

CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE MINUTES

April 9, 2015

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a conference at 5:00 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room on the 9th day of April, 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, Lang, Miller, Williams, and Mayor Rosenthal

ABSENT:

None

Item 1, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS OF A CITIZENS' QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE ENTITLED "NORMAN FORWARD":

- SPORTS COMPLEX IMPROVEMENTS AT GRIFFIN PARK, REAVES PARK AND NEW ADULT SOFTBALL/FLAG FOOTBALL COMPLEX
- GRIFFIN LAND ACQUISITION

Mr. Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation, said the City of Norman has facility agreements with Norman Youth Soccer Association (NYSA), Norman Optimist Club, Norman Amateur Softball Foundation, and Norman Football Academy for the use of Reaves Park and Griffin Park. He said they are three year agreements that require the agencies to pay 100% of the electrical costs and submit of an annual report of operations to the Norman Parks Board that includes league activity, fee structure, and budget information. The agencies are also responsible for daily prep of field surfaces, litter removal, minor repairs, restroom maintenance, and concession operations. The City's obligations include major repairs, electrical repairs to field lighting system, some chemical applications, winterizing restrooms, and some mowing.

Griffin Park

Mr. Foster said Griffin Park's current programs include youth soccer, youth baseball/softball, and adult flag football. Norman Forward's proposal is to remove 14 youth baseball/softball fields; remove four adult flag football fields; construct nine new outdoor youth soccer fields with lighting and irrigation – three fields with artificial turf surfacing; convert one outdoor soccer field to indoor soccer/multi-purpose facility; construct additional parking for approximately 1,300 vehicles; and enhance park walkways and pedestrian circulation. He said NYSA is prepared to assume operating and maintenance (O&M) costs. He said the indoor facility could be used for other functions such as sports clinics, other indoor competitions, birthday parties, etc. Net field count would be one indoor and 20 outdoor soccer fields at a cost of \$12 million.

Mayor Rosenthal asked the advantages of artificial turf versus grass and Mr. Foster said turf is better for playing during or after inclement weather as well as playing soccer year round. Councilmember Holman said many high schools, colleges, and pro sports fields use artificial turf surfaces because they seem to be safer and require less maintenance than natural grass fields. Mr. Foster said artificial turf does not have to be mowed or watered, but it does become worn and has to be replaced about every ten years, which can be expensive.

Griffin Park, continued:

Mayor Rosenthal asked if the indoor facility had artificial turf would that require an investment in a hard surface floor to cover the turf for other sports such as gymnastics. Mr. Foster said yes, if a hard surface is needed the City would have to cover the turf with some type of hard surface flooring such as rubber pallets. Mayor Rosenthal was concerned that once the turf was installed, there would be limitations on other uses such as basketball, gymnastics, etc. Councilmember Allison said high schools roll out large mats for wrestling tournaments and mobile sport courts are also an option. He said while it is an investment, it would help make the facility multi-use.

Councilmember Lang said scheduling of an indoor facility would leave little room for birthday parties and with soccer being its primary use, how would the time be divided between soccer and other uses. Ms. Christie Fluente, NYSA, said the mindset is a multi-use facility to be used for more than soccer although she is not sure how that will work. Mayor Rosenthal said these are details that would need to be worked out and that conversation has not happened yet. Councilmember Lang said going forward City needs to determine how time would be allocated in a public facility with multiple uses.

Councilmember Allison asked how many people are currently in the soccer program each year and Mr. Foster said 2,600 and growing. Councilmember Allison said local hotels, restaurants, and retail stores would benefit from upgraded facilities. Ms. Fluente said the current soccer complex is maxed on participation at this point and felt Norman Forward's proposal would attract more elite regional and national tournaments and competitions.

Councilmember Miller said the City already maintains all the park facilities and the City's park Staff is operating pretty lean as are all City departments. She asked if fee scales are being considered because although NYSA currently maintains the fields, the new proposal looks like it will take a lot more maintenance. Mr. Foster said that is not being considered at this point, but Staff does not see a lot of extra maintenance in today's portion of the presentation because that maintenance is already being done. He said NYSA will be adding more to their load if there is an increase of eight fields; however, in terms of all the park facilities, the City will have to consider additional maintenance. Mayor Rosenthal said ongoing O&M costs can be discussed during the financial portion of the discussions.

Councilmember Castleberry asked if Edmond's soccer fields are turf or grass and Mr. Foster said they are grass. Councilmember Castleberry asked if turf fields would give Norman an advantage over Edmond and Mr. Foster said definitely.

Councilmember Lang said the City needs to consider traffic impacts for higher volumes of use because adding eight new soccer fields will bring in more vehicles and it is already difficult getting in and out of Griffin Park during games. Mr. Foster said Staff will need to work with the Public Works Department on adequate access. Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, said there is no signalization on Robinson Street for Griffin Park, which would require widening the road to install a left turn lane. He said each of these Norman Forward proposals are like mini-developments that are changing their function from what they are today. Mayor Rosenthal said the \$12 million is based on improvements in the park, not on traffic control. She said there are complicated traffic issues and the City needs to get ahead of that, if possible. She would like to see some traffic impact numbers. Mr. Foster said Staff is aware and sensitive to traffic impacts.

Reaves Park

Mr. Foster said current programs at Reaves Park include adult softball and youth baseball. The Park Maintenance Facility is also located at Reaves Park. He said Norman Forward's proposal at a cost of \$8 million would include removal of six existing adult softball fields; moving the Park Maintenance Facility to Griffin Park; constructing eleven new youth fields with lighting and irrigation; constructing two new restroom/concession facilities; renovating three existing restrooms/concession facilities; renovating two existing softball fields and five existing baseball fields; constructing additional parking for approximately 1,000 vehicles; expanding/enhancing park walkways and circulation; expanding picnic/festival areas; and additional landscaping. The existing Veterans Memorial, KidSpace playground, Arboretum/Reaves Center, and picnic/festival area will remain.

Councilmember Castleberry is concerned about the reduced number of baseball fields for the older kids because when his son was playing there were not enough fields at that time and now the City is talking about taking out more. Is the City comfortable there will be enough fields for the older boys? Mr. Foster said Staff is comfortable with the number and only four of the current six fields are typically being used.

Councilmember Allison asked if the Maintenance Facility is included in the budget and Mr. Foster said yes, \$2 million is in the Griffin Park budget.

Mr. Foster said the proposed adult softball/flag football complex would cost \$3.5 million and include the purchase and development a new 25 acre site (not yet determined); establishing utility infrastructure (electric, gas, water sewer, stormwater, and traffic/roadway analysis); construction of five adult softball fields with lights, irrigation, restroom/concession facilities; construction of four adult flag football fields with lights, irrigation, restroom/concession facilities, and construction of parking for approximately 500 vehicles.

Councilmember Holman asked if Optimist Football Association was currently playing at Reaves Park and Mr. Foster said no, they play their games on the artificial turf fields that Norman Public Schools (NPS) offer, but they practice at Reaves Park.

Mr. Foster said Staff would like to have discussions with NPS in terms of sharing or trading property for an adult softball/flag football complex site.

State Property

Mayor Rosenthal introduced Mr. Durand Crosby, Chief Operating Officer of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS).

Mayor Rosenthal said Griffin Hospital has been in the Norman community since 1895 and at one point was a city within a city and housed 3,300 patients during its peak period in the 1950's. She said the hospital operated with a farm, its own power plant, its own food service, etc. The hospital was a pioneer and model for mental health care, but its current capacity is 120 beds and it will not be growing. She said ODMHSAS future goals include obtaining capital to remove/renovate buildings, utilize land to collaborate with the community, support its mission, and honor its historical presence in Norman.

Mr. Crosby said while ODMHSAS is planning renovation of some buildings, there are buildings on the property that are not being utilized and are not needed. He said ODMHSA'S would like to sell some property and have a smaller footprint in the community.

State Property, continued:

Mayor Rosenthal said existing City leases for State property held by ODMHSAS includes the George M. Sutton Urban Wilderness Area (160 acres leased for 99 years to expire in 2078), Griffin Community Park (160 acres leased for 50 years to expire in 2033), and Francis Cate Park (14.5 acres leased for 50 years to expire in 2027). She said these leases are critical to the City of Norman and changes are taking place at the State level making these leases more uncertain than their terms currently suggest.

Mr. Crosby said the agency that oversees all of the State land leases has expressed concern that these leases are not constitutional and would be invalid because of the way they were drafted and the State will no longer enter into land leases. He said ODMHSAS has requested an internal legal opinion on that. Mayor Rosenthal said the City needs to work on this issue immediately.

Mayor Rosenthal highlighted other public and non-profit agencies' use of State property requiring lease negotiations that includes McKinzie Gardens (residential treatment facility), Community Services Building, Leland Wolf Alternative School, and Phil Smalley Center. She said the legality of these leases could potentially be questioned. She said ODMHSAS facilities on Griffin campus include Griffin Memorial Hospital, Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center, Children's Recovery Center, and Red Rock (a private non-profit mental health crisis facility). She said although the Cleveland County Health Department owns its land and building, it is in need of additional space.

Mayor Rosenthal asked Ms. Susan Connors, Director of Planning and Community Development, to explain why some of the existing buildings on Griffin Hospital property cannot be utilized. Ms. Connors said many of the buildings have extensive water damage, roof damage, non-working heat and air systems, etc. Basically they are not safe.

Councilmember Heiple said he understood many of the old buildings contain asbestos and asked about that and Ms. Connors said just last week there was an assessment for asbestos and it found there is asbestos in some of the buildings and in portions of others.

Mr. Crosby said ODMHSAS is working on obtaining Brownfield Grants to address the asbestos, but there is a cap on the grant amount per year so ODMHSAS is prioritizing which buildings need to be done, but are moving forward.

