

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

January 30, 2018

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a Study Session at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room on the 30th day of January, 2018, 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 Bierman, Castleberry, Clark, Hickman, Holman, Karjala, Wilson, Mayor Miller

ABSENT: Councilmember Allison

Item 1, being:

PRESENTATION BY HAHN PUBLIC OF A POTENTIAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND RESEARCH INITIATIVE FOR A POSSIBLE STORMWATER ELECTION.

Mayor Miller said the City has discussed stormwater issues for years and adopted a Stormwater Master Plan (SWMP) in 2011. State mandates were put into place regarding stormwater requirements and the City will need approximately \$7 million per year for stormwater maintenance and improvements. A recommendation from the SWMP was to create a funding option for dedicated stormwater management, but the City did not begin serious discussion regarding stormwater funding until 2015 and that discussion was pushed back because of NORMAN FORWARD. She said a Stormwater Utility (SWU) needs to be established in order to have a predictable and stable funding source for programs that can help address stormwater runoff to protect drinking water; maintain creeks, streams, and drainage systems; repair erosion of streams and creeks, and meet federal and state regulatory requirements.

Mayor Miller said Norman is the only city in the nation that requires a vote of the people for a utility rate increase or adding a utility and it is not always easy to obtain public approval even though it may be important to do so. An unsuccessful election to create a SWU was held on August 23, 2016. She said, at that time, the City learned stormwater issues are more complex than originally thought as the approximately 190 square miles in Norman are impacted in different ways by stormwater runoff and stormwater problems. She said at that election, the City attempted to fund the entire program as outlined in the Strategic Plan, but it really ended up being too complicated for the public to understand and the City did not have answers to all the questions from the public. She said during the Council Retreat in August, Council regrouped and recommitted to finding a solution for stormwater issues. She said a Stormwater Citizens Committee was created consisting of sixteen citizens representing each ward, the development community, environmental community, as well as related Boards and Commissions within the City to review the creation of a SWU and make recommendations to Council.

Mayor Miller introduced Ms. Amanda Nairn and Mr. Andy Sherrer, Co-Chairs of the Stormwater Citizens Committee. Ms. Nairn said there is overwhelming support within the Committee to hire a communications firm to assist the Committee in communicating with and educating the public.

Mr. Sherrer agreed with Ms. Nairn and said the committee includes citizens who have a high level of intelligence with various backgrounds who have worked very hard on the stormwater issue and each one has strong opinions on stormwater. He said they all agree they need help with educating the public because public education is the key to a successful election. He said there is a lot of confusion on what exactly stormwater is and what it means to the community to solve the stormwater issues.

Ms. Claudia Deakins, Chief Communications Officer, introduced Mr. Ryan Orendorf and Ms. Sapna Mulki, representatives from Hahn Public, and said Hahn Public is being recommended to prepare a potential communication strategy and research initiative for a possible stormwater election. She said Hahn Public wanted an opportunity to share their proposal and plan for communications and research.

Ms. Mulki thanked Council for their time and said she is the Director of Water at Hahn Public and is the designated water nerd with ten years of experience in environmental education and policy research. She has also worked on water policies and finance infrastructure projects with private water companies to develop public education campaigns on issues ranging from water rates communication to stormwater rates communication, public outreach, and smart metering. She said Hahn Public is currently working with the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan, on a similar stormwater education campaign that includes a communication outreach.

Mr. Orendorf, Vice-President of Utilities Practice at Hahn Public, said he works with cities and utilities to help increase customer understanding of and appreciation for anything related to utilities that customers may take for granted on a daily basis. He said Hahn Public is very familiar with Oklahoma and has helped Oklahoma Natural Gas (ONG) with education and outreach for their energy efficiency program. He said Hahn Public's expertise has helped clients improve perceptions, change behavior, and win approvals. He said improving perceptions may mean teaching the citizens of Norman why stormwater is so important and how it impacts the community, which changes public behavior by engaging citizens to become accountable for the problem so they will take personal steps to improve stormwater issues. He said at the base of these three items are transparency, inclusion, and trust. He highlighted the eight member team that would be helping with the City of Norman education and communication process.

Mr. Orendorf said cities that are able to implement programs are the cities that acknowledge there is a serious problem, in this case stormwater. The City must let citizens know the challenges being faced, the hurdles ahead, and the consequences of doing nothing. The City must also let citizens know that Council is the right entity to address the problem and will address the problem reasonably, sensibly, and responsibly. He said citizens will need to know that City Staff and Council are listening and care. The fact that the City created a Committee to review stormwater issues helps demonstrate Council cares and wants to solve the problem as a community.

Ms. Mulki highlighted the process and deliverables that include laying the foundation, developing a strategy, and finalizing the plan, which will be a three month process. She said by laying the foundation, the City is trying to gain understanding of the public's perception toward stormwater and what they would like to see on the ballot at some point. She said Hahn Public will quantify public perceptions through development of a needs assessment, pre and post surveys, focus group discussions, and stakeholder analysis.

Councilmember Karjala asked how participants of the focus groups would be chosen and Ms. Mulki said they will be randomly selected, but Hahn Public will ensure they are representatives of the Norman community. She said picking and choosing people can make the data dirty and biased and that is true of the surveys as well so the surveys will also be gathered randomly.

Councilmember Bierman asked if the three month process will begin after a Stormwater Plan (Plan) has been finalized and Ms. Mulki said the three month process will help form the communication and education outreach after the Plan is finalized. Councilmember Bierman asked what would happen if the Plan did not meet the expectations of the focus groups and stakeholders and Ms. Mulki said the surveys and focus groups will give the City the hard data on whether residents are in support of the proposal.

