



# CITY OF NORMAN, OK CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE

Municipal Building, Executive Conference Room, 201 West Gray, Norman,  
OK 73069

Tuesday, February 13, 2024 at 4:00 PM

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## MINUTES

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Special Session in the Executive Conference Room of the Norman Municipal Building on the 13th day of February, 2024, at 4:00 p.m., and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray Street 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

### CALL TO ORDER

#### PRESENT

Mayor Larry Heikkila

Councilmember Ward 1 Austin Ball

Councilmember Ward 2 Lauren Schueler

Councilmember Ward 3 Bree Montoya

Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant

Councilmember Ward 5 Michael Nash

Councilmember Ward 6 Elizabeth Foreman

Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman

Councilmember Ward 8 Matthew Peacock

### AGENDA ITEMS

#### 1. DISCUSSION REGARDING RENOVATIONS TO 109 WEST GRAY STREET.

Mayor Heikkila shared a report from the Downtowner's Association. A suggestion would be to put out an RFP to hire a consultant to identify properties for Council to consider purchasing and come up with a plan of action.

Ms. Kathryn Walker, City Attorney, said staff needs to make sure there are firms willing to submit a proposal for this purpose. It would probably take 30-45 days to draft the RFP and take in proposals, review them and bring them back to Council.

Mayor Heikkila said he thought it would take approximately 60-90 days to look at land options and bring it back to Council for questions.

Ms. Walker said she was not sure what type of responses the City would receive concerning a land survey. The City would want to select a firm from the Norman area so they would be familiar with the properties. The timeline could be longer, but staff will not know until the RFP responses are received.

Councilmember Grant said she is not opposed to doing renovations at the 109 W Gray location. The City would be abating asbestos, installing sprinklers and making the space more useable. The location will not always be a shelter and these improvements would make it easier to sell or lease to future tenants.

Item 1, continued:

Councilmember Ball said Council should not waste money on renovating the current building at 109 West Gray because this will not be a permanent home for the shelter. The City should use the money on something permanent.

Councilmember Grant asked Facility & Construction Program Manager, Lance Harper, what the condition and lifespan of the building is, in his opinion.

Mr. Harper said he could not speak to the total lifespan but in his opinion, the building has another 7-10 years on the roof and 15 years on the structure of the building. The building is brick and the HVAC system has recently been upgraded. The other buildings are structurally sound but would need remodeling to get them up to Code.

Councilmember Holman asked if anyone had approached the City about buying the property.

Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager, said it has been several years since there has been interest in the building from any outside parties. He also said if the City were to build a new shelter from the ground up, it would take 18-24 months.

Councilmember Holman said Council has looked at multiple alternate properties to purchase for building a permanent shelter or to remodel another existing building, but none of the locations became a reality for numerous reasons. Council even looked at an unused building on Griffin Memorial property and that did not work out either. Even though this location would not have been near any residents, we still encountered significant protests. If the City had any other options, they should be explored. However, those options do not exist.

Councilmember Holman is open to any reasonable solution, except for closing the shelter altogether. If the shelter closed with no other option available, it would make the problem much worse than it is now. The proposed renovations would make the current location a better environment for everyone while Council continues to search for a permanent location.

Mayor Heikkila agreed it is a difficult decision because Council wants to make the best decision possible and that is a huge task. Consequently, simply shutting the shelter down is not the answer and finding a new location has been unsuccessful so far.

Councilmember Holman said if Council chooses to expand the current shelter location, one of the issues is everyone at the shelter leaving each morning at the same time. There are very few options for them during daytime hours. Finding a solution to this problem is something that needs consideration if Council is going to increase the number of people that can be housed overnight.

Councilmember Peacock stated he feels similarly about these issues and would support some type of survey to find out what existing properties might be available. He said the City would have to abate the asbestos first at 109 West Gray, no matter which path forward the City takes.

Councilmember Schueler said she would support an RFP to find land and/or buildings. She said this is not a solution to the problem, as this is another issue altogether. Expansion of the current shelter location is not the most popular idea; however, people are turned away every night at the current location.

