

CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE MINUTES

March 10, 2015

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 10th day of March, 2015, 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 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Allison, Castleberry, Heiple, Holman, Jungman, Miller, Williams, and Mayor Rosenthal

ABSENT: Councilmember Lang

Item 1, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING A CITIZENS' QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE ENTITLED "NORMAN FORWARD".

Mayor Rosenthal said tonight's meeting will be a planning session to begin considering and discussing a package of projects suggested by a citizen initiative group known as Norman Forward. She said the total amount of the proposal is \$143 million and for comparison sake, the 2008 Library proposal was \$50 million and the recent bond package for road projects was \$38 million along with a similar amount of federal funds. Mayor Rosenthal said it is Council's responsibility to learn and be able to answer questions when voters and/or constituents ask for information regarding the Norman Forward initiative; therefore, there will be a series of meetings over the next few weeks explaining the proposal, project by project. A list of the Norman Forward Projects is as follows:

- New Central Library (\$39 million);
- New East Branch Library (\$5 million);
- Westwood Pool (\$12 million) - Demolish the existing pool facilities and replace with new family aquatic center to include a free form recreation pool with zero depth entry and play/spray features, water slides and plunge pool, lazy river, 25 yards x 25 meters lap pool and diving area, large shaded deck and special event area, new bathhouse and concession facilities, and additional parking;
- Park Projects (\$25 million)
 - Ruby Grant Park - Develop initial phase to include infrastructure improvements, signage, parking, walking and running trails, practice fields, pavilion, and pedestrian lighting;
 - Saxon Park - Develop Phase II to include additional parking, decorative fencing, site furnishings, children's play area, restroom facilities, and event shelter;
 - Existing Neighborhood Park Renovations - To include items such as new signage, decorative fencing, site furnishings, walking trails, trees and playground shade structures, additional playground equipment, picnic pavilions, additional soccer goals and backstops;
 - New Neighborhood Park Development - Develop new parks for the Cedar Lane, Southlake/St. James, Summit Valley, Bellatona, Redlands and Links neighborhoods;
 - Andrews Park - Renovations to include splash pad enhancement, shade for amphitheater seating, skate park expansion and additional tree plantings;
 - Westwood Tennis Center - Convert two existing courts to an indoor facility and construct two new outdoor courts with lighting and site furnishings; and
 - New Trail Development - Complete Legacy Trail loop, connecting segments from Ruby Grant Park, east along the Little River Corridor, and south to the existing Robinson Street trail.

Norman Forward Projects continued:

- Sports Complex Projects (\$23.5 million)
 - Reaves Park (\$10 million) - Remove six existing adult softball fields and existing park maintenance facility and construct 14 youth baseball/softball fields with lighting, restrooms, concession facilities and additional parking. Optimist youth baseball complex (6 fields), Kidspace, Veterans Memorial and existing festival and picnic areas (central and southwest) are to remain as is;
 - New Adult Softball and Flag Football Complex (\$2.5 million) - Purchase and develop new +/- 25 acre site – location to be determined; however, preferably in north Norman, to accommodate 5-field adult softball complex and 4-field flag football complex, each with lighting, restroom and concession facilities, and parking; and
 - Griffin Park (\$11 million) - Remove 14 existing youth baseball/softball and 4 adult flag football fields and construct 9 new outdoor soccer fields with lighting and convert one of the soccer fields to an indoor soccer facility (net field count to be 1 indoor and 20 outdoor fields). Construct new Park Maintenance facility in northeast portion of park site.
- Indoor Basketball/Volleyball Facility (\$8.5 million) - Construct new indoor gymnasium to replace existing five court Optimist basketball facility located east of the existing YMCA.
- Indoor Aquatic Competition Pool (\$12 million) - Construct a new indoor competition pool facility located adjacent to existing YMCA;
- Griffin Land Acquisition (\$5 million);
- James Garner Avenue Extension (from Acres Street to Flood Avenue) (\$6 million) - Extend the existing James Garner Avenue as a two-lane roadway from Acres Street northward crossing over Robinson Street and connecting to Flood Avenue north of Robinson Street; and
- Expo Center (\$7 million).

The total estimated cost of all projects is \$143 million.

