

## CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

March 8, 2024 at 8:30 a.m.

### CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ABILENE, TEXAS COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

The City Council of the City of Abilene, Texas met in a Special Called Work Session (Retreat) on March 8, 2024, at 8:30 a.m. in the Council Chambers, 555 Walnut St. Mayor Weldon Hurt was present and presiding, along with Mayor Pro-tem Shane Price, Deputy Mayor Pro-tem Lynn Beard, and Councilmembers Blaise Regan, Brian Yates, Kyle McAlister, and Travis Craver. Also present were City Manager Robert Hanna, City Attorney Stanley Smith, and City Secretary Shawna Atkinson.

Councilmember Blaise Regan delivered the invocation, and led the pledges to the United States Flag and the Texas Flag.

The special called meeting was held for the purpose of holding the annual City Council retreat to provide the city manager the opportunity to present certain issues and obtain input from the City Council on the direction desired in specific service areas as well as any new areas members of the City Council felt needed to be reviewed/included for staff follow up, research, strategy development, and/or project analysis.

#### PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mayor Hurt opened the public comment period. The following addressed the City Council:

- Tammy Fogle

With no other speakers coming forward, the public comment period was closed.

#### AGENDA ITEMS

2. Core Purpose, Core Values, Strategic Priorities:

City Manager Robert Hanna went over the agenda for the day, and then reviewed the City's core purpose, core values, mission statement, strategic goals, and a brief review of the Council's priorities.

3. Organization:

a. Compensating for Years of Service:

Mr. Hanna reminded Council that they approved the pay plan at 94% of market rate last year. This plan has worked but it has not compensated for years of service. Mr. Hanna proposed to use the stability pay program to reward employees for years of service. His proposal would be \$500 per year of service, with a cap of \$10,000 at 20 years of service. He would like to combine this with a 1% cost of living adjustment this year. Mr. Hanna went over the numbers in detail.

Council questioned the pay scale, where this is stemming from, recruitment versus retention, and how employees transferring from other cities would work. Council is in favor of this.

b. Take Home Vehicle Policy

Mr. Hanna went over the current policy and the difficulties we've faced with it. He showed the numbers of take home vehicles, maps, which departments have take home vehicles, and presented a draft policy which

states City employees do not take vehicles outside the City limits, but the City Manager has discretion to authorize it when the need is justified.

The proposed policy was discussed at length, including various scenarios that require a take home vehicle. Several Councilmembers were comfortable saying no vehicles outside the City limits, with City Manager discretion, and several would like to see more stats before making a decision, like the number of calls that require a take home vehicle and emergency situations.

c. APD Authorized Strength

Last year, Council authorized 19 additional officers. Mr. Hanna presented the phasing-in options for these new officers, with 5 officers and 2 detectives added for the first two years, and 2 officers and 3 detectives added-in in year three.

Council questioned if this was doable and amenable to Chief Seratte. Chief Seratte is comfortable with this approach.

d. Childcare Benefits for Employees

Mr. Hanna discussed a possible childcare incentive for employees. Day Nursery of Abilene has agreed to contract with us to take in children of employees. The City would pay 50% of childcare costs directly to the provider, and it would be capped at \$4,990 per employee, per year. This would still be done on a first come, first served basis with Day Nursery, but they said they have the space to accommodate 40-50 employees per year right now.

Council questioned if it would be better to have multiple options for employees, not just one provider, or possibly just paying the employee so they are able to choose where to send their children. They would like to see some options for this before deciding anything, and potentially a sliding scale based on salary to receive the benefits.

e. TMRS Non-retroactive COLA

The Texas Legislature opened a 3-year opportunity for TMRS cities to offer a new non-retroactive cost of living adjustment of either 30%, 50% or 70% of the year over CPI-U increase. Meaning we can provide a modest COLA to retirees without having to calculate a COLA benefit for all retirees since the date of their retirement. Mr. Hanna went over the numbers and what this would look like at the different percentages. We are currently at 94.2% funded, which is a great number, and this option would make that rate go down.

Council questioned if this would be helping those with lower retirement payouts, and the answer is no, it's really going to benefit those with higher payouts already, and really only a few people at that. The options were discussed at length and it was determined that there is really not another way to do this a different way.

The consensus of Council is to leave it as it is right now, because it would end up hurting the plan in the long run for the benefit of only a few people.

Mayor Hurt recessed for a short break from 9:51 a.m. to 10:01 a.m.

