



City of Grand Island

Tuesday, March 09, 2004

Council Session

Item G3

Approving Minutes of March 2, 2004 City Council Study Session

The Minutes of March 2, 2004 City Council Study Session are submitted for approval. See attached MINUTES.

Staff Contact: RaNae Edwards

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS

CITY OF GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA

MINUTES OF CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

March 2, 2004

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a Study Session of the City Council of the City of Grand Island, Nebraska was conducted in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 100 East First Street, on March 2, 2004. Notice of the meeting was given in the Grand Island Independent on February 25, 2004.

Mayor Jay Vavricek called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The following members were present: Councilmembers Meyer, Whitesides, Gilbert, Nickerson, Pauly, Hornady, Walker, and Haase. Councilmembers Cornelius and Pielstick were absent. The following City Officials were present: City Administrator Gary Greer, City Clerk RaNae Edwards, Finance Director David Springer, City Attorney Doug Walker and Public Works Director Steve Riehle.

RESERVE TIME TO SPEAK ON AGENDA ITEMS: No individuals reserved time to speak on agenda items.

MAYOR COMMUNICATION: Mayor Vavricek commented on a meeting with Dewy Heminger, father of Firefighter Bobby Heminger, thanking the City for all they had done after the tragedy in Wood River with the loss of two Firefighters. Also the Mayor commented on the central air service in our community. A meeting will be held on March 10, 2004 at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Meeting Room at City Hall regarding air service through the Central Nebraska Airport. Councilmember Gilbert commented on the water contamination in her area and stated the water main had been completed.

Discussion Concerning ½ Cent Sales Tax Ballot Language. City Administrator Gary Greer stated that on August 27, 2002 the City Council voted to put a measure on the 2004 ballot to consider a ½ Cent Sales Tax for the purpose of expanding parks and recreational opportunities, providing for infrastructure, and property tax relief. It was determined that many important capital projects could not be funded without additional revenue and that the voters should be given the chance to approve paying for projects such as a new fire station, library expansion, law enforcement facility with expanded sales tax. A great deal of discussion had taken place on the possible ballot measure.

In November of 2003, a survey was conducted to receive input from citizens concerning projects which had been suggested as needed capital projects. Six hundred and thirteen respondents prioritized projects in the following order:

1. Construction of 3rd and Broadwell Underpass
2. Replacement of Pine Street Fire Station
3. Police/Sheriff Public Safety Center Replacement
4. Expansion of the Edith Abbott Library

5. Fire Training Facility
6. Grand Generation Center Renovation
7. Expand Island Oasis/ Replace Lincoln Park Pool
8. Reduction of Train Noise
9. Hike/Bike Trail Expansion
10. Ammunition Plant Recreation Development
11. Northwest Park Pool

In order to continue the education process, study sessions were conducted to go more in depth with the projects. The following projects were studied:

1. January 20, 2004 Fire Station, Fire Training Facility, Train Noise
2. February 3, 2004 3rd & Broadwell Underpass, Aquatics, CAAP Development

Additionally, a fire Sprinkler system was approved for funding for the Grand Generation Center on February 10, 2004.

On February 17, 2004, the financial implications of the projects were explored and the idea of using some of the of possible sales tax proceeds for property tax relief was discussed.

During the annual retreat on February 21st the Council discussed the plan presented by City Administration and asked that the final ballot language be reviewed at the March 2, 2004 Study Session before it was placed on a Regular Council Meeting for approval.

On March 9, 2004, the final ballot language would be approved to be sent to the Election Commissioner.

Mr. Greer stated the process had been enlightening, educational and thought provoking concerning the ½ Cent Sales Tax ballot measure. The Council had listened to the public, closely reviewed alternatives and brought greater understanding to the issue at hand. The public had ample time and opportunity to review the proposed projects and to comment on their viability. It was prudent to move forward with the final stages of the process at this time.

In order to assist in the process, City Administration had developed a recommended project plan and ballot language. The proposed plan and ballot language was discussed and evaluated by the City Council during the Retreat on February 21, 2004. The draft plan that was presented during the Retreat had been changed due to new information obtained at the Retreat and an error that was brought to light concerning the amortization schedule.

The following was the proposed plan for the proceeds that was recommended by administration in the event the ½ Cent Sales Tax was passed May 11, 2004.

How should the money be invested?

It appeared that Grand Island residents were very concerned about the expansion of the property tax levy. Therefore, property tax relief seemed to be a very wise investment of sales tax dollars.

Sales tax was derived from a wider group of taxpayers and had been used effectively to provide property tax relief in the past in Grand Island and other Nebraska Communities.

It was recommended that ½ of the proposed sales tax proceeds be used to provide property tax relief and reduce the City's tax rate. It was estimated that the ½ cent sales tax would generate approximately \$4,000,000, allowing for \$2,000,000 in property tax relief.

The remainder of the sales tax proceeds were recommended to go for capital improvement projects to allow for the City to continually improve its facilities.

The sales tax was recommended to not be used for operational or personnel expenditures. This would allow approximately \$2,000,000 to take care of the needs which had not been addressed and allow for future needs to be addressed in a timely manner.

What projects should be accomplished and how were they to be financed?

