

COUNCIL WORK SESSION
February 22, 2013

MINUTES

Casper City Council met in work session at 7:00 a.m., Friday, February 22, 2013.
Present: Councilmen Bertoglio, Cathey, Goodenough, Meyer, Powell and Mayor Schlager.
Absent: Councilmen Hopkins, Sandoval and Hedquist.

City Manager Patterson provided an update to the Council on the discussions with the Wyoming Medical Center on emergency transport services in the community. After reviewing the financials on the ambulance service, the Wyoming Medical Center has decided to continue providing transport services from their facility.

The City Manager reported on recent communications between the Food Bank of the Rockies and the local food bank representatives. He indicated that he met with them in December 2012, and was told that they had no plans to move forward with the proposal for a new facility which was presented to Council by former employees of the food bank. The proposal was predicated on the local food bank leaving the Food Bank of the Rockies to form the Food Bank of Wyoming, but that step has not been taken and is something that may be requested again in the future.

City Manager Patterson continued by saying that when budget adjustments were approved in January, the Excess Optional 1%#13 Sales Tax funds for the Boys and Girls Club were included; however, the funds for the Food Bank of the Rockies were not included in the adjustments.

Councilman Hedquist joined the meeting at 7:15 a.m.

Councilman Goodenough questioned whether the City Manager had the authority to announce to the public that the \$2.5 million from Excess Optional 1%#13 Sales Tax funds that were allocated by the Council for a new building for the Food Bank of Wyoming was released and could be used for other projects. He felt that since the Council had voted to allocate these funds, the Council needed to take action to release them.

Councilman Sandoval joined the meeting at 7:25 a.m.

Councilman Powell indicated that he had no problem with how this was handled because the funds were allocated to the Wyoming Food Bank which has not developed as was promised.

Mayor Schlager noted that Council Leadership was aware of the communication from the Food Bank of the Rockies and agreed with the City Manager that the funds were no longer committed since the basic requirements for accessing the funds had not been met. She apologized for not making all of this clear to the rest of the Council before it was announced to the media.

City Manager Patterson also provided copies of a letter from a local Board Member who contacted all of the other local board members and reiterated that the funds would not be reserved since they had no plan in place to utilize them.

Councilman Hedquist asked staff and leadership to make sure that changes like this are communicated to the rest of the Council in a timely manner, to allow members to respond and to ask for discussion, if that is needed.

Mayor Schlager agreed to improve communication and noted that it was her intent to use the Council's email to send out regular updates on issues that may result in requests for further discussion.

Councilman Cathey said that although he appreciates receiving the email updates, he has some concern with timing since if he is in the field for an extended period of time, he may not be able to check his email everyday and could miss some important communications. He suggested that staff provide a 6-week calendar that lists the possible timing of when items will be placed on a work session or regular Council agenda.

Councilman Bertoglio suggested that a spreadsheet with upcoming issues could be prepared that listed the tentative dates for consideration with the understanding that things could be moved at any time.

Councilman Powell suggested that there be a closer connection between what has been discussed at work sessions or at the Mayor/Manager meetings, and when Council will be asked to provide input or make a decision.

City Manager Patterson explained that once Council gives direction, it may take staff several days to finalize agreements or paperwork that is required in order for there to be formal action.

City Manager Patterson then provided Council with a suggested timeline for addressing the repeal of the smoking ordinance and the possibility of a special election.

Councilman Goodenough asked what alternatives are provided in the statutes which may allow the election to be conducted on a different day of the week or by mail in ballots versus voting at the polls.

City Attorney Luben indicated that the Wyoming State election laws were pretty narrow in what they allowed communities to do, but that he would check the requirements and report back.

Councilman Powell suggested that the City contact the Natrona County School District and see if the timing could be such that there could be a combination special election on their proposed bond issue at the same time that the referendum election was held, in order to share costs.

Several Council members indicated that they were surprised by the way this issue was brought back at the last work session, because they were not prepared to respond to the Mayor when it was suggested that an ordinance to repeal the smoking ban be placed on the March 5, 2013, regular Council meeting agenda.