4. Capital Improvements:

a. Street Improvements

Max Johnson, Director of Public Works, gave a presentation on street improvements, going back to 2016. We've touched 26% of roadways since then in variants of repairs, and spent \$125 million in repairs. Mr. Johnson went over the 2024 planned improvements, spoke about the Street Maintenance Board and how it works, and the 2025 staff recommendations for roadway project considerations.

Council questioned what the process is for identifying streets in need of repair. SeeClickFix is often the first step, but the Street Maintenance Board is where citizens can come and ask as well. Council discussed the PCI index, how the money has been spent from the 2015 bond project on streets, and the cycles and timelines of fixing all the roads.

It was the consensus of Council that streets are a top priority but they will continue to monitor how everything is working before deciding to go any other routes.

b. Information Technology

Troy Swanson, IT Director, spoke about the 5 year IT master plan. He discussed a few big projects coming up, including the Microsoft implementation, database consolidation and admin, and SharePoint design and configuration. Council questioned why we were choosing to contract some of this work out, and not find employees with the skills to handle it. Mr. Swanson stated that these services allow us to find the expertise we need to do the transition, and deliver training to our current staff so they are able to handle it in the future.

Mr. Swanson also went over upcoming expenses for FY 2025, including desktop and laptop replacements, server networking and infrastructure, Kirby Lake video surveillance, Verkada APD access, and Safety City security cameras. Council discussed the camera options at length.

Mr. Swanson estimates a total of \$400,000 is needed for personnel needs going forward. Council asked if there would be AI tools that could help address these needs. That was discussed at length.

c. Facility Needs

Mr. Hanna spoke about roof repairs needed, including Cobb, Rose, Admin at the Zoo, the NE Water Treatment Plant, and Grimes, for a total of \$972,000. He then went over the Schneider electric energy audits and upgrades. The energy savings have paid for the debt services for facility improvements. 37 buildings have been upgraded, resulting in a 27.5% reduction in utility usage. We are now looking at phase 5, which is building system automation upgrades, mechanical upgrades, electrical upgrades, elevator refurbishment, building envelope improvements and retrofitting of street lights. Phase 6 improvements will be to the microgrid and backup generators for Water, due to changes from the state and TCEQ after Winter Storm Uri.

Mayor Hurt recessed the meeting for lunch from 11:53 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

d. Maxwell Golf Course

Mayor Hurt asked for this item to be considered next due to guests in attendance.

Mr. Hanna shared that the management company for Maxwell has asked to renew their long-term lease, which is up in September. Currently, the City pays \$40,000 in effluent charges, and may share in capital replacement costs for Maxwell. That's not enough money going into the maintenance of the course and it is slowly declining. Mr. Hanna went over the costs for the annual membership and daily play, and gave a comparison to other courses in the area. He feels that we are not charging enough, but the area analysis shows we are comparable to the market rate. He asked Council if they are interested in entering into another long-term lease, and if so, do we want to invest more public funds into the course or explore other opportunities?

Council questioned if the course was well-used, and what kind of capital expenditures are needed to get it up to where it needs to be. It is a very well used course, and there would probably need to be some investments to the greens after the spring. Council agrees that a municipal golf course is important to keep though.

Guy Bailey with West Texas Golf Systems, LLC, explained the differences between the charges at Maxwell and the Country Club, and that 80% of their revenue is off of daily play, not memberships. Council questioned if he thought his clientele would accept an increase, and he said yes since this year will be the first increase he's done in over 4 years. Mr. Bailey also spoke about the watering system needing an upgrade, the pro-shop needing repairs, and the possibility for some kind of restaurant at the turn.

Mr. Hanna proposed that the City could potentially charge a \$5 per play maintenance fee, that would go into a fund to allow for course upgrades. Council was amenable to this idea. Mr. Hanna will work with Mr. Bailey and Lesli Andrews to come up with a good number and lease agreement reflecting these changes, to bring forward to Council at a later date.

e. Parks Improvements

Lesli Andrews, Director of Parks and Recreation, spoke about the following parks improvements: the restroom at Rose Park, the Rose Park walking trail, brush center restrooms, a fire marshal's office, and cameras at the Storybook Garden.

Council asked about the options for the restrooms at both Rose Park and the brush center, and what was needed at each.

Ms. Andrews also spoke about bat and ball sports, and they will be bringing forth a contract with Lateral Studios to see what a tournament sized facility for baseball and softball would look like. She also spoke about the Fort Phantom Hill Recreation Master Plan, and a contract with LJA Engineering to do a comprehensive park master plan. They've done an online survey and the results will be shared on 3/28.

Council questioned what the next steps after the master plan will be, how to help our facilities become more sustainable, what's next for the Kirby Lake trail, and the possibility of a Parks Foundation.

f. Utility Improvements & Water Supply

Rodney Taylor, Director of Water Utilities, spoke about the five-year capital improvement needs for Water Utilities. He went over the planned capital improvements for the next 5 years at length.

Council asked about the reverse osmosis concentrate line for PK and if it goes back to PK. Mr. Taylor explained that it is a roughing facility to make the water compatible with Hubbard and Phantom. Council questioned how some of the projects would be funded that said debt on the slides. Mr. Taylor stated that it would be a certificate of obligation. The dams at Kirby and Fort Phantom were discussed, as well as water resources planning for the future. Cedar Ridge Reservoir was discussed at length and where we are in that process.

g. Stormwater Masterplan

Mr. Hanna went over the Stormwater Master Plan. We have several projects that need to get done and we are looking at grants for these capital projects. We will also be performing a rate study to evaluate fee increases for the execution of future projects. Creek maintenance was discussed.

h. Convention Center

Mr. Hanna went over the history of the convention center and its build and renovations. He is proposing to create a second Venue tax strictly for the convention center and asked if Council would like to explore that option. They asked what it would be used for. Mr. Hanna stated that we need to improve the restrooms, the foyer, and possibly change the seat layout in the auditorium. Council is supportive of looking into the design work to see what this would cost to see if it would be feasible to fund this with a second Venue tax.

Mayor Pro-tem Lynn Beard left the meeting at 2:55 p.m.

5. Community:

a. North/South Council Boundary Line:

Mr. Hanna presented three options for the boundary line: the way it is currently (North/South 1<sup>st</sup>) using ES 11<sup>th</sup> and S 14<sup>th</sup> streets as the boundary, or S 27<sup>th</sup> street. We would really need an expert to come in and tell us how we can equitably divide the community, not just on population but representation, too.

Council questioned if changing would put us at risk for having to redraw at every census. Mr. Hanna said we are at-large so we would probably avoid that, but that would be why we need an expert. Council also asked about eliminating the line all together and just being completely at-large.

b. Infill and Code Compliance:

Tim Littlejohn, Director of Planning and Development Services gave Council an update on the Rebuild ABI program for infill development. They currently have 3 active agreements, 3 more coming to Council next week, and 15 in the works. They are expected to fully expend the \$1 million that Council set aside for FY 2024.

Council complimented staff on this accomplishment and asked if there were any tweaks they foresee needing to be made. There are none at this time.

Mr. Littlejohn then went over the timeline for the nuisance abatement process, junked vehicles, code compliance, Board of Building Standards and the demolition process, and the dilapidated structure procedures in detail.

Council asked about cleaning up trash and if Keep Abilene Beautiful could be utilized to help with that.

c. West Texas Homeless Network:

Mr. Hanna presented Council with a request for assistance from the West Texas Homeless Network. Homelessness is a problem in our community and we are dealing with it a lot recently. The request from WTHN is for \$200,000 to fund two positions to help with this issue. This was funding they had and recently lost, so we would be helping them continue with something they've been doing already.

Council had questions about the Community Response Team and if two teams is enough, and the role of the Abilene Housing Authority in helping with this issue.

d. Micro Transit

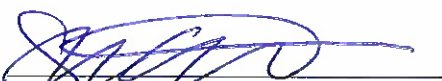
Mr. Hanna went over our contract with CityLink and their revenue sources, as well as total passengers and riders for their fixed route, ADA paratransit, evening service, charter service, and contract service. Micro transit now has one route and we have a potential for higher revenue here that we haven't engaged yet. The issues the new program have been facing were discussed. Creating more zones is being discussed.

A second approach to the micro transit issue could be leveraging transportation network companies, such as Uber and Lyft to provide a true on-demand transit service at a subsidized price. Riders would scan a QR code to save a CityLink pass in their TNC app wallet and then ride at a subsidized price when they hail a ride in the app. We are exploring both approaches and looking at costs associated with both. Both options were discussed at length.

Mr. Hanna asked if there were essential priorities to come out of this. The top items said were employee compensation and benefits, streets, and parks/facilities. Council would also like to see the options for Maxwell funding and the take home vehicle policy come before them soon for approval.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:26 p.m.

  
Shawna Atkinson  
City Secretary

  
Weldon Hurt  
Mayor

Minutes approved on: March 28, 2024

