

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

October 6, 2020

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in virtual Study Session at 5:32 p.m. in the Municipal Building Council Chambers on the 6th day of October, 2020, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted in the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT:	Councilmembers Bierman, Foreman, Hall, Holman, Nash, Peacock, Petrone, Mayor Clark
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ABSENT:	None
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Item 1, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING AN UPDATE ON THE NORMAN FORWARD PROJECTS.

Mr. Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation, said there are six major NORMAN FORWARD (NF) Projects currently under design or construction. He said all projects were affected by the General Obligation (G.O.) Bond election on August 25, 2020, that would have added money to all the projects; however, all of the propositions failed.

Multi-Sports and Aquatics Facility

Mr. Foster said the Ad-Hoc Committee met on August 16, 2020, to discuss revisions to the design of the 50-meter pool, which had to be removed from the project as well as a good portion of the spectator seating. He said current funding will allow for an eight-lane by 25-yard pool that works well for short course competition and other swimming activities, a four-lane warm up pool, reduced spectator seating area on the aquatic side, and four basketball courts. He said the Ad-Hoc Committee discussed use of a private donation from the Young Family Foundation in the amount of \$4 million, which will provide four additional basketball courts for a total of eight. There will be space available if a 50-meter pool is built in the future as well as space for two additional basketball courts. He said Norman Regional Health System (NRHS) has expressed interest in contributing \$4.7 million to build an athlete's clinic within the facility, which would put this project on the national map. The total estimated cost for the revised project is in the range of \$23.6 to \$34.5 million with total available funding of \$33.9 million that includes donations from Young Family Foundation donation and NRHS.

Griffin Park

Mr. Foster said the budget for Griffin Park is \$11 million and the Ad Hoc Committee met to discuss continuing the project as originally designed. The changes that would have occurred had the vote been successful included an Indoor Soccer Facility, lighting for seven soccer fields, and additional parking on Robinson Street. Two fields per year are being regraded in order to keep the sports programs in motion.

Griffin Park, continued:

The largest project is the Adult Softball and Football Complex and the budget allows for construction of two fields and parking, but the Ad Hoc Committee felt it would not be sufficient to start a project on the north side because two fields does not help either of the two programs in terms of allowing local league play, let alone drawing a tournament. He said the City is obligated to deliver some kind of practice facility and the best way to do that is take the \$4.5 million dedicated to the north side of the project and use it to make additional improvements at Ruby Grant Park where an open area can be utilized. He said other funding will be used at Reaves Park for improvements to the current adult fields, which will remain in Reaves Park for the foreseeable future.

Ruby Grant Park

Mr. Foster said the Ruby Grant Park Master Plan has been approved and changes will include the open greenspace being used for practice fields for adult softball and football. The project also includes paved walkways around the fields and bathroom facilities.

Reaves Park

Mr. Foster said the \$8 million budget will provide four softball fields, restrooms modifications, concession modifications, and parking adjustments that would enhance the Adult Softball/Football Program to allow that program to remain in the park. The Reaves Park Ad Hoc Committee met to discuss the changes and approved a motion to change the scope of the project to add funding to complete the additional work.

Senior Wellness Center

The Senior Wellness Center Ad Hoc Committee met to review four site options for the Senior Center at the NRHS location on Porter Avenue and recommended the southeast corner of the property adjacent to Findley Street. The project has a budget of \$7.6 million, which is not sufficient to construct the entire buildout of the project that is estimated to cost \$12.4 million. The Committee recommended Council consider other funding options that might exist to subsidize the full buildout of the project immediately.

Council Questions/Comments

Councilmember Holman asked if the Senior Center site was chosen because of its availability to start the project more quickly and Mr. Foster said that was an important factor, but did not drive the decision to choose that site. Councilmember Holman suggested CARES Act funding be used for Senior Wellness Center Project and Mayor Clark said that can be discussed during the Council retreat later this month, but there are multiple organizations and businesses asking the City for financial relief.

Councilmember Peacock asked if there will be a bus stop at the Indoor Aquatic and Multi-Sports Complex and Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, said there is a bus route on 24th Avenue through University North Park (UNP) and a bus stop at the complex could easily be added.

Council Questions/Comments, continued:

Councilmember Peacock said he was concerned about the Senior Center having an “ocean” sized parking lot that may never be utilized to it fullest capacity and Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager, said the City wants to share as much parking space as possible and the project was always envisioned lots of open space for outdoor opportunities.

Councilmember Foreman said the Senior Center needs to be the top priority because citizens are very unhappy that a stand alone Senior Center is still not under construction. Mr. Pyle said the goal this evening is to find consensus among Council on how to move forward with these projects.

Councilmember Hall said she supports moving forward with fully funding the Senior Center and the challenges in identifying that funding. She said the site has a Thrift Store and asked if that building will be demolished and Mr. Foster said yes, NRHS has indicated that would not be an obstacle since the building would be demolished in future construction plans for the hospital. Councilmember Hall asked how that would be funded and Mr. Pyle said that will be a part of the negotiation discussions with NRHS. Councilmember Hall asked why negotiations with NRHS are not further along and Mr. Pyle said COVID 19 had a much bigger impact on the hospital’s workload and while it was an inconvenience from the City’s perspective, it was literally all consuming from the hospital’s perspective. Ms. Kathryn Walker, City Attorney, said now that a site has been identified, Staff will proceed.