Councilmember Holman said some of the Griffin property buildings are really old and have been in Norman a long time. He asked if consideration has been given for preservation of any of the buildings for historic purposes, particularly the Administration Building and Chapel. Ms. Connors said it would be up to the State to determine if they want to pursue any sort of historic value for those facilities. She said most of the buildings were constructed in the 1920's so they are really not that old. Mayor Rosenthal said that question has come up several times in the past as well as repurposing, but it would take a large amount of money to repurpose the buildings and the general conclusion has been that that would be very difficult and costly, especially in terms of safety.

Mayor Rosenthal said rehabilitation of this property is addressed in the Community Develop Block Grant Consolidated Plan, Stormwater Master Plan, 2015 Land Use and Transportation Plan, Parks Master Plan, Greenway Trails Plan, Comprehensive Transportation Plan, and End Chronic Homelessness (ECHO) 2015 Plan.

State Property, continued:

Mayor Rosenthal said the State has communicated to the City that long term State leases are off the table in the future and current leases may be in jeopardy so waiting for them to expire is not a good idea. ODMHSAS has indicated their primary goal is to meet the needs of their patients; therefore, the City will need to acquire currently leased properties. In 2013, ODMHSAS approached the City about community collaboration to reach mutual goals. In 2014, a Community Coalition was created, chaired by Representative Scott Martin and Mayor Rosenthal. The coalition met twice to draft redevelopment goals, but that was as far as the coalition could go without a detailed analysis. Also in 2014, legislation authorized collaboration between ODMHSAS and City of Norman to discuss disposition of property and redevelopment. She said \$5 million is proposed in the Norman Forward package that could serve as a potential "placeholder/down payment" to cover a portion of the costs for acquisition, land clearing, and infrastructure improvements. She said the \$5 million has not been negotiated it would simply be a placeholder.

Councilmember Heiple asked if the State has done appraisals of the Griffin property and, if so, can Council have access to them. Mr. Crosby said there are appraisals for portions of Griffin property, but not the whole property and he can provide that to Council. He said appraisals cost money and the State is limited in resources.

Councilmember Castleberry asked if there has been discussion of selling any of the property for private development and Mr. Crosby said yes because the corner of Robinson Street and 12th Avenue N.E. is very valuable for commercial development. He said the State does not really care who purchases the property or for what reason they purchase the property.

Mayor Rosenthal said an Urban Land Institute Study is being conducted. The study is a market and feasibility analysis being done by an expert panel, including, but not limited to the following questions:

- How can we bring together the public and private sides of development to create a vibrant, mixed-use development?
- How can the City of Norman set the stage for future growth and development on this property and what types of public/private partnerships should be pursued?
- The State must sell land in order to realize their goal of new facilities. What types of land use sales should be first? What is the highest and best use for this property if it were not public land?
- What are the steps to achieve the vision in terms of the political, administrative, and public context?
- What types of public investment will best catalyze private investment? What redevelopment financing options does the panel recommend?

Mayor Rosenthal said one of the initial private development proposals was advanced by Staff as a possibility to create commercial development under a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District arrangement. Future TIF revenue could be used to redevelop and invest in infrastructure in the area and that will be part of the Urban Land Institute Study. She said Councilmembers will be asked to be a part of that process as well as stakeholders and the public.

Councilmember Castleberry asked if there is a way to protect the State's interest by not allowing a liquor store or bar to be developed and Ms. Connors said that can be done through a Planned Unit Development (PUD), but if the property is simply zoned commercial, there is no way to restrict those type of businesses. Councilmember Castleberry asked if Council can approve a PUD without knowing what types of businesses would be developed and Ms. Connors said there are various ways to rezone to protect the State. Mr. O'Leary said the State can also dictate certain restrictions when they sell the land and sometimes that is the best mechanism.

State Property, continued:

Ms. Joy Hampton, The Norman Transcript, wanted to clarify that the \$5 million placeholder is part of the Norman Forward proposal and Ms. Rosenthal said yes, that is part of the Norman Forward package at this time. Ms. Hampton asked if that money would be used for the land the City is currently leasing or if it can be used for other land the City may purchase. Mayor Rosenthal said the money is the beginning of a commitment to secure the leased properties for the future and securing the property north of the hospital where the current soccer complex is located. She said there is huge interest in what this property means to the community in the future.

Councilmember Castleberry said the City does not want to invest \$12 million dollars in a facility that sits on leased land especially when the lease period is uncertain. For that type of investment, the City needs to own the property. He said he did not want the \$5 million to be a slush fund for whatever the City wanted and Mayor Rosenthal agreed. She said the money is a commitment to work with the State to secure these assets and help with redevelopment of their campus going forward. Councilmember Castleberry felt the \$5 million placeholder makes the City a more serious buyer.

Items submitted for the record

1. Memorandum dated April 8, 2015, from Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation, to Steve Lewis, City Manager
2. Griffin Park Soccer Complex location map
3. Proposed Reaves Park Youth Baseball/Softball Complex location map
4. Griffin Memorial Hospital Property location map
5. State Lease Parcels location map
6. Memorandum dated April 8, 2015, from Terry Floyd, Development Coordinator, through Steve Lewis, City Manager, to Mayor and City Council
7. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Norman Forward Organized Sports and Griffin Land," dated April 9, 2015

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Councilmember Williams left at 5:40 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 6:18 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor