

CITY OF SULTAN COUNCIL WORKSHOP – April 6, 2023

Mayor Wiita called the regular meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. The meeting was a hybrid with attendees both in person at City Hall Council Chambers and via Zoom Internet Conference Service. Mayor Wiita announced that zoom video was malfunctioning so zoom attendees would have audio only. Mayor Wiita called roll and the following were in attendance:

Councilmembers: Morgan, Aldrich, Hund, and Sivewright

Councilmember Absent: Dearborn, and Beeler

Staff: City Administrator Ibershof, Finance Director Erdman, Operations Manager MacDicken, and City Clerk Pevey.

CHANGES/ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

None noted.

DISCUSSION

AB23-20_Parks Levy

Presentation on file with the city clerk's office

Mayor Wiita advised preliminary council discussion started a few months prior to explore possible parks levy to be able to keep up with the demands of the parks as the city grows. Administrator Ibershof presented the goals of the discussion to include the growth of the city and its finances, why parks and recreation are so important to Sultan, current levels of service, and the growing needs of the parks system.

Administrator Ibershof discussed the 2018 population of 5,050 citizens with 1,733 utility customers versus 2022 population which has increased to 6,260 citizens with 2,423 utility customers; and the fact the city's general fund has only grown 14%, but the parks budget has grown 55% since 2019 and the impacts it has on the equation. Confirmation amongst the group that parks, and recreation are important as they build community to include community events, organized sports, and open space for recreation.

Public Works Operations Manager MacDicken explained the current levels of service being provided to parks and the staff's current investment of time spent equates to approximately 2,796 hours in the park. The department anticipates this need to grow by 540 hours in the coming year and they are currently just keeping up with ground keeping and maintenance to handle mowing, cleaning, and pressure washing.

In addition, the city added Sportsman's Park in 2022 and plans to add a park on the basin in 2024; organized sports are growing; and definite increased usage of parks which in turn increases maintenance; events are being added as well. State law is very descriptive on what park impact fees can be used for and it limits the use of park impact fees to capital improvements, not operations and maintenance.

Staff recommendation is to create a Metropolitan Parks District (MPD) so they can control the designated area, and is designed to manage, control, and improve parks and establishes a dedicated funding source. The funding source is a voter approved levy on property taxes. Term limited from 1-6 years with a set dollar amount to be collected. The assessed value and overall city assessment will vary how much a resident contributes. Staff are recommending a 6-year levy to ensure the process is sustainable for the community down the road.

Discussion turned to current utility workers being pulled to handle parks maintenance and how much more workers could handle; MacDicken acknowledged employees are currently being stretched too thin as it is. Staff hours and resources to fund those hours were discussed. The council requested to have a more concrete response of at what point staff will reach a breaking point where the city would have to make hard decisions on project/priority cuts. Mayor suggested four years before council will have to have a serious look at the general fund and the expenditures funded

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from that arena. He acknowledged good decisions of past council have helped sustain the level of surface, but it is acknowledged that one time dollar amounts in the general fund from building are just that: one-time funds.

Staffing presented three options for park levy amounts as follows:

- \$342,000 a year for 6 years; average home \$12.48 a month
 - 2 dedicated parks employees
 - add \$100,000 park maintenance and repair budget which would allow \$76,000 reallocated back to general fund for other needs.
- \$455,000 a year for 6 years; average home \$16.60 a month
 - 2 dedicated park employees
 - Add \$169,000 parks maintenance and repair budget, which would allow \$120,000 to be reallocated back to the general fund for other needs.
- \$594,248 a year for 6-years; average home \$21.69 per month.
 - 3 dedicated parks employees
 - \$208,000 park maintenance and repair budget which would allow \$120,000 to be reallocated back to the general fund for other needs.

Staff remained open to changes to the options presented and discussion on differences in what each funding level allows to include staffing and maintenance.

Staff is recommending option 1 for \$342,000 a year for 6 years as the city understands it is the first parks levy, will staff a new team, provided added resources for maintenance and repairs, but taking into account voter fatigue with a recent school district levy and fire district levy; staff felt this is the stronger change of success in a special election. Discussion on seasonal workers and confirmation that seasonal workers would be replaced with full time workers and acknowledged that utility workers would be pulled in during heavy seasonal times.

Discussion amongst council suggested calling it a “Metropolitan Parks and Recreation District” (MPRD) to incorporate the recreation side in the future. Discussion confirmed that recreation already exists and is a natural part of the parks department, therefore, would make sense to proceed in that fashion. Discussion on the various elements to include but not limited to the timeline and requirements to form an MPRD; staffing levels, and other elements of an MPRD.

The council inquired, if approved, how quickly would the funds be received and if the city could fund it from other sources to get the project rolling faster. Administrator Ibershof explained the taxes would not be collected until the year after it is approved so the city would have time to incorporate the changes in the budget and prepare for the hiring process. In addition, staff could start reviewing grant opportunities and building the groundwork in advance. Mayor suggested the council could front funding and have contingency plans in place to start projects and hire staff sooner rather than later knowing the revenue would be coming. The council expressed the importance of showing the results of the levy in the parks as soon as possible.

Also, discussion on the public participation process that would be involved and clarification on distinct roles of what city can and cannot say during a special election process. Confirmation that staff will explore options to share what the city has done with existing resources and what the city can do with additional resources. Good documentation in the parks pros plan that provides guidelines from the public as to why and how the city should move forward in the parks arena. Confirmation that the more the public is involved in the process, their feedback and ideas assist and support changes moving forward. Discussion on the needs and how to meet those needs for the citizens.

Discussion moved on the best ways to present the information to the public moving forward and obtaining citizen input to assist in determining the best service level and confirming what voters are truly interested in. Administrator Ibershof discussed the timeline to present it in a special election in 2024 and that council would need to confirm their intentions

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no later than December of this year. Staff suggested taking the remainder of 2023 to host public outreach to determine what to put forth to the voters. The council supported that though process and suggested to present that it will not just be strengthening parks, but also strengthening other departments.

Council confirmation on the following:

- Change title to “Metropolitan Parks and Recreation District”.
- Put the options to the public first, then after hearing from the public, decide which option to bring forward.

Administrator Ibershof confirmed staff will start the process of preparing materials and the presentation process to gather public input. Discussion continued for a short while on avenues to present the information to the public. The council thanked staff for their hard work preparing the information for presentation this evening.

PUBLIC COMMENT:


Brandon Miller, Seattle: Requested clarification on what RCO stands for and the source of grant funding; *With permission of the Mayor, Administrator Ibershof answered RCO stands for Recreation Conservation Office and confirmed it is state funding source.* Miller also expressed interest for a “concerts in the park series” idea discussed during the workshop; thanked council for how informative the session was.

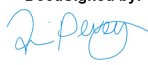
David Simons, Sultan: Grateful on the discussion with a lot of information covered; addressed a website issue he encountered that misdirected the zoom meeting information for tonight’s meeting; agreed with attendance at events but believes there will be a lot of opposition and controversy and provided reasons why he felt that way.

Ginny Smith, Sultan: thankful for explanation presented; feels tax rate would be a burden for many families in the area; acknowledged she has been an advocate for improvement and maintenance in the parks; concerned who decides where the funds would go if a levy is passed and requested more information on that element; concerned about additional money going back to the general fund and who decides where that goes. Is disappointed in the mess at Sportsman’s Park because of the Wastewater Treatment Plant construction and wondering how long that will continue. Look forward to future information on this topic.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Councilmember Morgan, seconded by Councilmember Aldrich the meeting ended at approximately 8:26 pm. The Zoom meeting connection was disconnected shortly thereafter.


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Russell Wiita, Mayor

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Tami J. Pevey, City Clerk