

CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE MINUTES

January 29, 2013

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a conference at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room on the 29th day of January, 2013, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray, and the Norman Public Library at 225 North Webster 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT:

Councilmembers Castleberry, Gallagher, Griffith, Kovach, Lockett, Spaulding, Williams, Mayor Rosenthal

ABSENT:

Councilmember Jungman

Item 1, being:

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION REGARDING THE REVIEW OF PARKS MAINTENANCE AND RECREATION PROGRAMMING.

Mayor Rosenthal said during the City Council Budget Retreat in August, 2012, an enhanced maintenance program for parks and review of current recreation programs was identified as a high priority for Council review. She said the Finance Committee had several discussions on the topic and a review of the current activities in Park Maintenance and Recreation Divisions was conducted. The report is complete and includes an overall assessment and recommendations to improve organization efficiencies and effectiveness to better manage resources. She said because of the interest by the entire Council it was felt the entire Council should review the results of report.

Mr. Lewis said review of the Capital Budget is scheduled for February 26, 2013, and Staff is looking for direction on which projects to schedule.

Mr. Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation, said there are 62 employees in the Parks and Recreation Department and the City of Norman ranks eight out of ten in comparable benchmark cities for staffing levels. Mayor Rosenthal asked if staffing levels include the vacant and frozen positions and Mr. Foster said yes. Councilmember Castleberry asked which City was number one in the ranking and Mr. Foster said Tulsa, Oklahoma, with 166 employees.

Mr. Foster highlighted the Park Department's budget excluding Westwood Golf Course and Swim Complex. He said expenditures total \$4,725,023 and FYE 13 revenues are estimated to be \$459,809. He said revenues are generated by user fees from recreation programs and facility rentals, which represents 32% of the recreation division budget. He said Westwood Pool covers 100% of its day to day operating costs.

Mr. Foster said the City has applied for 52 grants since 2002 and has been awarded 51 grants totaling \$1.48 million. He said examples of successful grant applications include forestry programs; trees; beautification; public art; and Legacy Trail. Councilmember Spaulding asked if the 52 grants were the only applicable grants available to apply for and, if not, is there a reason the City did not apply for more grants and Mr. Foster said Staff time hindered the ability to apply for more. He said many of the grants were small and easy to obtain while others were in the hundreds of thousands of dollar range. He said the larger grants are more detailed, complex, and time consuming in terms of tracking and reporting. Mayor Rosenthal said the City had a forester at one time, but that position is now vacant and asked if some of the grants required a forester position. Mr. Foster said he did not know specifically, but he could review the grants to determine if any of them required a forester position and Councilmember Castleberry said that would be good information.

Mr. Foster highlighted the recreation facilities and said most of the facilities are aging and in need of renovation.

Item 1, continued:

Mr. Foster discussed recreation programming and said youth and adult programs include athletic; exercise; dance; senior citizen activities; children's activities; after school and summer camps; and tennis. He said some special events include the Daddy Daughter Dance; Easter Egg Hunt; Hershey Track Meet; 4th of July Celebration; and Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony. He said the Parks Department promotes these activities through the City's website; banners; e-mail; press releases; Channel 20; public school system; and printed materials available at the Norman Public Library and recreation centers.

Mr. Foster said the Parks Department also partners with other organizations such as the Firehouse Art Center, Sooner Theatre, Cleveland County Historical Society, and Performing Arts Studio. The City has contracts with outside organizations to oversee youth soccer, adult softball, youth football, adult flag football, and youth baseball programs.

Mr. Foster highlighted the Park Maintenance Division responsibilities as follows:

- Maintains 65 parks (over 1,140 acres);
- Maintains grounds at recreation facilities, public property such as landscaping medians, City Hall Complex, and other properties;
- Installation and removal of holiday decorations;
- Mosquito Surveillance Program; and
- Assisting with special events – July 4th; Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony; Earth Day; free tree distributions; Medieval Fair; Midsummer Night's Fair; Easter Egg Hunt; Veteran's Day; Summer Breeze; and Jazz in June.

Mr. Foster said new maintenance responsibilities include Main Street bridge planters; Legacy Park; Saxon Park; Robinson Street Underpass; and new neighborhood park sites.

Mr. Foster said City maintenance practices comply with American Public Works Association (APWA) standards for mowing heights, chemical application, inspections, and certifications. He said detailed maintenance records are kept for all daily activities.