The projects on the board had been determined to cost approximately \$47 million to bring about. City Administration recommended the following projects be prioritized for the initial use of the approximate \$2,000,000 capital improvement proceeds:

Financed projects:

1)	Fire Station # 1 Replacement	\$3,000,000
2)	Fire Training Facility (Land, Building, Burn Building, Training Tower)	\$4,000,000
3)	Police/Sheriff Law Enforcement Center	\$3,000,000
4)	Library Expansion	\$7,000,000
5)	Aquatics Projects (according to Aquatics plan)	<u>\$3,000,000</u>
	Total:	\$20,000,000

The aforementioned if amortized for 20 years at 5 % would create approximate annual costs of:

\$1,593,449.

Annual Cash Projects:

1)	Grand Generation Center Capital Fund	\$100,000
2)	Cornhusker Army Ammunition Recreation Development	\$125,000
3)	Hike/Bike Trail development	\$125,000
4)	Infrastructure Emergency Funds	<u>\$ 56,551</u>
	Total:	\$406,551

Annual Grand Total: \$2,000,000

It was recommended at this time to suspend the Broadwell Avenue and 3rd Street underpass project (\$12,600,000) and the Railroad Noise Reduction project (\$2,000,000). It was further recommended that the upcoming Railroad Corridor Study be broadened to investigate long range alternatives up to and including re-routing the rail lines around the city. It was believed that a more comprehensive look at the Railroad issue may be in the best interest of Grand Island long term.

The Ballot Language

The City Council was asked to review the proposed plan from City Administration and discuss its various elements. After discussion it was recommended to place a resolution with finalized ballot language on the agenda for the March 9, 2004 Council Meeting for approval.

City Attorney Doug Walker commented on a minor change to the Resolution that would come before Council on March 9, 2004. The words “capital improvements” were changed to “capital projects” as required by state statutes.

Councilmember Walker commented on what citizens might ask about the property tax rate and what would keep the City from increasing the tax later on. City Administrator Gary Greer stated that the City had a lid limit set by state statute that had to be followed. Also mentioned was that the City did not have control on other governmental spending or valuations. Councilmember Whitesides commented on the projects that needed to be done whether or not the sales tax issue passed. Councilmember Nickerson stated he was glad to see the addition of the senior/grand generation facilities included in the ballot language. He commented that this was an investment, better growth, better economic development, and future for our City.

Gene Dominic, 221 East First Street encouraged the Council to keep their courage. He also stated that we needed to be honest and open and to make sure that this was stated as property tax relief. Discussion was had concerning the property tax base compared to the sales tax base which was much larger.

Finalizing City Council 2004 Goals: City Administrator Gary Greer reported that during the February 21, 2004 City Council Retreat, there was great discussion about the future of Grand Island. As part of this discussion, the City Council began developing several goals for the next year. After developing preliminary goals, the Council asked that the priorities that rose to the top be discussed in a Study Session.

Following was the list that was established at the retreat for Council review:

Public Safety

- Develop a Fire Training Facility and work toward other projects that help establish Grand Island as a “Training City” (City of Training Excellence)
- Replace Fire Station # 1
- Work on legislation that would be beneficial to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Law Enforcement
- Continue to develop and implement Community Policing programs

- Develop programs to address problems with Domestic Violence/Abuse
- Develop programs aimed at addressing issues with illegal Drugs

Economic Development

- Assist the Economic Development Corporation in creating and retaining quality jobs
- Establish opportunities for Grand Island to become “Training Center” for various groups
- Work with downtown to develop programs, policies that help the Downtown
- Develop a plan to transition Grand Island to 50,000+ population before April 2010

Infrastructure

- Create better, more accessible entryways to the City of Grand Island
- Develop a traffic plan that enhances traffic flow throughout the City
- Work towards legislation to bring more funding for the upgrade of Grand Island’s infrastructure
- Finalize the Comprehensive Plan and assure for the long term planning of the city
- Plan for the annexation and development of new subdivisions in an orderly way

Government Efficiency

- Enhance Communication to the public by reinventing GITV and the City webpage
- Cooperate with Hall County on a study to seek interlocal partnerships that eliminate duplication and promote efficiency
- Streamline City services in order to reduce costs
- Shift the tax burden from property tax
- Develop a Information Technology plan and implement a streamlined system

Quality of Life

- Expand the Library and its services
- Support ethnic diversity programs
- Develop a Green space policy
- Develop more recreational facilities in cooperation with community partners
- Develop a recreational vehicle park at the Cornhusker Army Ammunition Plant
- Funding for the continuation of the Hike/Bike Trails
- Seek grant funds and implement programs to improve housing in Grand Island
- Conduct an Aquatics Study

Community

- Support programs geared for Youth Development
- Support programs geared for Senior Citizens

Public Health

- Explore the possibility of the development of a Regional Hazardous Waste Site in Grand Island
- Evaluate programs that enhance the quality of Housing in Grand Island
- Evaluate programs that minimize the usage of illegal Drugs
- Investigate the issue of banning smoking in public places

Councilmember Gilbert commented on the number of goals and whether or not we should prioritize within the list. Mr. Greer stated these were all possible to accomplish, some would take more time than others.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

RaNae Edwards
City Clerk