Councilmember Hall said it is important for Councilmembers who did not watch the Ad Hoc Committee meeting to understand that the Ad Hoc Committee’s recommendation was not only the preference for the selected site, but they also strongly recommended constructing the Senior Center in one phase and are expecting Council to find supplemental funding for full build out.

Councilmember Hall asked if there has been discussion about a partnership with NRHS for the wellness portion of the Senior Center and Mr. Foster said not in terms of funding, but in terms of programming as part of their Healthy Village proposal.

Councilmember Bierman asked for more information on the proposed clinic in the Indoor Aquatic and Multi-Sports Facility. Mr. Richie Splitt, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of NRHS, said the operation of the clinic would be the responsibility of the hospital and the purpose would be human movement and performance particularly competitive athletes of all ages. The clinic will provide orthopedics, therapy, etc. Councilmember Bierman asked if services would be free and Mr. Splitt said no, it would be operated as a physician clinic with costs in line with those types of services. Mr. Pyle said Staff and the Trey Young Foundation partners have been discussing ways to fund a scholarship fund that will help lower income athletes with the clinic’s services. Councilmember Bierman suggested NRHS enter into some type of occupancy agreement because if NRHS is going to utilize the space, there should be a long term agreement as an assurance the clinic will be operational for many years.

Councilmember Bierman said she cannot move forward with these projects until all details, funding, and agreements have been fully vetted and secured. She said language on the ballot said projects will be completed “to the extent feasible,” which does not mean the City should just build a project and hope for the best without having all aspects of the project determined.

Council Questions/Comments, continued:

Councilmember Holman said Council has struggled with constructing some projects without taking funding away from other projects. He said the Senior Center began with a zero budget and Council was able to identify \$7.6 million for the project so it has been a priority, but the roadblock has been factors out of Council's control, such as low sales tax revenue and increased construction costs. While he would like to fully fund the Senior Center, he would like feedback on whether or not the organizations who came to the City in 2015 asking that these projects be voted on by the people would consider cutting back on their project in order to fully fund the Senior Center. He asked Ms. Walker if all the projects have to be done and Ms. Walker said if funding is an issue, but to the extent that a project has a budget and materials, which were sent to voters, she would not want to take money from one project to put into another project. She said if another NORMAN FORWARD project comes in under budget then Council can use the remaining funds on another NORMAN FORWARD projects if they wish.

Councilmember Holman said he agrees with Councilmember Bierman and would not feel comfortable moving forward with projects that will need agreements with other entities or land purchase is being negotiated. He would be okay with moving forward with projects on City owned land.

Councilmember Petrone agreed with Councilmembers Bierman and Holman regarding having agreements in place as well as knowing who will be operating these facilities and how much it will cost for operation and maintenance. She said prior to the retreat she would like information on the parameters of using CARES Act funding, the amount of CARES Act funding available, and if any has been spent, and if so, on what.

Councilmember Nash said in regard to the Indoor Aquatic and Multi-Sports Facility reduction in spectator seating and loss of the 50-meter pool, will the facility still be interesting enough to attract competition from out of state and surrounding communities to spend money in Norman? Mr. Foster said the Sooner Swim Club has stated they need more water to swim in and the 25-yard pool is a short course competition pool, which serves a need. He said it would bring visitors to the City to compete, but will not draw regional meets. Councilmember Nash said if that facility will not bring competition from other states or cities to stay at hotels, shop in retail districts, and eat at local restaurants to increase sales tax revenues then this facility is just a big nice pool that does not do much for the City.

Ms. Alva Brockus, Sooner Swim Club, said the facility will not draw regional meets, but can handle dual competitions and will provide health benefits to the citizens of the City who utilize the facility because there are low-impact activities, i.e., lap swimming, water walking, swim lessons, etc., that everyone from small children to seniors can benefit from. She said the Westwood Aquatic Center is full all the time, but is only open in the summer and the YMCA has a very small pool that is not open to the entire community. She said the Indoor Aquatic Facility will provide year round health benefits in addition to competitive activities.

Council Questions/Comments, continued:

Mayor Clark said Council “kicks the can” down the road too many times, but it is time invest in Norman. She encouraged Council to consider moving forward. She said Ad Hoc Committees were created for citizen input and they have made their recommendations so Council does not need to keep beating a dead horse. She appreciates Council’s willingness to move forward on the Senior Center and intrigued by the use of CARES Act funding, if possible. She likes the location of the Senior Center because it is close to the hospital where the possible Health Village is being proposed, it is close to a bus stop, the Farmers Market at the Cleveland County Fairgrounds, etc. She said this is NORMAN FORWARD so the City should keep moving forward and she appreciates everyone’s due diligence.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, “NORMAN FORWARD Update,” dated October 6, 2020

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Item 2, being:

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

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ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor