

COUNCIL WORK SESSION
Tuesday, November 9, 2021 at 4:30 p.m.
City Hall - Council Chambers

AGENDA

1. Council Meeting Follow-up
2. Mayoral Election Process
3. Phase III of Graves Implementation—Employee Compensation
4. Parks Watering Data
5. Council Goals Update & Tracking Demo
6. Agenda Review
7. Legislative Review
8. Council Around the Table

Mayor Freel began the meeting at 4:37 p.m. with the following Councilmembers present: Cathey, Engebretsen, Gamroth, Knell, Pollock, Quest, Vice Mayor Pacheco and Mayor Free.

Mayor Freel asked whether there was any meeting follow up. Council and City Manager Napier had no items to cover. Mayor then asked City Manager Napier to begin the discussion on the Mayoral Election Process. Mr. Napier explained that we were at that point of the year when Council is asked to select a new mayor and vice mayor. City Clerk Tremel summarized the traditional process. Councilmembers are asked to fill out a provisional ballot, first for the mayor and then for vice mayor positions. These ballots are then collected, respectively, by the Clerk, and counted by the Clerk and the City Attorney. Once the provisional winners are selected, Council would then officially vote on the straw poll winners at the first Council Meeting of the next year. City Manager Napier and City Clerk Tremel answered questions.

Mayor Freel then asked Mr. Napier to begin the discussion of the Graves Implementation Phase III. Mr. Napier explained that the Graves study is a comprehensive salary survey that was intended to keep the City of Casper's wages comparable with those paid in other communities. This third phase of the implementation was meant to focus on wage compression. There are supervisors in the organization that make only a slight amount more than the employees that they supervise. Phase III of the implementation is primarily geared toward giving those supervisors an appropriate salary increase so that they consistently make more than 10% above each of their employees.

Mr. Napier also brought the current sales tax chart to the Council's attention, and specifically, he pointed out that the chart shows that we have sometimes collected sales tax revenue as budgeted, and sometimes, we have collected less. From this chart, Mr. Napier pivoted to a budgeting tool as prepared by the Financial Services Division. The tool allows users to see the actual revenue, the projected revenue, and it connects that to the possible increases in spending. The Graves Study, by its nature, calls for some city employees to receive enhanced pay. At a certain point, pay enhancements begin to exceed available budget.

Mr. Napier demonstrated that Council could, through the use of this tool, add projections that envision enhanced revenue. He explained that, if Council believes that sales tax revenue will continue to exceed projections, then that assumption can be input, thereby showing that more funding will be available.

Mr. Napier further demonstrated that the tool allows for separate consideration of sworn police officers, as opposed to other employees. He also pointed out that some employees have been “frozen” for the last few years because some of them are paid above their approved salary range. These people would not receive a COLA increase if one was granted for other city employees. He also showed that some employees are “maxed out” at their current wage, which means that they would continue to receive COLA increases, but they don’t have any room to receive other wage increases. Mr. Napier further mentioned that he is likely to propose other salary increases in May 2022 as part of the FY23 budgeting process.

Councilmember Knell said that the Council has been up front about its desire to help the police officers who have been frozen in their salary ranges. However, he said he was not comfortable with changing revenue projections. He asked that currently frozen police officers be unfrozen through a 5% wage increase, but that maxed out police officers be reconsidered in May.

Councilmember Pollock asked for more detail about where the City is in the overall Graves implementation. Mr. Napier said that, per the Graves study, sworn and non-sworn employees should really be treated differently, largely because sworn employees are typically paid on a stepped system. In general, he said that non-sworn employees under the new wage scales will typically have more room for salary growth. Councilmember Pollock followed up by asking about the 5% across the board increase for frozen employees, and specifically, Councilmember Pollock said that she was concerned that the unfreezing won’t impact compression.

Vice Mayor Pacheco asked if a COLA was being considered. Mr. Napier said that it is not currently being proposed, and he noted that it would further enhance the cost of any unfreezing or compression solutions. Vice Mayor Pacheco asked if it should be considered now, or perhaps, reconsidered in May. Mr. Napier suggested it be considered in May.

Councilmember Engebretsen asked if less than 5% could be given to the frozen employees with the idea that something could then be given to others. Mr. Napier said that it could be done that way.

Councilmember Cathey suggested that it was unrealistic to suggest an enhanced sales tax projection because the City is already behind projections for the year.

Councilmember Quest asked about the employees who are maxed out, if that had the effect of freezing their pay. Mr. Napier stated that for those that were maxed out on the previous scale, they were not frozen, they had just gotten to the top of the scale. Moving on to the new chart their earn-ability has increased. One could argue that means they are frozen by not moving them on the new scale. But he doesn’t think of them as being frozen until the next budget cycle when we are already on the new scale. Councilmember Knell said that maxed out employees are not frozen and concurred with Mr. Napier.

Mayor Freel asked for clarification regarding the sworn frozen and the non-sworn frozen. Mr. Napier said that the line 37 are sworn and 34 would be non-sworn employees. Specifically, he asked if the step increases for sworn employees are set at 5% per step. Mr. Napier said that not all steps are identical, and the top steps in particular get somewhat smaller.

Councilmember Pollock said that she was in favor of the 5% for the sworn. In particular, she asked if any employees would get a compression adjustment and a step increase. Ms. Belser said that no, no employees are slated to get both increases under this model.

Councilmember Knell thanked staff for their work. He also pointed out that this was long overdue and this takes a lot of work. He stated the employees will be better for it and that he supported our employees.

Councilmember Cathey stated that he would suggest going with the suggested amounts that were on the chart. Council is proposing that the compression be dealt with, along with a 5% salary increase for the frozen sworn employees and the unfrozen sworn employees. Mr. Napier also asked when these changes should be implemented. Councilmember Knell asked it could be done now. Mr. Napier recommended that it be implemented in January. Council agreed to make the changes effective January 1, 2022.

The next item of discussion was a review of parks water practices and costs. Mr. Napier said that this year's numbers are somewhat skewed because of the Water Treatment Plant's ferric acid delivery issues in the middle of the summer. This year's consumption was roughly \$260,000, but he said that were it not for that situation, costs probably would have been much closer to \$400,000. Mr. Napier also pointed out that turf maintenance, even without the watering costs, is a labor intensive (and therefore costly) activity. Mr. Napier mentioned there are other things to do to reduce the costs. He then asked Ms. Zulima Lopez, Parks, Recreation and Public Facilities Director, to present the information to Council.

Ms. Lopez explained that the Parks Division deals with formal parks, and it deals with Special Areas which includes smaller places, like landscaped intersections which are not classified as parks. Ms. Lopez said that the first option staff was interested in instituting is a new broad-spectrum radio-controlled irrigation system. Some of the system is already on a remote-controlled system (45 through the Motorola system, and 11 through a cellular system). But most of the rest of the City's irrigation system is not on this remote-controlled system, and this means that the sprinklers will operate even when they're not needed. Ms. Lopez also suggested moisture sensors, because they would help Parks staff to know when the soil truly needed to be watered. Ms. Lopez also suggested moving more parks to raw-water irrigation systems. The Soccer Complex, for example, is largely irrigated with raw (untreated river) water. Other areas could be added to this system, or they could be added with well water.

Another proposal was that the water rates charged to the Parks Division could simply be reduced. A new rate schedule could be adopted that would give the City access to irrigation water at lower per unit cost, but this would inherently cause private water rates to rise, to cover the shortfall. A final proposal was to simply water fewer areas by eliminating turf, perhaps by replacing them with xeriscaping.

Councilmember Cathey complimented Ms. Lopez for the report, and he followed up by suggesting a mix of all these solutions. Regarding the rate model option, Councilmember Cathey suggested setting the Parks water rate to equal the wholesale cost that the City pays to the Central Wyoming Regional Water System. Councilmember Cathey complimented the soil moisture sensors, because rain in Casper is not uniform across the City.

Councilmember Knell said that there is an incentive to not water, because of the cost savings, but members of the public also object to parks that turn brown. He suggested that the public could be polled to ask their preferences – brown grass, or higher water rates?

Councilmember Gamroth said that he would be very interested in seeing the cost-benefit of buying the electronic enhancements with the hope of saving money in the long term. He also asked if the Department of Energy and/or the EPA have grants to help support these enhancements. He also specifically mentioned the CY Islands, which he felt was a waste of resources – he suggested xeriscaping it, which could still look nice, but cost much less.

Mayor Freel asked if there were ways to make xeriscaping attractive, and he asked how many areas could be considered xeriscaping candidates. Ms. Lopez said that discussions have been held regarding how such areas could be converted. Regarding the areas that could be converted, Ms. Lopez said that at least three areas would be good candidates in addition to the CY Islands, and perhaps a dozen others could also be considered.

Councilmember Pollock asked if there was any cost-benefit done on some of these landscaped areas – for example, do citizens enjoy the city much more because of these turfed areas, and does that benefit exceed the cost? More generally, Councilmember Pollock suggested pursuing all of the options that were suggested.

Councilmember Gamroth suggested coming up with a cost-per-acre figure for the existing turf, and then using that as a mechanism for deciding which turf could be xeriscaped. Further, he asked if Staff could continue to look into the electronic options that were already being discussed.

Councilmember Engebretsen suggested implementing the remote irrigation controls at all of the major parks, and making improvements from there.

Councilmember Quest concurred with the idea of trying to find non-city funding that might help with these improvements.

Mayor Freel asked if maybe Council could look into all of these options in more detail. And look into other grant funding. Mr. Napier said yes that could happen.

Next Mayor Freel asked City Manager Napier to begin the discussion on the Council Goals Tracking. Mr. Napier stated that he wanted to give the Council tracking on the goals, in addition to the Council meeting items and there was a way to track the items on their own. He stated the demo today would show how and where they could go to check into the Goals and see where they are in the progress. He then invited Pete Meyers, City Manager's Analyst to provide this demo and overview. Mr. Meyers explained how the Goals are broken down into sub-goals and sub-parts

and then tasks. This year it was broken down into 96 specific steps. Mr. Meyers then pulled up the software, Microsoft Planner and showed how the tasks were broken into 19 sections. He explained that the software color codes progress and divides items into “buckets”. He then demonstrated an example. Green categories are done, blue are in progress, and gray have not been started yet. Mr. Meyers then displayed the tasks in Microsoft planner.

Councilmember Gamroth stated that he liked the tool, and he likes that they are monitoring the goals in real time. He stated there is no point setting goals and then not revisiting them for two years. He stated he appreciated the work.

Councilmember Pollock agreed with Councilmember Gamroth’s statements and that it was a good way to stay organized. Further, Councilmember Pollock stated that Council often email about the status of various projects or goals, and this would help Council to be able to go look rather than have to bother the City Manager and then staff. Mayor then thanked Mr. Meyers. Mr. Meyers stated the link would be sent out. Council supported the addition of the transit goal.

City Manager Napier then went through upcoming agendas and asked Council if they would like to cancel the December 28th Council work session. He also went over some topics he wanted Council to be aware were added to pre-meeting agendas. Council supported canceling the December 28th meeting and only having three meetings in December.

There was no legislative review.

Council then went around the table with their updates. Council spoke of various meeting they attended the past week. Council member Gamroth stated there was an Oil City Article for water tank painting for a lot of money and a local firm did not receive the bid. He wanted to explain that of the 9 bids, none were local. Maybe because it is a specialized service, or maybe local bidders did not hear. He stated they are published, and on the website, as well as public bidding websites. If firms in Pennsylvania can find it he would hope our local firms could. He then explained that Laramie County passed 14 proposals for the specific purpose tax, whereas the Natrona County did not and stated if anything went to election we should separate it. Laramie received 128 million and Natrona could not approve 4.3 million and he was disappointed.

Councilmember Knell agreed. He thought it should have been separated out. He then updated Council regarding subsidies for Delta Air Lines out of Natrona County.

Councilmember Cathey stated he was somewhat disappointed in the vote but very disappointed in the number of people who actually voted.

Councilmember Quest said she was interested in the Delta issue and looked forward to that debate. She then thanked Staff and Council for all the help and information shared about her hometown as she took office. She then shared the continued issue of COVID and asked that everyone take it seriously and look into vaccines to protect our public.

Vice Mayor brought up the program Academy Hour which provides mental health support for law enforcement. He also brought up the bar opening near St. Anthony's Tri-Parish school and whether it would be appropriate to have an ordinance regarding the allowable distance between a bar and school.

Mayor then stated that he was worried about putting money into a private business but he does have concerns about losing the Delta flight as once you lose it you don't get it back. He then announced that there would be an executive session, but first there would need to be a regular meeting called to order.

There being no further business, the work session adjourned at 6:33 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF CASPER, WYOMING
A Municipal Corporation

Fleur Tremel
City Clerk

Steven K. Freel
Mayor