Mayor Schlager asked if Council wanted to discuss this issue at a future work session before asking staff to prepare an ordinance to repeal. Council members agreed that this deserved more time for discussion. City Manager Patterson indicated that it would be on the March 12, 2013, work session agenda.

City Manager Patterson presented a proposal from the Platte River Parkway Trust for development of the Adams Greenway Trail. The Trust is funding the construction of the trail on City-owned property through a cooperative agreement with the Wyoming Conservation Corp which will provide the labor. Council agreed to support proceeding with this project.

City Manager Patterson updated Council on three parcels of land that are currently available for sale or development. There is a 5-acre parcel on East 21st Street which has been used as a snow storage site. There is also the property behind the new Casper Fire-EMS Station No. 3, which was recently platted and zoned. The last piece is at Trevett Lane and Robertson Road. Staff recently sent out a request for proposals, but received only one proposal which was less than half the current appraised value of the site. Staff rejected this proposal and the individual may be contacting Council to complain.

Monthly reports on activities in Public Services and Community Development Departments were distributed.

City Manager Patterson discussed the upcoming efforts to conduct an educational program on the Optional 1% Sales Tax, in preparation for the 2014 election for Optional 1%#15 Sales Tax. He noted that revenues from the Optional 1% represent 20% of the total expenditures in the City budget.

Council members questioned how the funds are being used, and staff indicated that the majority of the funds are used for capital expenditures for new or replacement equipment and maintenance of City facilities. Some funds are used for programs, such as subsidized swimming in the outdoor pools, but this is a small percentage of the total.

Councilman Goodenough commented that he was surprised to hear that the funding for the purchase of the Adbay Building was coming from the \$5.5 million which was set aside for the conference center. He thought the monies would come from the Revolving Land Fund set aside for the Old Yellowstone District.

City Manager Patterson indicated that this purchase was included in the previous discussion on land purchase for the conference center, and felt that it was clear direction to purchase the properties from those dollars.

Councilman Powell excused himself from the meeting at 8:15 a.m.

Councilman Hedquist indicated that he would like to discuss the conference center project at a work session, in order to make certain that he has a clear understanding of how staff is proceeding on this project. He made the statement that he is certain the cost figures which have been provided do not include the needed public improvements for streets, water and sewer to serve this project. Because of that, he feels that the project has been severely underestimated and he questions where the funding will come from to support this structure.

City Manager Patterson indicated that there will be a presentation at the work session on February 26 regarding the conference center, in order to review all of the cost estimates and the justification that was given by the Strategic Advisory Group study on the feasibility of the conference center, and the Crandall Arambula study on Downtown Casper.

Councilman Goodenough commented that the questions raised about use of Optional 1% Sales Tax funds on the conference center were important, and to say that no Optional 1% Sales Tax funds will be used may be misleading if it is planned to construct public improvements in this area which are funded by Optional 1% Sales Tax funds. As the numbers are presented, it may make sense to conduct a special meeting for citizens to ask questions specifically about this project in a public setting to avoid the ongoing conspiracy theories that are being raised by outside groups.

Councilman Hedquist also noted that he is opposed to staff using the 2013 Community Strategic Plan to justify moving forward with projects that support the Downtown. He provided examples of what he considered to be excessive spending on improvements to the Downtown which have resulted in very little benefit to the community. He questioned whether there were numbers available that indicated how much of the sales tax revenue generated in Casper came from the Downtown compared to other parts of the community. He feels that projects that end up on the list are not determined by need, such as street improvements, but are driven by other priorities.

Councilman Bertoglio indicated that these discussions would be more appropriate during the upcoming budget work sessions, as staff provides options for Council to direct capital investment.

Councilman Cathey excused himself from the meeting at 8:45 a.m.

Councilman Sandoval responded to Councilman Hedquist by emphasizing that the private sector may have interest in making significant investments in the Downtown, but needs to see that there will be public improvements as well.

Mayor Schlager asked if Council members were interested in setting up a full day or half day retreat to discuss how to proceed with improving communications. Council members did not support conducting a retreat at this time.

With no further business, Mayor Schlager adjourned the work session at 9:05 a.m.