

COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Tuesday, January 26, 2016, 4:30 p.m.
Casper City Hall
Council Meeting Room

AGENDA

1. Police Body Cameras (Chief Wetzel)
2. Parkway Plaza Update (Steven Senft)
3. Casper Area Chamber of Commerce Update (Gilda Lara)
4. Dead Tree Task Force (Pete Meyers)
5. City Manager Report
6. Future Agenda Review
7. Council Around the Table
8. Executive Session – Litigation

Mayor Sandoval called the meeting to order at 4:27 p.m. with the following Councilmembers present: Councilman Powell, Miller, Hopkins, Heili, Johnson, Cathey, Pacheco, Schlager and Sandoval.

City Manager McDonald introduced Jim Wetzel, Police Chief, to update Council on body worn cameras. Chief Wetzel began by discussing what BWC (Body-Worn Cameras) are and where the City is in obtaining them. He described the state of affairs of BWC's across law enforcement in general and the purposes of BWC's, including the opportunity for accountability of police officers. He discussed the stakeholders including victims, witnesses, bystanders, prosecutors, citizens, suspects, etc. He then discussed new technology considerations which included the purpose of the technology, what the technology will be used for, how the recordings will be retained and collected, how the information will be shared with others, and what measures will prohibit unauthorized access.

Chief Wetzel went on to summarize some problems that other municipalities have faced when using the technology and attempting to conform their department's regulations to standard policies. He explained several of the benefits and challenges of BWC's. He stated his concerns about the Wyoming Public Records Act in regards to BWC's and explained that there would need to be specific amendments explaining what portion of the footage is open to the public before he would feel comfortable with the Police Department using the technology. He then discussed different instances of case law that have applied to BWC's and how those instances have provided benchmarks for using this technology.

Councilman Miller asked if the challenges with the BWC's are the same as with the car cameras that Casper already has in place. Chief Wetzel responded that the application is much broader with BWC's and that the car cameras are used in very specific situations. He also stated that the

current car systems have been difficult to use and that the department is constantly troubleshooting the technology. Mayor Sandoval asked if the officers are recording some things from their car cameras. Chief Wetzel explained that the audio recorders are connected to the car's dash camera, but that the audio is lost when the officer steps too far away from the car.

Councilman Johnson asked if the Mills Police Department has liked using the BWC's, and Chief Wetzel replied that as far he knew, they like them. Councilman Powell asked if there have been many instances of buyer's remorse in other departments across the country. Chief Wetzel responded that as far as he has heard, most departments who have purchased BWC's like them and complaints from the public have decreased. Councilman Powell then asked if there has been any movement within our legislature to make amendments that would stipulate what footage could be obtained by the public. Chief Wetzel responded that he has not heard of any movement, but he would like to see that before the Casper Police Department moves forwards with implementing BWC's. Mayor Sandoval asked what the department would need in terms of funding and technology in order to move forward with the BWC's. Chief Wetzel stated that the technology and equipment would cost around \$175,000, in addition to the man power to review the footage.

Next, City Manager McDonald introduced Steven Senft, co-owner of the Parkway Plaza, to discuss the hotel's recent renovations. Mr. Senft began by discussing the upgrades the hotel is currently undergoing. He explained that currently they have finished upgrading half of the guest rooms, modernized the lobby, and are upgrading the meeting space and the outdoor space. They are working on plans for upgrading the hotel bar, ALL THAT JAZZ, and adding an entrance arch from Center Street.

He then moved on to explain the future vision for the Parkway Plaza. He stated that they would like to make the Plaza into a Four-Star destination hotel. Part of the future vision is to possibly build a 40,000 square foot Convention Center and Outdoor Pavilion Venue. The Pavilion will be located along the river and will be a venue for groups to do events and concerts. The Convention Center would house the largest ballroom in the state. Mr. Senft explained how a large centralized convention center would help Casper's hotels and businesses. He stated that they have not started the Convention Center project yet, because they wanted to discuss it with Council first and know what their plans may be for building another convention center in Casper.

Councilman Powell stated that there was a study conducted four years ago examining the demand and marketability for a convention center in Casper and the results were very positive for moving forward with a project like this. He asked if Mr. Senft had looked at the study and if he felt the results were valid. Mr. Senft responded that he had read the results and believed they are accurate. He stated that Casper is well-located to host conventions, but because the City does not currently have a convention center, it cannot accommodate larger conventions. He explained that the proposed type of convention center would not only compete with other cities in Wyoming for conventions, but would compete in a larger regional way with surrounding states.

Councilman Hopkins asked if their company had other successful properties similar to the Parkway Plaza. Mr. Senft replied that they did and named several successful facilities that they have owned. Councilman Powell asked if they had considered turning the Parkway into a franchise as they had with some of their other hotels. Mr. Senft replied that they had considered it, but concluded that they did not need to turn it into a franchise in order to market it.

Councilman Powell discussed the public/private partnership that has been in the works for several years for another convention center in Casper. He asked how that project would affect the Parkway's plans if it went forward. Mr. Senft responded that Casper cannot support two convention centers, so if the other project does move forward, the Parkway Plaza will not build a convention center. He stated that they do believe the Parkway Plaza is in a better location for a convention center and that they have every intention of moving forward with it.

Councilman Cathey asked what the estimated timing for a Parkway Plaza Convention Center would be. Mr. Senft replied that once they move forward with it, it is projected to take 16 to 24 months to build.

Council expressed appreciation for the owners of the Parkway Plaza and their willingness to invest in Casper and in the community. Mr. Senft stated that they would keep in touch with the City for any ongoing plans. He also said that they may need some things from the City in the future in terms of infrastructure. City Manager McDonald stated that staff would look at updates to Center Street and its walkways if the Plaza's Convention Center is built. He also stated that staff is working on issuing a Request for Proposal to see if anyone is interested in building a convention center on the Amoco property.

Next, City Manager McDonald introduced Gilda Lara, Executive Director of the Casper Area Chamber of Commerce (CACC), to update Council on the CACC. Ms. Lara began by discussing goals set by their Board of Directors and the CACC's vision and mission. She noted that these goals intersect with Council's goals. She also explained that the CACC contributes a lot of time and money to the One Cent Campaign, because the goals of the City are in line with their goals. The CACC's membership has steadily increased over the last couple of years due to membership development and engagement. Recently, they conducted a survey of their membership to identify legislative priorities for the 2016 Legislative Session. There was a high response with very strong opinions that led the Board to take a stance on some issues. These stances will go out in a press release next week. She discussed some of the programs and services provided by the CACC including a CAEDA partnership, professional workshops, and a Leadership Casper program. She explained that for all of these reasons, funding of the CACC is a very good investment.

Councilman Powell asked how diversified our economy is and if there is evidence that interest in our community has decreased due to the recent drop in sales tax revenue. Ms. Lara responded that they have found that Casper has very low unemployment rates compared to other communities. They have also found that on average, Casper citizens have a good quality of life

and a low cost of living. She stated that there has been a slight downturn in tourism, but that membership is growing and there has been a decrease in drops and cancellations.

Councilman Hopkins thanked the CACC for their support with the One Cent campaign. He asked if the CACC has had any inquiries about a biathlon course. Ms. Lara responded that there have been inquiries about the biathlon course along with inquiries about campgrounds and the Eclipse Festival. Councilman Powell asked what challenges the CACC faces with maintaining the interest of businesses that are not tourist-based. Ms. Lara stated that this is a constant balance, but that everyone is touched by tourism in some way. In order to keep those businesses engaged, the CACC provides a professional development piece which includes workshops. She also explained that during these workshops, home businesses are allowed the opportunity to use the CACC as a storefront.

Next, City Manager McDonald introduced Pete Meyers, Public Services Assistant Director, to update Council on the Dead Tree Task Force. Mr. Meyers acknowledged Councilman Pacheco as the liaison and introduced arborists present at the meeting as well as other staff that are on the task force. He started by explaining that the committee was formed because Council asked for the creation of a task force to estimate how many trees were lost and to deal with other issues related to the dead trees. The committee decided to focus their efforts on three major topics: estimating how many trees have died, funding the tree problem, and public education.

To estimate a proper number of trees that have died, Staff used survey data that provided photos of vegetation. They were able to compare canopy levels. This is the gold standard for counting trees. At this point, they are estimating that 40,000 trees, about 1/3 of the trees in the area, have died or are in the process of dying. A statistical count will be available in 2017.

The second issue of funding is problematic because it is very expensive to hire a professional to cut down a tree. It is estimated to cost around \$1200 for an arborist to take down a fully grown tree on private land. On public property, park staff are in ongoing efforts to cut down trees in parks in order to keep the public safe. Staff is applying for a grant through FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) in the amount of \$300,000 to help with the cost of cutting down the trees. This grant money would come from leftover funding from the Lusk Flood. FEMA will most likely provide funding for cutting down trees that will help prevent fires and flooding. It is possible that this grant will not apply to neighborhood areas. The formal submission for the grant will be in June, and Staff will first ask Council's permission to apply for the grant.

The third issue is how to educate the public about trees that are not quite dead or alive. These trees are suffering internal cellular damage caused by a sudden freeze. The consensus among professional arborists is that these trees will eventually die. In order to cut down a tree, the arborist must climb it, which is possible when the tree is still partially alive. When the tree eventually dies, the arborist cannot climb it and a crane is necessary in order to cut the tree down. This increases the cost of cutting the tree down and presents a danger to citizens. The committee

is trying to get the word out about trees that are dying and will start a campaign in February to educate the public.

Councilman Pacheco thanked the committee for all of their hard work. He noted that the City is now dealing with an issue that is much bigger than initially thought. He stated that the City needs to continue to lead the charge, and that even though they cannot foot bill, they need to find a way to help families who cannot afford to cut down their trees. Councilman Powell clarified the misperception that the City cannot fund cutting down the trees for financial reasons. It is a legal matter more than a feasibility issue, because it is illegal for the City to fund private individuals. He asked if the trees have any market value that could help defray the cost. One of the arborists present stated that most of the trees are difficult to use for firewood because they produce a lot of smoke and soot when burned and have an odor when stored.

Councilman Hopkins asked if it was difficult to differentiate between trees that were damaged in the snowstorm a couple of years ago from the trees that died in the sudden freeze. Mr. Meyers responded that it is hard to separate the data, but the best source came from GIS Flight data. This data provided canopy loss which was key.

Mayor Sandoval asked how long the citizens and the City have before these trees begin to fall. An arborist present at the meeting stated that there is debate on how long it will take for the trees to die and then actually fall. There is no good way of knowing, because some trees can be dead for years before falling over. Councilman Cathey noted that because the City rests in a high wind area, there is a much higher risk of trees falling and this shortens the timeline. Councilman Pacheco stated that this is what creates problems; people cannot afford to take their trees down and will choose to wait until something happens that damages their house or a person. Councilman Johnson asked if there are federal grants that individuals can apply for through the U.S. Forest Service or the Department of Agriculture to help with the cost. Mr. Meyers responded that they have looked at some other foundations and grants, but the FEMA grant is currently the best option.

Councilman Cathey asked if there is a way private individuals could haul trees to a certain location or have curbside pickup and have the City take the trees to the landfill. An arborist responded that most of the companies will charge less if the individual chooses to do their own clean-up. City Manager McDonald stated that there are some provisions that need to be explored for assisting the poor with matters like this that affect public safety. Council then discussed further ideas and community efforts that could be utilized to help homeowner's defray the cost of cutting down the trees.

Council then discussed the public education piece, reiterating that they do not want the public cutting down trees themselves. Due to the economy, the fear is that many people may try to do tree work without the proper training and equipment and offer their services for lower prices than the professional arborists. This could lead to a rise in injuries and property damage.

Next, City Manager McDonald discussed the Eclipse Festival. He stated that the CACVB (Casper Area Convention and Visitors Bureau) has offered to take the lead on the project and Staff is recommending that Council take that offer. He stated that Council will be receiving a letter this week with the offer. He introduced Brooke Kreder, CACVB's CEO, to discuss this update. Ms. Kreder explained that the CACVB is equipped to properly estimate how many people the City can handle for the Festival and has the resources for media and tourism. She stated they would still like to work with the City but are ready for their organization to take the lead. Their board unanimously voted to move forward with this. City Manager McDonald explained that the City will still need to look at some funding options and will need to continually monitor the numbers so there is proper infrastructure in place for the Festival. Councilman Hopkins asked if Council will receive documentation of what the CACVB's plan is for the Festival. Ms. Kreder responded that Council should receive that information in thirty days, and should be available by the February 23 Work Session. Mayor Sandoval asked Council for a thumbs up vote allowing for the CACVB to take over the Eclipse Festival, and Council agreed to move forward allowing the CACVB to take the lead.

City Manager McDonald updated Council on the current state of the City's budget. He explained some of the ways that the City has been saving money including implementing a hiring freeze, making mid-year cuts for unnecessary expenses, operations savings, and using reserves. Currently, the City is down \$3.4 million from the projected sales tax revenue. The City should realize the projected revenue from property taxes, and may gain some revenue from franchise fees. Court fines and forfeitures are down, due partially to the vacancies in the Police Department. The City may have to use \$2 million in reserves, but will not use more than \$3 million. Right now Staff is focusing on next year's budget and will continue to look for ways to save money. The finalized budget will be approved in May.

City Manager McDonald presented Council with a review of the future agenda for the Regular Council Meeting on February 2, 2016.

Next, Councilmembers reported updates for each of their respective board meetings. Councilman Schlager asked Council what they thought about decreasing the amount that goes to the Senior Board from \$50,000 due to the current budgetary issues. City Manager McDonald explained that Staff sent out letters to all agencies letting them know the economic situation that the City is in, and that it will be up to each of them to decide how much money to ask for. Mayor Sandoval suggested putting Councilman Heili into places that former Councilman Mundell vacated, with the exception of the CAP position which Councilman Pacheco took over and the CACVB position that Councilman Johnson took over. Council agreed and Mayor Sandoval stated that he will talk with Councilman Heili about those positions and will get back to Council if he is unable to fill those positions.

Council adjourned into executive session to discuss litigation at 7:18 p.m., moved by Councilman Hopkins and seconded by Councilman Cathey. Motion passed.

Council adjourned out of executive session and into the regular work session at 8:03 p.m., moved by Councilman Pacheco and seconded by Councilman Miller. Motion passed.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF CASPER, WYOMING
A Municipal Corporation

Tracey L. Belser
City Clerk

Daniel Sandoval
Mayor