Item 1, continued:

Councilmember Montoya agrees a plan needs to be in place. The Home Base study from 2021 said the implementation of a permanent shelter was recommended. In 2018-2019, a major winter storm was predicted and Council was very concerned for unhoused citizens and there would be deaths if they could not get indoors. Since that time, it has snowballed into what we have today and a plan of action needs to be developed. The improvements to the current building that are underway; for example, the remediation of asbestos and the installation of a fire suppression system are improvements for the good of the building overall and increase the resale value of the property. What improvements are being suggested due to the expansion of the shelter?

Mr. Harper said that the City looked at simply adding a sprinkler system to the building and leaving the interior in the current state, which would require working around the asbestos, not removing it, and this was going to cost close to \$40,000. An estimate as to how much it would cost to completely gut the building was requested and it was estimated at \$60,000. The better option seemed to be to remove the asbestos and gut the entire building, based on this estimate.

Mr. Pyle said the City should not avoid abating the asbestos. If the City does not remedy the problem, a new owner will eventually find it and not think very highly of the City.

Councilmember Montoya suggested scheduling a session with those that work with the unhoused population regularly to determine what it is they need and develop a plan to present to the voters.

Mayor Heikkila suggested reading the report from the Downtowner's Association, which provides very detailed information and the business owner's comments about what they feel should happen with the shelter. Ultimately, the 109 West Gray shelter location cannot be shut down at this time. However, the shelter should be removed from this location as soon as possible. The location of the shelter at this time is very damaging to the business owners in the downtown area and therefore it is suggested for Council to schedule a Special Session where Council can hear their concerns directly and better understand what they need.

Councilmember Holman said there has been a shelter in downtown Norman since the late 1980's or early 1990's. Several businesses opened in downtown during the time when the shelter was located directly behind one of the most popular restaurants in Norman. The reason that the City funded a shelter was in response to a situation that happened years ago when several people died from freezing to death on the streets. Finding deceased individuals in front of your business on the sidewalk seems to be worse than having a shelter located in downtown. The City had an empty library building which is where the shelter was located for two years. The shelter moved to the location on Comanche, which was not well equipped for this purpose. Multiple other locations have been explored and every option has had roadblocks. Homelessness is a national issue that is not just in Norman and every Mayor, no matter if they were Republican or Democrat has had to deal with this issue. If there were any other options for a location for the shelter, Council would be more than happy to move it elsewhere. There has been nothing offered from the public or otherwise for a location for the shelter and City staff has been unsuccessful in finding a location, therefore we are stuck with the current location.

Councilmember Grant said that she spoke with the Salvation Army and they have been operating in this community since 1960 and they are expanding their shelter. After conferring with other Councilmembers, none of us have received complaints about this shelter.

Item 1, continued:

Mayor Heikkila said the Salvation Army does a fantastic job and hopes they will build a shelter for the community rather than the City.

Mr. Harper said he looked at many different City properties and the 109 West Gray building fit what was needed. Anytime remodel work is done, asbestos has to be checked for and it was only found in this one building. Currently, the south end of these buildings is what is being used and asbestos was found in every aspect of this area of the building. This includes the sheet rock, ceiling tiles and building boards. Finding asbestos here is what has hindered the City from simply installing a sprinkler system. The cost for leaving the asbestos was almost as much as having it removed. We are obtaining pricing for a state contractor to remove the asbestos. The contractor would come in, the power would be cut off from the building and they would remove everything from the building. It would be a stone and mortar building once they are finished. The fire suppression system would then be added to this building and branch out to the other buildings as well. The asbestos removal would take approximately three to four weeks. It would take about two weeks to bring in the fire line to the building. The water main is in the road directly in front of the building but a fire line would need to be added.

Councilmember Foreman said this building was never meant to be a long term solution for the shelter. How long can we kick this can down the road? What is the deadline to make a decision about this property?

Mr. Olsen said the second that Council approves the renovation work, things can get started.

Councilmember Foreman asked if this is a property that the City would actually consider selling.

Mr. Pyle said this property is an asset and owning it gives the City control of a piece of downtown property.

Councilmember Peacock said an upside to selling this property is that it goes back on the tax rolls for the Center City TIF.

Councilmember Peacock requested staff get a current appraisal for this property prior to obtaining an RFP. Council needs to see the full picture before making a decision.

Mr. Pyle said the City could have it appraised as-is, with the asbestos, etc. and then also get an appraisal as just vacant land.

Ms. Walker said a separate RFP would need to go out for the appraisal of the property.

Councilmember Holman had reservations about expanding the shelter's capacity when there is not a good plan for where unhoused individuals go during the day, once the shelter closes. Since opening this shelter in 2022, over 200 people have been transitioned into housing.

Mayor Heikkila said the first step is to get the property appraised and find out how much it is worth. Secondly, put out an RFP to find someone who will work with the provider at the shelter and assist them in finding a new location. Lastly, Council can then make the decision on the issue at hand. He asked if this is the order that Council would like to see things happen?

Mr. Pyle said the service providers in Norman like Red Rock, Griffin Memorial and the Cleveland County Jail do not have a good policy for those that have completed services and where they



Item 1, continued:

go next. There is work to be done in regard to how the service providers are going to get these persons back to where they started from and provide them with the opportunity for long term success. There are other partners in the Cleveland County Continuum of Care that need to participate in this with the City to find a solution. As far as locating the shelter in another city within Cleveland County, the study will show where it should be located.

Councilmember Schueler said Council has an estimate of \$300,000 now, but what is the likelihood that this price will increase if we do not make a decision on it today?

Mr. Harper said this estimate would be accurate for approximately six months.

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## **2. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE PURCHASE OF FIRE TRUCKS.**

Mr. Travis King, Norman Fire Chief, said there is a \$307,000 appropriation being presented at tonight's City Council meeting for the purchase of two fire apparatus. From a historical perspective the Public Safety Sales Tax put a 10 year apparatus replacement plan together that was approved by the voters. Generally, the two ways the City has been able to purchase fire apparatus is with PSST funds or Capital Fleet Replacement funds. The large apparatus that came up on regular Fleet replacement would be purchased from PSST or they would be delayed so the City could fit them into the replacement program. This year the Norman Fire Department received the Mid Mount Aerial apparatus in early fall, Fleet notified staff two more pumpers were approved through Capital Program Fleet Replacement. The team assembled and put together a plan and were notified by Fleet and Finance that \$830,100 had been appropriated for each of these apparatus'. After meeting with the manufacturer, the final price came to \$999,000 and with our 80% pre-pay it was reduced to \$938,000 per apparatus. This left \$107,000 on each apparatus that had not been budgeted. It was calculated that \$45,000 per apparatus would be needed for loose equipment. Loose equipment is defined as hoses, nozzles or anything that is not permanently fixed to the vehicle. This is what totals the \$307,077 being requested.

Other options were researched, which were less expensive, but it was found that these vehicles would not withstand the wear and tear put on them by a City of our size. Generally, the less expensive models are made for smaller cities or volunteer departments. Ultimately, it is better to purchase a brand that staff and mechanics are familiar with and know how to operate. Parts are also more easily obtained. Due diligence was given to ensure that the City was not being price gouged and based on historical trends and the increase in the price of base components (steel) the prices have been steadily increasing. The motors themselves are increasing in price due to EPA regulations. It could take up to 42 months before the apparatus' are received and go into service. Based on Fleet's research, it was determined both apparatus' need to be replaced.

Councilmember Holman asked how old the two apparatus' were that would be replaced? Chief King responded that these pumpers are 12-15 years old.

Councilmember Schueler asked if each of the new apparatus' were going to cost \$938,000? Chief King said this is correct but Council is only considering the \$307,077 and this would come from the General Fund balanced to supplement the Capital Fund.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Council adjourned out of Conference at 5:00 p.m.

ATTEST:

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City Clerk

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Mayor