

COUNCIL WORK SESSION
Tuesday, July 11, 2023 at 4:30 p.m.
City Hall – Council Meeting Room

AGENDA

1. Meeting Follow-up (Donor Alliance)
2. Code Enforcement – Potential Code Changes
3. Metro TNR & Fees Resolution
4. NCSD MOU for Youth Volleyball & Basketball
5. Council Goals
6. Agenda Review
7. Legislative Review
8. Council Around the Table

Mayor Knell called the work session to order at 4:34 p.m. with the following Councilors present: Cathey, Engebretsen, Pollock, Bond, Haskins, Gamroth, Vice Mayor Pacheco and Mayor Knell. Councilor Jensen arrived to the meeting at 5:33 p.m.

City Manager Napier was absent. Liz Becher, Community Development Director, led the meeting as Acting City Manager.

1. Meeting Follow-up

Mayor Knell introduced Laura Jeffries, CEO of Donor Alliance to discuss the City’s plan to become Wyoming’s first donate life community. Ms. Jeffries thanked Council for their efforts and explained what it means to be a donate life community.

2. Code Enforcement - Potential Code Changes

Mayor Knell introduced Acting City Manager Becher to discuss potential code changes for code enforcement. She stated that staff put together information based on Council’s questions regarding these issues. She discussed that one of the challenges her department faces are minimum timelines, which can impede enforcement. Staff’s recommendation is to work with the City Attorney’s Office to identify how to reduce these impediments. Councilor Engebretsen asked questions regarding sending the code violations to the correct owner, renters, or property managers who are able to deal with the issue. Amber Jividen, Code Enforcement Supervisor, explained that the requirement to send the notifications via certified mail slows down the process, but is necessary to know there is acknowledgement of the failure to act. It is also in the ordinance that property owners must be contacted, and staff does try to also contact whoever is on the water bill, but property owners are ultimately responsible. Craig Collins, City Planner, stated that as a courtesy staff does try to contact property managers as well. Council gave their thumbs up to continue working on the changes that staff recommended.

Next, Acting City Manager Becher discussed forced abatements and repeat offenders, stating that administrative fees are not currently being charged, so there is no incentive for property owners to abate the issue themselves. The City only recovers 70% of the cost of abatements, because the

process is labor and resource intensive. There are also unrecovered costs from mailings, postings, inspections, re-inspections, etc. Staff recommended invoicing administrative fees to cover the City's costs and to incentivize property owners to correct their own violations. They also suggested consolidating and billing total costs for multiple repeat violations, and once a threshold is met, employing enhanced collection methods and liens.

Mayor Knell stated that he dislikes billing for administrative costs in general, because these should already be part of the City's budget. Councilor Pollock responded that she disagrees, because these individuals are taking more than their fair share of a normal taxpayer's share of code enforcement's time. If there are too many people who take advantage of this, the costs will continue to escalate which will lead to having to hire more code enforcement officers. She pointed out that these fees are being considered for egregious offenders and not just normal functions of code enforcement. Councilor Cathey and Engebretsen agreed with Councilor Pollock, stating that these owners are utilizing the City as a property manager to schedule a contractor to provide lawn service for them. Councilor Gamroth stated that he would be interested in an escalating fee schedule, which would continue to incentivize people to not keep offending. Council asked about linking these fees with specific ordinance suggestions related to the recommendations and to include progressive fees in the suggestions.

Next, Acting City Manager Becher discussed issues related to junk vehicles and interest in toll fees. She described that currently code enforcement does not get charged by the towing company, therefore there is no invoice sent to the property owners for towed vehicles. Vehicles are usually sold to recoup towing fees. There is no incentive to deal with the vehicles themselves, because the property owners are not responsible for paying for the tow themselves. Currently the Police Department is charged \$150 per towed vehicle, and when those cars are retrieved out of impound, the Police Department gets that towing cost back. Staff is recommending that code enforcement begin contracting with towing companies similar to the Police Department and assess those towing fees to the property owners who are requesting tows from their property. Ms. Jividen stated that the issue is larger commercial properties who are utilizing the City as a service provider for towing to get rid of blight. The wrecker companies are doing the City a service by not charging, but this arrangement could change in the future. This service consumes a lot of their time, and requires them to store, find titles, and auction the vehicles in order to recoup their cost. Council gave their thumbs up for staff to look into options for these towing fees and bring back recommendations to Council.

Next, Acting City Manager Becher discussed obstructions on City sidewalks which can create imminent hazards. Arborists are expensive to hire, which can create a significant barrier to compliance. She stated that ownership and responsibility for trimming vegetation and trees is often a grey area, and shared costs for tree maintenance in the parkway areas may need to be considered. She also suggested allowing for billing of costs to responsible parties, including administrative fees. Council gave their thumbs up for staff to look into these options.

Next, Acting City Manager Becher discussed blight, squatters and dangerous buildings. She stated these issues are often called in by adjacent property owners and can pose significant safety and fire risk. There is a significant financial barrier to condemnation of building, and it is very labor

intensive and time consuming. The City can lien property to recover costs but there is no guarantee if or when that money will be recovered. A commercial building can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to demolish. Staff's recommendation is to have a funding source to pay for more of the condemnations and forced demolitions. Mayor Knell discussed the Econo Lodge property and estimated costs of repairing damage and cleaning it up. He asked if the City would be at the top of the lien list for this property, and City Attorney Nelson responded that there will be a push to give the City a super priority on lien position if the City ultimately demolishes and abates the property. Council gave their thumbs up to staff continuing to look into these recommendations and staff will return with recommendations for funding sources.

3. Metro TNR and Fees Resolution

Next, Acting City Manager Becher introduced Police Chief McPheeters to discuss Metro Animal Shelter fees and the possibility of a trap neuter release program. Chief McPheeters discussed that the Metro Animal Task Force has identified inequities in fee structures for each of the different jurisdictions, therefore it would be advantageous to centralize the fees and have them equal to one another no matter which jurisdiction is applying a fee. The other jurisdictions will also be going back to their governing bodies to pass similar resolutions to the one that will be proposed to the Casper City Council. He discussed surrender fees, microchipping fees, and registration fees. Council gave their thumbs up to move the fee schedule forward for formal approval at a future Council meeting.

Police Chief McPheeters then discussed the City implementing a TNR program in order to reduce the number of feral cats in the community. This program would allow for the feral cats to be sterilized but not killed, removing them from having generational impact. The proposal is for a trial program in order to work out the cost effectiveness and to see if over time it diminishes calls for service and the population is reduced. The program could be done on a bulk basis and would be scheduled in advance, substantially reducing costs. The program is designed to reduce overall costs by decreasing euthanasia as the population decreases. TNR programs have proven to be successful in other communities in Wyoming. The proposal is for a resolution for support of a trial program, but would not bind the City to continuing the program if it does not work. There is some funding available to do some of the large TNR events. City Attorney Nelson stated that the resolution in the packet was a very rough draft, and if Council is in favor, it will need to be reworked before it is presented to Council for formal consideration. He stated that there may also need to be some ordinance tweaks that would allow Metro to implement the program. Council gave their thumbs up to move forward with formal consideration of a TNR program with the caveat that staff will come back to Council to discuss any proposed ordinance changes.

4. NCSD MOU for Youth Volleyball & Basketball

Next, Zulima Lopez, Parks Recreation & Public Facilities Director, discussed memorializing an MOU with the Natrona County School District (NCSD) to offer grade school basketball and volleyball. The program will continue to be run as it is with staffing continuing to be reimbursed. These staffing rates of reimbursement will increase, but the agreement is mutually beneficial to

both the City and NCSO. Having the City manage and staff the program is more cost effective and efficient than NCSO hiring their own staff to manage elementary sports.

5. Council Goals

Next, Pete Myers, Management Analyst, reviewed Council goals and the tasks that staff has developed to help the City reach those goals. He began by reviewing City Council goals that were developed in February: livability, sustainability, and citizen engagement. Some of the tasks discussed to meet the livability goal included developing remedies for homelessness; police support; facility improvements; Metro Animal Shelter support; improving community amenities and recreation opportunities; and developing plans for Fire Department capital construction costs for Fire Station No. 1 replacement. For the sustainability goal, some of the tasks included remaining engaged with wastewater environmental regulation and developing plans for waste water treatment plant capital improvements; considering a funded stormwater system program to support maintenance and capital improvements; reducing water waste and promoting financial equity by instituting tiered water rates; presenting options to encourage recycling; maintaining City buildings; developing sources of revenue that are generated externally; developing sustainable sources of revenue that are generated locally; facilitate smart decision-making by re-engaging the City's primary planning documents; and facilitate development through reimagined public-private partnerships. For the citizen engagement goal, the tasks included implementing a communications plan that strives for effective information distribution across City social media; developing a plan to gather citizen input; providing feedback loops that provide guidance on citizen priorities; and research and assess tech solutions for customizing communication with citizens, customers, and service users.

Council discussed the Midwest Avenue project and methods for asking voters for additional 6th cent taxes to complete necessary projects in the City. Council discussed whether the list of tasks can be reasonably attained or if it should be narrowed down. Mr. Meyers explained that he believes staff is able to make progress on each of the tasks, and they have already been narrowed the list down from a much longer list. Councilors Pollock, Gamroth, and Haskins stated that some of the tasks may be longer than two-year projects, but should still be on the list so that they can someday be attained. They stated that some projects may take several years, and progress on the task is the goal. Mr. Meyers stated that he will provide a tracker to track the tasks, which will have milestones and sub steps, so that Council is able to see where staff is at in accomplishing each of the tasks. Council asked staff to carefully evaluate the tasks and let Council know if they feel that some may not be attainable. They asked for a few days to review the tasks and will let staff know if there are any changes they would like to see. Council will review the goals again on July 25th before staff moves forward with developing sub steps.

6. Agenda Review

Next, Council reviewed the agendas for upcoming regular Council meetings and work sessions. City Attorney Nelson stated that the issue previously discussed involving a property easement on Casper Mountain will be removed from the Grid, because the requestor is not the property owner. It will be a few years before Council needs to consider this issue. Councilor Engebretsen asked

about the medical clinic regulations item, and City Attorney Nelson stated that he is continuing to research the issue.

7. Legislative Review

There were no items to discuss for legislative review.

8. 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. Councilor Pollock stated that Council needs to stay in their lane when dealing with medical regulation issues. Several Councilors and Mayor Knell and Vice Mayor Pacheco commented on City Manager's Office Executive Assistant Renee Jordan-Smith's retirement and thanked her for her service to the City.

The work session was adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF CASPER, WYOMING
A Municipal Corporation

Fleur Tremel
City Clerk

Bruce Knell
Mayor