Mayor Rosenthal said she met with the City Manager yesterday to discuss a schedule that will allow the time to be educated on the different projects as well as gather public input. She said the anticipated meetings will permit Council to consider public input, the community's needs and priorities, and whether phasing of projects would be appropriate. Mayor Rosenthal said if Council so recommends, a package of the proposal will be scheduled on June 23, 2015, as an item on Council's agenda for first reading and scheduled as an agenda item for second reading on August 11, 2015, for Council consideration. She said if approved by Council, the proposal can be submitted to the Norman voters in an election scheduled in September, 2015.

Mayor Rosenthal said she would like the decision-making process for the Norman Forward initiative to be a similar method the City utilized with the Strategic Water Update process. She said the process included determining the most important criteria and then a ranking exercise was done. Mayor Rosenthal felt this decision-making process will assist Council in making an informed decision.

Mr. Steve Lewis, City Manager, said Staff compiled a 17 criteria process for ranking for consideration and prioritization of capital projects as they cover a wide range of topics ranging from Public Health and Safety, Economic Development, and Timeliness of Project, etc.

Mr. Lewis said he annotated sub-points under each of the 17 criteria and said the criteria may not apply to each of the projects proposed by Norman Forward and Council may place different “weights and measures” on each of the criteria topics and how they apply to the proposed projects. Mr. Lewis reiterated this criteria is one tool used for all City-wide projects and was not created solely for Norman Forward.

Mayor Rosenthal requested Council input as to whether they felt some of the proposed projects are more important than others in respect to the quality of life issue(s). Councilmember Miller felt most of the projects are pretty clear and wanted to make sure she was interpreting the External Requirements topic under the Considerations for Project Investments. Mr. Lewis said this particular topic relates to projects the City is obligated to implement under ODOT requirements such as the water and wastewater improvements.

Councilmember Castleberry said the projects have already been vetted in the community before being presented to Council. He understands that \$143 million is a large number but does not feel he would delete any projects because each one addresses Quality of Life issues and will transform the community. He felt some of the proposed projects are deferred maintenance that was not completed due to budgetary restraints, etc., and said all the projects go together in some regard, somewhat like a domino effect. He felt the proposed projects are more of a “want” and are much different than typical Capital Projects because they address a “need”. While the criteria topics are a good tool for Council to have, he felt Council should look more at “do you want to invest a half-percent sales tax in a quality of life initiative” for 15 years while the interest rates are low and invest in the community’s infrastructure and tourism possibilities.

Mayor Rosenthal said Council needs to weigh in and assess whether a 15 year commitment or a phased-in approach is better for our community. Councilmember Holman said he liked the list of proposals; however, he would like to see a public transportation aspect added to the list of proposals. He has concerns about operating costs and is looking forward to learning more about financing an Expo Center. Councilmember Castleberry said this may be an opportunity for Norman to evaluate what Cleveland Area Rapid Transit (CART) routes the community currently has versus the routes needed for proposed projects. He said if Council determines additional CART routes would be beneficial, the City could approach CART, if necessary, about funding additional routes within the community and Councilmember Holman agreed stating this could be an avenue to gain additional public transportation for the City.

Councilmember Allison felt the proposal needs to include information regarding the funding previously authorized by the voters in 2008 to move the Senior Citizens Center (SCC) to the library building once a new library is built. Mayor Rosenthal agreed stating there is already an authorization of \$11 million for a renovation of the old library and details for the Front Street/Library/SCC proposal will be discussed on April 2, 2015, at a scheduled Council Conference. Councilmember Holman felt there is not a lot of consensus among senior citizens in the community wanting the SCC to be relocated to the library building and Mayor Rosenthal said Staff has researched this topic to include the proposed design and layout of the building and said Staff will present the information at the meeting on April 2nd.

Councilmember Heiple felt the proposed projects should be phased-in rather than an all at once approach. He felt money has already been authorized for the SCC; however, the Library must first be relocated before the renovations for the SCC can begin. His top priorities include a new Library, Westwood Pool, Park projects, and renovation of the old library for a SCC and the other projects can be phased-in. Councilmember Heiple said there are spectacular ideas being proposed and the vision is excellent; however, he felt it was Council’s responsibility to determine what the citizens want for the community.

Councilmember Holman said the James Garner Avenue project is needed and would allow another downtown entrance to Norman, thus taking traffic off of Flood Avenue and Porter Avenue. He questioned whether the Front Street proposal and library proposal should be tied together or would the Front Street project be more successful as a separate issue on the ballot.

Mayor Rosenthal cautioned everyone about deciding priorities and what the ideal proposal package should be until more detailed discussion(s) regarding each proposal is complete. She felt there are a lot of unanswered questions and possible impacts to the operating budget that will need to be considered.

Councilmember Miller said she likes all the proposed projects and felt all were worthy of being quality of life projects. She felt the public is very demanding about wanting to know all the details of all the proposed projects and Council needs to be very diligent about discussing each project to determine the best proposal package possible.

Councilmember Allison asked how much of the details need to be worked out before taking a proposal package to the voters and Mr. Lewis felt citizens want a solid understanding of what a project will cost, who will carry out the project, and operating impacts associated with a project. Mr. Lewis said the more Council can learn about each project, the better Council can explain or answer questions regarding each project to the citizens; therefore, a better and more successful voter outcome is likely. He said some of the details will come after voter approval is achieved, i.e., some or most proposed projects that are selected will still need to be designed and/or bid out to a contractor.

Councilmember Heiple asked what options will be available regarding the \$11.2 million previously authorized should the library package fail and Staff said the \$11.2 million authorization will “live on forever” but can only be used as specified in the ballot language. Councilmember Heiple said for clarification purposes, should the library package fail, the \$11.2 million could not be used for a new Senior Citizen Center in another location (other than the old library) and Staff said that is correct.

Councilmember Castleberry said the City needs to have some structure regarding prioritizing the projects; however, if the language is too restrictive it can tie up funding such as the \$11.2 million that can only be used if and when the old library can be renovated for a SCC. He felt the City should be somewhat flexible in order to make good decisions and/or agreements.

Mayor Rosenthal requested Council rank projects and submit them to the City Clerk. She said some of her concerns include the operating budget impact, what percentage of the population is likely to be served, financial partnership(s), and public support.

Mayor Rosenthal highlighted the Norman Forward meeting schedule and topics as follows:

- **March 17, 2015**: Expo Center (to be included with Council’s update on the University North Park UNP) Tax Increment Finance (TIF)
- **April 2, 2015**: Front Street/Library/Senior Center
- **April 7, 2015**: Parks Master Plan and Westwood Pool
- **April 9, 2015**: Organized Sports/Griffin Land
- **April 16, 2015**: YMCA Partnerships - Indoor Aquatics and Basketball/Volleyball Court Facility
- **April 23, 2015**: Finance Issues, Governance and Oversight - Project Packaging, Length of Temporary Tax, Sales Tax or other source, and Oversight

She said after Council discusses each topic, a proposed package will be put together for citizen input through a series of public meetings in May.

Councilmember Jungman said he would like to see options based on the length of tax or funding and asked whether public meetings could be held during the Norman Forward meetings rather than at the end of the meeting(s) process. He said before an ordinance comes forward for Council consideration, a sufficient amount of time is necessary to gather public comments and to tweak any proposal. Mayor Rosenthal said she understands public input is very important, but until Council can put a preliminary package together it will be hard to request and receive any public input. She said public input would start much earlier than at the end of this process, i.e., comments on the webpage, surveys, etc.

Mr. Lewis said approximately a year ago, some surveys had been conducted by private parties; however, he felt a proposal package of this magnitude deserved additional surveys that should include written, telephone, and internet based surveys. Councilmember Castleberry asked whether the survey(s) will be on a broad scale or narrowed down to specific projects and Mr. Lewis said he envisioned the survey(s) being done after Council has a pretty good idea of what the package proposal will be and felt this would be closer to the end of this process. Mayor Rosenthal felt the best time to conduct a survey to gather citizen input regarding where they stand on the proposal(s) is after Council determines a specific package proposal and/or specific package proposals. Councilmember Jungman felt public meetings should be held in the next couple of weeks with input gathered to be used as a guiding principal. He said public input is usually a broad-stroke issue, e.g., duration of time residents are comfortable with for sales tax, what kind of population is underserved in our community, etc.

Councilmember Allison said all meetings are open to the public and during the Parks Master Plan process, a lot of public comment had been gathered. Mr. Lewis agreed and said the \$25 million included in Norman Forward was a place-holder for park improvements outlined in the Parks Master Plan. He said Norman Forward did not propose the list of Park Projects; instead Staff selected the list of Park projects using the Parks Master Plan as a guide.

Mayor Rosenthal encouraged Staff to look at alternative ways to include public input throughout the process.

Items submitted for the record

1. Norman Forward Proposal Package dated March 10, 2015
2. Norman Forward – Considerations for Project Investments
3. Norman Forward Calendar

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The meeting adjourned at 6:27 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor