

COUNCIL WORK SESSION
Tuesday, June 27, 2023 at 4:30 p.m.
City Hall – Council Meeting Room

AGENDA

1. Meeting Follow-up
2. Homeless Coalition
3. Optional 1% Tax
4. Ordinance Regarding Feeding Turkeys
5. Rec Enterprise Business Plans Part I (Golf & Hogadon)
6. Judge Evaluation Form
7. Fire Station No. 3 Roof
8. Agenda Review
9. Legislative Review
10. Council Around the Table

Mayor Knell called the work session to order at 4:38 p.m. with the following Councilors present: Jensen, Cathey, Pollock, Bond, Haskins, Gamroth, Vice Mayor Pacheco and Mayor Knell. Councilor Engebretsen was absent.

1. Meeting Follow-up

Councilor Cathey stated he received all information he needed for the Coffman Avenue improvements contract, and Council agreed this item should be put on the consent agenda next Tuesday.

2. Homeless Coalition

City Manager Napier stated that this item was in response to a request from City Council to hear a report from the Homeless Coalition as well as a follow-up regarding ordinance amendments that may help provide staff with tools to deal with some of the issues from the homeless situation in Casper. He emphasized that the issues are varied and complex and will need a number of solutions to improve the situation. He stated that tonight's discussion is for informational purposes and to let staff know if they are on the right track with addressing some of the issues. He then introduced members of the Homeless Coalition and asked that they address Council.

Deb Clarke, member of the Homeless Coalition and CEO/Founder of Eval.com, discussed her concerns about the homeless situation and its effects on the broader community. She discussed a surge in reports of loitering, litter, property damage, and disturbing behavior from homeless individuals, especially in the downtown area. She discussed how this is negatively impacting downtown businesses. She expressed concern over other communities bussing homeless individuals to communities that have more resources, and how if Casper was to increase resources, it could lead to more homeless individuals traveling to this community. She suggesting exploring measures such as code enforcement, ordinances, and increased lighting to help with the problems, as law enforcement is already stretched thin with their resources.

Kim Summerall-Wright, Executive Director of Casper Housing Authority (CHA) and member of the Homeless Coalition, then discussed how CHA and other agencies in Casper are working to address the homelessness issues by providing transitional housing, permanent housing, mental health services, and access to veteran's benefits. She discussed that Casper is a "greyhound community" and does receive individuals from across the State, but this is because there are many small communities that do not have the resources that Casper does. She stated that those communities need to provide help to Casper if they are bussing their citizens here for treatment. She then discussed a federal continuum of care program that is designed to promote the community wide commitment to end homelessness by providing funding to non-profits to provide housing, promote access to resources, and optimize self-sufficiency.

Mayor Knell discussed that he has heard that Wyoming Rescue Mission is no longer providing programming and is closed during the day. Councilor Haskins asked that Brad Hopkins, Executive Director of Wyoming Rescue Mission, discuss the services and resources that are offered by his agency. Mr. Hopkins discussed that each homeless person is assigned a case manager to help them be restored to community independence. He stated that many of them will go out on assignment during the day, but the shelter is not closed during the day and is actively providing resources. He stated that the vast majority of individuals want to improve their lives, but there are about 5% who do not want to do anything, and in those cases, the Mission must try to provide compassion without facilitating poor choices. He also expressed concern that Casper will become a homeless destination. Councilor Pollock stated that she believes there needs to be a unified vision and the group needs to define goals and philosophies for how to move forward. Vice Mayor Pacheco discussed the importance of the Homeless Coalition collaborating and compromising in order to find the best solution for the community. He also asked that people refrain from using dehumanizing language when discussing homeless individuals.

City Manager Napier stated that these problems deserve a variety of solutions, and asked that Council consider amending three ordinances to help staff deal with these issues on a municipal level. The ordinances include those that would prohibit camping and provide tools to deal with abandoned properties that are becoming flop houses. He discussed the importance of evaluating transportation options to get homeless individuals back to networks that can help them, as well as continuum care services that are currently not functioning as they should. Councilor Pollock stated that she would like initiatives like ordinance changes to be coupled with resources to provide a more wholistic approach. Councilor Gamroth stated that he agrees with a balanced approach but the majority opinion from individuals on the Downtown Development Board is that the problem is getting worse, and there are security issues resulting from the problem. He discussed how mental health plays a big part in the homeless situation and how addressing that is also important.

City Attorney Nelson explained that criminalizing homelessness without offering other options could lead to a lawsuit, and advised that a balance be carefully prescribed. He also suggested that the City advocate for statewide assistance to help with costs the City is incurring due to other municipalities in Wyoming bussing their homeless individuals to Casper. He also stated that the point and time count is currently done in January, which does not give an accurate representation for the number of homeless in Casper. They are currently working with Senator Barrasso to change

that count date in order to obtain an accurate count. Councilor Cathey stated that he does not want the City to throw money at the problem, because that will not necessarily help and will cause Casper to become a homeless magnet to the rest of Wyoming. Councilor Bond suggested that the Coalition break into work groups to address high priority high impact strategies and to come to Council with specific recommendations. Councilor Gamroth stated that the majority of homeless individuals in Casper are from Natrona County and are not being bussed into Casper. City Attorney Nelson explained that many individuals are being bussed to Casper, because Wyoming Behavioral Institute (WBI) is one of the only mental health facilities of its kind in Wyoming. When people are released from WBI, they often have no way to return back to their communities. Casper is not currently receiving state funding that is commensurate with the burden that is being put on the community. Council discussed that they would like to advocate to work with the Wyoming Association of Municipalities to address the proclivity for individuals to be sent to Casper as it does create a drain on resources.

Letitia Drake, Clerk of Municipal Court, stated that Casper Municipal Court has 25 to 50 cases from 12 to 15 individuals each month that identify themselves as homeless. She reiterated that there are a small portion of individuals not willing to make changes, but a large portion of people are willing to improve their situation. Chief McPheeters discussed that the Police Department (PD) is currently dealing with issues related to homeless individuals illegally entering into abandoned or vacant property. The ability of the PD to deal with absentee owners and to protect river lands is low and is impacting the PD. He stated that the highest percentage of arrests are related to substance abuse while the second highest percentage is violent crime. Council asked about the PD not enforcing some of the ordinances that are on the books, and Chief McPheeters responded that there are Chiefs and Councils before this Council that put moratoriums on specific laws that were not enforced. He stated that he does not believe illegal immigration is playing a large part in this issue currently.

Councilor Gamroth discussed that there are vigilante type groups that have said they will patrol downtown with weapons. He asked that if downtown business owners are not in support of that, they make it known as this type of patrolling can create an atmosphere of fear and can escalate crime and violence. Council gave their thumbs up in support of giving staff the ability to continue in the direction they have been going to help solve this problem and bring back tangible solutions to City Council.

3. Judge Evaluations

Mayor Knell moved this item up on the agenda to allow Judge Martinez to leave the meeting earlier. Mayor Knell asked Judge Martinez which of the options that were presented in the Council packet best met her needs. She responded that the "Proposed Evaluation Benchmarks", beginning on page eight of the packet, was the best form to use as the evaluation was developed from benchmarks for the Wyoming Supreme Court, District Court Judges, and Circuit Court Judges. She stated she would like to meet with the Council and do an evaluation before Council fills out the rubric. She said at that time she can provide the information required in the rubric. The rubric will also be sent to public defenders, police officers, etc. who work with Judge Martinez. Council gave their thumbs up to use this new evaluation going forward.

4. Optional 1% Tax

Next, Mayor Knell asked for direction from Council on moving forward with a proposal to extend the additional one cent tax. He stated that the proposal would be for the extension indefinitely unless a future Council reverses it and emphasized that it is not permanent. He stated that the County Commission supports the initiative as well. Councilor Gamroth stated that he would support the effort, as this tax has been widely supported since its inception and is essential to continue providing services and supporting infrastructure for this community. Mayor Knell stated that the advantage of the fifth cent over the other four cents of tax is that most of that money is kept in the County and its municipalities, and 35% of it comes from tourist dollars spent in Natrona County.

Councilor Pollock asked for an explanation on the other three approaches. City Attorney Nelson explained that the first approach is to continue to put the tax on the ballot every four years, put a question on the ballot to make the tax permanent, and the previously discussed option to have the majority of the municipal and County governing bodies in Natrona County pass resolutions and ordinances to continue the tax in perpetuity. He explained that this could be rescinded in the future in the same way it was formed, with the majority of the governing bodies of the municipalities voting to rescind it. Mayor Knell stated that the State Loan and Investment Board (SLIB) has made it clear that only communities that have fifth cent taxes will be eligible for SLIB funds in the future. Councilor Pollock stated that this aligns with Council goal of sustainability. Councilor Cathey stated that he would like to put it to the voters to make the tax permanent.

The majority of Councilors gave their thumbs up to formally consider an ordinance at a regular Council meeting. Councilor Cathey gave a thumbs down. City Manager Napier explained that if the ordinance is passed, it will be submitted to the County Commission for consideration. Three other communities would also need to pass similar ordinances for the measure to be formally adopted by the Commission.

5. Ordinance Regarding Feeding Turkeys

Next, City Manager Napier discussed a question proposed to the City from the Wyoming Game & Fish Department regarding feeding of turkeys. There is an overpopulation of turkeys in the community, and they cause damage to cars, houses, trees, and draw dangerous predators, such as mountain lions, inside the City limits. The Game & Fish Department has expressed that the City's ordinance to allow feeding of turkeys makes it difficult for them to manage the problem and relocate the turkeys when they create problems in town. City Attorney Nelson explained that the memo and draft ordinance in the packet will be finetuned and was meant as a placeholder until Council considered the issue. Councilor Bond asked about enforcement for people who unintentionally feed turkeys while trying to feed song birds from bird feeders. Police Chief McPheeters explained that Metro Animal Control officers will be tasked with looking into intentionality, and there would not be citations for accidental feeding.

Councilor Cathey stated that he would like to prohibit the feeding of squirrels as well in the ordinance. Councilor Pollock asked if staff could look into this issue more and provide research to Council on the actual damage caused to trees by squirrels before Council provides direction. City

Attorney Nelson stated that there are also issues with water fowl, such as geese, and staff will also look into those issues when doing research. Chief McPheeters stated that feeding of many of these non-domesticated animals is creating issues, especially turkeys and pigeons. He advised that measures be taken so that parks are usable to humans and not overtaken with geese, turkeys, and pigeons. Council gave their thumbs up to move forward with an ordinance restricting non-domesticated animal feeding, and asked for more information about issues related to squirrels before adding them to the ordinance.

6. Recreation Enterprise Business Plans Part 1 (Golf & Hogadon)

City Manager Napier discussed business plans that have been developed for implementation in response to the cost recovery presentations made for each of the recreation enterprises. He then introduced Zulima Lopez, Parks, Recreation & Public Facilities Director, to discuss the specific recommendations. Ms. Lopez reviewed the rate model and proposed strategies to increase revenues that were presented for the golf course earlier this year. The actual numbers for FY23 outperformed the optimized models that were presented at that time for both golf and Hogadon enterprises. She first discussed the Municipal Golf Course, stating that the goal was 110% cost recovery in FY23, and the actual cost recovery was 115%. The FY24 budget includes rate adjustments, and the currently budgeted cost recovery is estimated at 114%. She then reviewed how implementing the proposed strategies over time will improve the subsidy. The goal is 128% subsidy by FY28, and to be able to purchase light equipment and tools with the fund reserves. Larger capital items will still need support from outside funding sources. She discussed the renovation of the 19th Hole Restaurant, stating that some of this can be completed with capital reserves and some may require more capital investment. She also discussed dredging the pond, which will likely require investment from other sources. Reserves are being put away specifically for replacing the golf fleet by FY29/30, so this should not require other investment. Council asked if they could receive more information on the breakeven points for all of the capital investments.

Next, Ms. Lopez reviewed the rate model and proposed strategies to increase revenue and reduce expenses that were presented for Hogadon earlier this year. She stated that the cost recovery goal for FY23 was 60%, and the City is expecting an actual cost recovery of 80%. For FY24, staff budgeted a conservative 76% cost recovery assuming an ok snow year. She discussed that staff believes the Hogadon fund could become self-sufficient by FY28. Some of the strategies to reach this goal are adding value to season passes, lighting more runs to improve night skiing, replacing the chair lift with a higher capacity lift, and increasing summer usage of the lodge. She assured Council that the current lift is safe and is audited by insurance, but it is past its life cycle so continuing to maintain it instead of replace it may need to be carefully weighed. She discussed the options for maintaining versus replacing the chair lift, and the value that could be added if the capacity were doubled resulting in reduced wait times. Council asked about expanding night skiing hours, and she stated that this is a challenge because the City utilizes volunteer ski patrol which is harder to find for night hours. She stated they can look at staffing those hours if it makes sense financially. She then discussed that the FY24 budget includes 5% rate increases, and a resolution for this will be formally presented to Council for approval later this summer. Council gave their thumbs up to the direction of the Municipal Golf and Hogadon business plans.

7. Fire Station No. 3 Roof

City Manager Napier discussed that a new roof is necessary for Fire Station No. 3, but the bids came in outside of the budgeted amounts. The project is critical, so staff is suggesting using capital reserves to cover the \$136K additional cost. Council gave their thumbs up to this proposal.

8. Agenda Review

Next, Council reviewed the agendas for upcoming regular Council meetings and work sessions.

9. Legislative Review

City Manager Napier stated that the resolutions chosen by WAM were put in Info Packets for Council.

10. Council Around the Table

Next, Council went around the table to discuss their respective board and committee meetings as well as matters of public interest. Mayor Knell asked if any Councilors were interested in walking Metro Animal Shelter dogs during the parade, and Councilor Pollock, Bond, and Gamroth volunteered. Mayor Knell asked if Council would give support to make Casper a Donate Life City, which doesn't cost money and promotes awareness for organ and tissue donation. Council gave their thumbs up for a Donate Life resolution to be brought forward for formal consideration at a regular Council meeting.

The work session was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF CASPER, WYOMING
A Municipal Corporation

Fleur Tremel
City Clerk

Bruce Knell
Mayor