Mr. Foster said the FYE 13 Capital Improvements Program includes construction of Legacy Park; construction of Saxon Park, Phase One; Andrews and Rotary Park tornado damage repairs; and Reaves Park Softball restroom/concession buildings renovations.

Mr. Foster said key recommendations from the Parks Master Plan (PMP) include renovating existing parks; trail development; Westwood Pool renovation; construction of an indoor recreation center; construction of Ruby Grant Park, Phase One; and River Park land acquisition. The estimated costs are between \$28.5 million and \$49.5 million and funding could come from sale of bonds or a sales tax increase. He said a \$40 million bond package over 20 years would equal \$4 per month for a \$100,000 home. He said a 1/4% sales tax increase would generate approximately \$3 million per year and a 1/2% sales tax would generate approximately \$6 million per year.

Mr. Foster said the PMP and a Citizens Satisfaction Survey were completed in 2009. He highlighted results of the survey as follows:

- 80% were satisfied with maintenance and appearance of parks;
- 75% were satisfied with the number of parks;
- 67% were satisfied with quality of outdoor athletic facilities;
- 64% were satisfied with quality of recreation programs;
- 78% were satisfied with the overall quality of Parks and Recreation service versus 74% nationally

Item 1, continued:

Councilmember Williams said he did not see anything in the survey regarding citizen's view on indoor facilities and Mr. Foster said most of the survey questions dealt with recreation programs and park facilities. He said the highest ranked needs in the survey are walking/bike trails and maintenance of existing parks and facilities.

Mr. Foster highlighted report recommendations as follows:

- Consider a bond or sales tax election to fund identified parks and recreation facility improvements;
- Replace worn out maintenance equipment and investigate new equipment that will improve efficiency which includes large area mower, Bobcat loader, trencher, three riding mowers, bucket/chipper truck, dump truck, and two pickup trucks;
- Fill vacant maintenance staff positions (3) and evaluate additional staffing;
- Evaluate outsourcing certain maintenance tasks;
- Evaluate benefits of utilizing a work order software program;
- Evaluate life cycle of recreation programs to determine whether new or different programs are needed;
- Expand use of social media to increase marketing and community feedback;
- Develop recreation fee policy to identify minimum cost recovery for each recreation program;
- Purchase recreation software to improve efficiency and program registration;
- Develop mini-marketing plans to promote Parks and Recreation facilities and programs;
- Conduct gaps analysis to determine current recreation programming needs;
- Compile program cost analysis data to determine most efficient use of resources;
- Develop recreation point-of-service user questionnaire;
- Develop on-line questionnaire for facility and program evaluation;
- Evaluate Norman age demographics and compare with current programs;
- Identify number of programs by type to evaluate mix offered to citizens

Councilmember Spaulding asked if the City has a sponsorship program or partners with local businesses to provide incentives for citizens to fill out a survey such as a free drink or small discounts on products. He asked if the City has a mechanism to match funding if a group such as the Soccer Association wants to make capital improvements to City parks and Mr. Foster said yes, the City has done that before. He said groups realize Council will be more likely to approve projects if half the costs are paid by private organizations and it has been very successful.

Councilmember Williams asked how programs rank as far as participation and Mr. Foster said the largest programs are little league softball and baseball with basketball coming in second and summer camps third.

Councilmember Williams asked where the City obtained the number of website visits to parks and recreation centers that are referenced in wayfinding information and Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, said figures were provided by the Norman Convention and Visitors Bureau (NCVB). Councilmember Williams said the Griffin Park Complex had 313,000 visits and recreation centers had 30,000 to 35,000 visits and these heavily used facilities do not seem to be in the forefront of anyone's mind. He said they are high visibility facilities and although the City may not need to completely renovate these facilities, they do need to be updated to get citizen interest back. He said he would rather spend money on updating facilities instead of spending it on state-of-the-art projects. Councilmember Castleberry asked about the status of new floors for Whittier and Irving Recreation Centers and Mr. Foster said estimates were received and new floors would cost approximately \$80,000. He said the flooring product is very durable and would last longer than a traditional wood floor that has a life span of six years or less.

