

City of Greeley, Colorado
COUNCIL WORKSESSION REPORT
May 14, 2019

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Mayor John Gates, in the Council's Chambers at the City Center South, 1001 11th Avenue.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Gates led the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

3. ROLL CALL

Cheryl Aragon City Clerk, called the roll. Those present were Mayor John Gates and Councilmembers Robb Casseday, Michael Fitzsimmons, Dale Hall, Jon Smail, and Stacy Suniga. Councilmember Brett Payton arrived late.

4. PRESENTATION REGARDING A POTENTIAL OPEN SPACE SALES TAX

Andy McRoberts, Culture, Parks & Recreation Director, reported that this is an opportunity to present background information regarding a potential dedicated sales tax that would support an active Natural Areas and Trails Division within the Culture, Parks and Recreation Department.

Councilmember Payton arrived at 5:35 p.m.

Mr. McRoberts reviewed the various components of the City's Master Plan as it relates to parks, open lands and trails, especially the core values that are included and mentioned the Parks, Trails and Open Lands Master Plan (PTOL) that is in place. He stated that a statistically-prepared survey of the community in 2016 indicated that 66% of residents across all demographics indicated a need for access to open lands and natural areas. In addition, he stated that 51% of households indicated that the highest priority for Greeley over 10 years should be walking and biking trails and that 27% also indicated that open lands and natural areas and nature and soft surface trails should be a high priority.

Mr. McRoberts advised that staff is recommending the pursuit of additional information, as expediently as possible, to ascertain the possibility of adding a ballot question to the City's ballot this November. He added that staff is also recommending entering into a working partnership with the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) to assist in those efforts, as well as assisting with a community survey to gauge community support for a potential tax.

With regard to the polling, Mr. McRoberts advised that the cost of this poll is estimated to be approximately \$30,000, and the Trust for Public Lands has offered to pay 1/2 the cost of the polling. The City's share, therefore, would be a maximum \$15,000.00.

He reviewed the projects that would be included in this question, as well as a timeline for polling and final Council action via a Council ordinance, and then communicate out to the community.

Mr. McRoberts acknowledged that there has also been citizen support towards this issue and it will be important to allow a citizen initiative to campaign and offer support towards any final recommendation. It is important to note that, by the Charter for the City of Greeley, that only City Council can authorize any Ordinance towards ballot questions that pertain to tax levies.

Sarah Witherell was present and stated that from a citizen's perspective, this is an important effort and that she would support this sales tax measure. She stated that there is a growing need to access nature and to continue to be vibrant and that because our ecosystem here is native and endangered, she would like to see it maintained.

Clint Torczon stated that this is an important task and preserving open spaces is key. He stated that growth is inevitable but parks, and trails and open space are a vital asset.

Mr. McRoberts stated that many people might ask why \$4 million each year, and he advised that with land acquisition and maintenance combined, that is what is needed.

Councilmember Suniga stated that given what the City's Comp Plan proposes, this effort will need to be embraced. She stated that she thinks the community will make this decision which is critical.

Councilmember Hall stated that as an avid user of the Poudre River Trail, there are definitely some dire needs. He expressed that his concern is that this is not the perfect time to ask the citizens for another tax.

In response to a question from Councilmember Smail, Justin Scharton, Natural Resources Superintendent, advised that about roughly 25 percent, or about \$1 million is maintenance and then acquisition is above and beyond that.

Councilmember Smail stated that this is an easy decision for him to ask the voters what they think at election time.

Councilmember Casseday stated that his concern is a timing one as he wants to protect the other initiatives that he has worked hard to support over the years.

In response to a question about maintenance from Councilmember Payton, Mr. McRoberts advised that the City has not been particularly adept at putting maintenance dollars in the budget, but some capital dollars from the food tax have supported the Poudre River Trail.

Mayor Gates stated that he shares timing concerns. He stated that the Poudre River Trail is a gem in this community, but now we are asking for money because we cannot sustain it, which is frustrating. He stated that because we hit the voters twice in 2018 with tax questions, he won't support another question this year, but potentially in the future.

In response to a question from Councilmember Smail about when it would be palatable to put this on the ballot, Mayor Gates emphasized that it has nothing to do with it being too close to the election, just that it's too soon for yet another tax question, maybe in 2020 though. Councilmember Casseday suggested 2022 as a better time.

Roy Otto, City Manager, clarified that the last two tax-related questions were continuations of existing taxes, not new taxes, and added that in 2020 it would be important to take a look at what is included in the food tax.

He stated too that there is no real science to placing tax questions on the ballot.

Councilmember Fitzsimmons stated that while he supports open space, timing so close to the election is a concern for him.

Councilmember Smail stated that since there are timing concerns, maybe next year would be doable if we started on it sooner in the year.

Mr. Otto stated that he is supportive of continued analysis and engaging with the outside agency to support this in 2020.

Councilmember Payton stated that he likes the idea of some extra time, as long as during that time, we have a better idea of where we are with maintenance in an effort to offer some accountability to the taxpayers about that.

After Mr. McRoberts offered a list of the kinds of things the Trust for Public Lands would help with, there was no Council consensus to proceed with a letter of engagement with the Trust for Public Lands or to proceed with any kind of community polling at this time.

5. SCHEDULING OF MEETINGS, OTHER EVENTS

No additional meetings or other events were scheduled.

6. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Council, Mayor Gates adjourned the meeting at 6:02 p.m.

Cheryl Aragon, Deputy City Clerk