Councilmember Castleberry said he was under the impression the City would obtain input from surveys and focus groups before Council finalized a Plan. Mayor Miller said at the time of the last election, Council set the ballot language before introducing it to the public so there was no time to gain input from the public. She said Hahn Public will be providing feedback to Council during the three month process so Council will know whether or not the public would support a SWU. Ms. Mulki said that is correct, the Plan would need to be established so people are aware of the Plan and provide feedback on what they like or do not like about the Plan. Mr. Orendorf said the Plan would be a draft and all information would be assessed at each step before moving onto the next step. Councilmember Castleberry voiced concerns about Council approving a Plan that was not specific. Mayor Miller said Council will be able to weigh in on any information before anything is put out to the public.

Councilmember Wilson said she would like to see all feedback data before weighing in on a Plan. Councilmember Hickman agreed and said he promised his constituents he would get their feedback before weighing in on a Plan for a SWU.

Councilmember Karjala said the Stormwater Citizen's Committee has not functioned under the idea that any recommendation they made would go straight to the public, it would always be vetted by Council first.

Councilmember Holman said any decision he makes on a Plan will be heavily based on public input data.

Ms. Mulki said in month two, Hahn Public will begin developing the structure of the campaign by translating data findings and complexities into a campaign that is easy to understand and easy to communicate as well as being compelling to citizens. Hahn Public will begin making recommendations regarding citizen participation methods such as open houses and how to conduct an open house. There will be an interview training workshop for Council so they will be able to answer those difficult questions they may be asked by constituents, which includes body language, eye contact, and how to construct simple and informative sentences when responding to questions in stressful situations. There will be strategies and scheduled meetings for each type of media form that could be used to reach the largest number of the public. In month three, the Plan edits will be made and the final Plan recommendations will be made to Council for approval.

Ms. Mulki said stakeholder outreach is key to a successful Plan and will include the rural community; Norman Chamber of Commerce; low-income families; environmental groups; labor unions (police and fire); University of Oklahoma; Norman Public School System; Home Owners Associations; and registered voters who did not vote in the last SWU election.

Ms. Mulki highlighted education concepts that include social media posts, digital brochures, and postcard mail outs. Councilmember Karjala asked if phone surveys would be done and Ms. Mulki said no because it is extremely expensive to do that. Councilmembers were concerned about how the surveys would be done and what groups may not have access to those surveys and Ms. Mulki said the City can have a multi-pronged approach on how the surveys are disseminated. Mayor Miller said libraries can be helpful in distributing surveys, which would also give the City data from a varied cross section of citizens.

Councilmember Karjala asked how many citizens Hahn Public expects to reach out to and Ms. Mulki said 10% of the total population above the age of eighteen (18).

Councilmember Bierman said during the last SWU election, the City relied heavily on social media, community events, and the internet for outreach purposes, but 76% of the public were not receptive to the messaging or did not hear about the information. She wants to make sure the City is diligent in how the public outreach is handled otherwise the City may only reach the part of the population that was reached the last time and she feels the library would help bridge that gap. Councilmember Castleberry felt the election failed because it was a utility fee and was not due to a lack of communication or education.

Ms. Mulki said stormwater is an elusive infrastructure the public does not really see so the public does not realize how it impacts the community. She said the more information that is given to the majority public with as much clarity as possible equals a better chance for a successful election.

Councilmember Bierman said that three months might be too optimistic in obtaining the feedback necessary for Council to approve a Plan that can be implemented. She said stormwater is not the most engaging issue and while she thinks Hahn Public has some great ideas regarding informing the public, getting people informed does not necessarily mean they will find the issue important enough to open their pocketbooks. She said the City needs to find a way to make stormwater an issue that is important enough that people want to pay for it and not be just another important issue. She said timing will be critical especially with all the other projects Council is dealing with and what the City may be asked to pay for those projects. Ms. Mulki agreed and said the education process has to be informative and change the behavior of the public towards stormwater and one of the variables that will be tested is the public's willingness to pay for a SWU. She said the timing can be adjusted, if needed.

Councilmember Hickman said when messaging and surveying, the recommendation from the Committee entails a utility fee and General Obligation (GO) Bonds for capital needs so the City needs to capture that data separately and identify if there is a priority for one or the other. He is concerned that if the surveys and data are based on the general population, not a targeted population, and the ballot is placed on a Special Election, the data may not be transferrable to the voting population. As far as the timing, Council is discussing a multitude of projects and he is concerned

about things that can happen from the time a SWU Plan is finalized to an election date that could possibly jeopardize the success of the election.

Councilmember Wilson asked where the money would come from and Mr. Steve Lewis, City Manager, said the City spends approximately \$40,000 each year for communication efforts so Staff will be identifying an additional \$40,000 for this project.

Councilmember Wilson said the Hahn Public presentation seems to indicate that rural property is farm land and has a lot of fertilizer runoff; however, that is not necessarily true since rural living can consist of ten acres with one structure with no farm elements. She felt more fertilizers are used in urban Norman than rural Norman. She said rural property owners realize the importance of water and are generally very conservative and caring as to what goes into the lakes and streams. Mayor Miller said many rural properties have farm animals and waste from those animals' flows into the streams that then flow into the rivers/lakes that are drinking water sources for communities. It is not all about fertilizer, and all possible water contaminants will be included in the education process.

Mayor Miller said there are several stormwater issues throughout Norman that includes homes being flooded and infrastructure being damaged during heavy rainstorms due to poor drainage that must be addressed and that can only happen with a SWU. Without a SWU all the stormwater problems that need to be addressed cannot be addressed unless the City can find a reliable funding source. She said this contract is scheduled on the February 13th Council agenda.

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "City of Norman Public Opinion Research and Strategic Communication Services," dated January 30, 2018

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The meeting adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

City Clerk

Mayor