Councilmember Gallagher said many times equipment and replacement of items in recreation facilities are done at different times so it could get confusing when discussing the life cycle of that equipment or replacement items. Mr. Foster said when he spoke about the life cycle of the recreation centers, he was referring more to the programs offered and their costs such as exercise and art programs. Mayor Rosenthal asked if the City evaluated programs from year to year or if programs are on auto pilot when the City should be deciding if a program should be discontinued. Mr. Foster said Staff keeps track of the condition of the facilities and evaluates programs and costs from time to time, but these need to be monitored more closely. He said the programs need a more detailed analysis to evaluate whether or not they should continue to be viable.

Councilmember Kovach asked what Mr. Foster meant by "evaluate." He said the City has a PMP and an extensive citizen survey and asked if he was talking about re-surveying the public. He also asked what type of metrics would be used to evaluate the life cycle of recreation programs. Mr. Foster said the PMP did not get into that level of detail on programming. He was referring to choosing a program that may have twenty people attending and looking in finer detail at the City's cost associated with that program. He said a gaps analysis is something that might obtain better results if a more detailed survey is done to determine what types of programs the City should offer. Mr. Lewis said one metric could be to have a community value judgment that adult programs should pay 100% of its costs, while children's programs pay 50% - 75% of its costs. He said if programs do not pay their percentages that programming could be cut back, restructured, or eliminated. He said that metric would be the cost recovery for recreation programming.

Councilmember Kovach said the City is looking at outsourcing some tasks and asked why the City would fill vacant maintenance positions before evaluating outsourcing, which could eliminate more jobs. Mr. Foster said an example of how outsourcing could be used is irrigation at Griffin Park. He said one employee spends a great deal of time there. He said if an irrigation line breaks, the City could hire a local irrigation company to repair the line rather than have the employee spending days repairing the line. He said outsourcing those types of projects would free up Staff to work on other issues.

Councilmember Castleberry said the PMP has done a good job of identifying the problems and needs, but has not addressed solutions. He said it is incumbent upon Council as leaders of this community to stop talking about the problems and do something about them whether it is done through bond sales or sales tax. He said citizens have stated they want current facilities fixed and maintained. He challenged everyone on Council to move this forward and find the way to make it happen. He said so much money could be generated if the City held soccer, baseball, and basketball tournaments. He said these programs could pay for themselves and increase participation among our youth.

Councilmember Lockett said she supports funding a better sports program, but the City should not propose a bond issue or sales tax increase until project priorities throughout the City have been determined. She did not want citizen costs for programs to be overwhelming and felt tournaments could be a way to generate money to rehabilitate and maintain facilities.

Councilmember Castleberry felt it would be easy to get businesses to advertise at the sport facilities. Councilmember Gallagher agreed and said professional and college sports place advertising at ballparks. He said fences around the parks would be the perfect place for local businesses to advertise. He said this could be a bonus situation for any program and pay good dividends. Mr. Foster said the City has done that in the past. Councilmember Spaulding said naming facilities after sponsors could generate money as well. Mayor Rosenthal said the City needs to be cautious of competing with sports associations that currently contract with the City and taking revenue away from them. Councilmember Williams agreed businesses would be willing to advertise, but only if they see the City putting money into the facilities first. He said they will not want to put their name on a rundown facility so the City should start upgrading facilities and generate the interest of businesses to advertise. He said until the City has invested their own money into the facilities no one is going to be interested in putting advertising banners on fences or walls. Councilmember Griffith agreed and said park maintenance has been left behind in the budget and he is pleased to see maintenance issues have reached a tipping point where the City has to do something. He said maintenance issues need to be prioritized in the budget then the City can put together a bond or sales tax package and start educating the public on how parks and recreation facilities and programs can improve their quality of life.

Mayor Rosenthal said Council made public safety a priority in the Capital Budget for a couple of years and made huge progress in that area. She reminded Council that November 13, 2013, is the targeted date for the wastewater rate increase election. She said Council has also discussed renewing the Public Safety Sales Tax (PSST) in 2014 and if that is not successful it will affect 70 plus jobs. She would like Council to think in terms of a short term strategy of prioritizing park maintenance in the current Capital Budget and look towards a 2014 initiative relative to quality of life. She said Council has experienced placing two funding propositions on the same ballot and they both failed. She said that is something to consider on the timing of election issues.

Mayor Rosenthal felt there is consensus to prioritize park maintenance projects and make those a priority. She said she has not heard consensus in terms of restoring positions or outsourcing. She said additional information may be needed to evaluate that as Council goes through the budget process. Councilmember Lockett said she would like more information on outsourcing versus additional positions.

Councilmember Kovach said he would like to move forward with new flooring for the two recreation centers and felt that would go a long way to show the City listens to their citizens.

Mayor Rosenthal said there are a lot of items that relate to the review of recreation programs and their menu of offerings, which might entail hiring a consultant and asked if that is something Council wanted to do at this time or a later date. She said the City could also request help from someone at the University of Oklahoma (OU). Councilmember Williams said he would be ok with that if the City did not have to spend money. He does not want to spend money for someone to tell the City what they need and what they do not need when the money could be better used. Councilmember Griffith felt Staff should be able to determine what programs are waning and decide if they are worth continuing. Mayor Rosenthal suggested Staff review the recreation programs with the Parks Board and bring back recommendations. Councilmember Williams felt program figures would not be factual because participation levels go down when facilities are in terrible condition and it is possible to discontinue a program that might be successful if the City updated the facility. Councilmember Griffith said the program could always be reinstated. Mayor Rosenthal felt it would be important to talk with recreation customers for feedback first.

Councilmember Kovach felt it important to make a policy decision on whether the City wants adult programs to be 100% funded or have another level of funding. He said that is the fundamental question. Councilmember Griffith asked what adult programs typically cost and Mr. Foster said Staff would need to research that. Mayor Rosenthal said cost recovery would be something the Parks Board would review.

Councilmember Spaulding said there had been a small dispute between two programs last year at Griffin Park and both programs stated they needed more fields. He asked Mr. Lewis if he had an update on whether or not the State would allow the City to use property just south of Griffin Park for practice fields. Mr. Lewis said he and Mr. Foster have been working with the State to temporarily use some of their property south of Griffin Park and the State has been receptive to that and is currently going through the evaluation process. He said the Norman Youth Soccer Association (NYSA) is willing to make improvements to that area to make it viable for practice fields. He said unfortunately any time you are involved in intergovernmental solutions, it takes longer than hoped for.

Councilmember Castleberry said wastewater issues are at a crisis point because the City has not addressed the problems in a timely manner. He said although park maintenance is a progressive, non-necessity issue, it is something citizens want. He felt sanitation, water, and wastewater are necessary needs so they are a totally separate issue than parks. Mayor Rosenthal said the City has spent \$80 million on wastewater over the last few years, but the City is at a point where a second plant capacity is needed. She said it is not correct to say the City has neglected a facility to the point of crisis. She said the argument that wastewater and parks are different is important, but at the end of the day it is all about money to the voters.

Item 1, continued:

Councilmember Castleberry felt the City of Norman is falling behind on quality of life issues. He said the City of Moore recently passed a sales tax to construct a pool and Oklahoma City (OKC) spent \$750 million on Quarter Shore Projects. He said that is called “vision” and the City of Norman could combine quality of life projects on one ballot such as a pool and library. Councilmember Kovach said there is nothing to preclude Council from laying the footprints for these projects and he is all for planning.

Ms. Joy Hampton, The Norman Transcript, said hotel/motel tax is used to promote tourism, which includes sports tournaments that bring people to Norman. She asked if that money is tracked and if it is reinvested into parks and Mr. Foster said every dollar is documented, including where it was spent and what it was spent on. Ms. Hampton said public criticism is the money is not being spent on park facilities.

Councilmember Kovach said he would like a cost benefit analysis on positions that are lacking that may be preventing the City from obtaining larger grants.

Mayor Rosenthal said there seems to be consensus to prioritize park maintenance projects in the Capital Budget especially those that will have the biggest payoff in terms of the number of people using facilities and not just routine maintenance. There is also consensus on evaluating outsourcing versus restoring personnel positions, and requesting the Parks Board to evaluate recreational programs and make recommendations to Council. She said Council will review larger Capital Improvement Projects that would require a bond issuance or sales tax increase including library facilities.

Items submitted for the record

1. Memorandum dated January 24, 2013, from Steve Lewis, City Manager, to Mayor and City Council
2. PowerPoint presentation entitled, “Norman Parks and Recreation – Park Maintenance and Recreation Programs Review and Recommendations,” dated January 29, 2013
3. Norman Parks and Recreation – Park Maintenance and Recreation Programs Review and Recommendations Report dated January 15, 2013

Participants in discussion

1. Mr. Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Community Development
2. Mr. Steve Lewis, City Manager
3. Mr. Anthony Francisco, Director of Finance
4. Ms. Joy Hampton, The Norman Transcript

The meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor