

JOURNAL OF COMMISSION WORK SESSION
February 2, 2010

City Commission Work Session

Mayor Winters presiding

CALL TO ORDER: 5:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL: City Commissioners present: Michael J. Winters, Robert Jones, Bill Bronson, Mary Jolley and Fred Burow. Also present were the City Manager, Acting City Attorney, Directors of Fiscal Services, Park and Recreation, Planning and Community Development, Public Works, the Interim Library Director, Executive Director of the Housing Authority, Police Chief, Fire Chief, the City Clerk and the Office Specialist.

1. CENTENE STADIUM PROPOSAL

Park and Recreation Director, Marty Basta, provided a PowerPoint presentation of the Centene Stadium proposal. Mr. Basta reported that the Legion Park baseball stadium was built in 1941, is owned by the City of Great Falls, and has been leased by the Baseball Club since 1948. The Baseball Club has requested the City's assistance to complete the Stadium renovation project estimated to cost \$1.46 million. The funding request by the Baseball Club was \$345,772. A grant request was made to the Park Advisory Board for \$172,886, which included monies to provide a match of CTEP funds. The remaining 50% of the request would be provided through an internal loan from the Garage Equipment Replacement fund. The remaining balance of \$1,114,041 would be raised through private funds by the Great Falls Baseball Club.

Mr. Basta explained that, as a condition of the MOU, the City's share of the funding (\$345,772) would not be released until the GFBC raised the remaining funds and provided proof to the City's satisfaction.

Commissioner Jolley asked for clarification on repayment of the grant funds. Mr. Basta explained that the grant was given without a repayment request. The repayment schedule for the Central Garage fund would come from the Pasta Montana annual lease (\$18,000 which now goes into the Park Trust fund) and the Baseball Stadium annual lease (\$8,800 which currently goes into the General Fund). Mr. Basta noted that this loan would be repaid within eight years at 3.25% interest. The City would also partner with the Baseball Club to use the stadium as a venue for outdoor events and concerts which could generate additional revenue toward the loan repayment and the Park Trust fund.

Mr. Basta showed slides of proposed renovations to the concessions area, the main concourse, the field box and the berm area. Commissioner Jones applauded Mr. Basta for a great proposal. Mayor Winters questioned the need for luxury box seats. Vinnie Purpura, President of the Baseball Club, explained that the seats are field boxes that facilitate meetings of corporations located in Great Falls, providing them the opportunity to have a corporate or staff meeting and also attend a baseball game. That is a common practice in minor league and major league baseball that helps generate revenue.

2. SNORKEL TRUCK REPLACEMENT

Assistant Fire Chief, Steve Hester, provided a PowerPoint presentation in support of the Great Falls Fire Rescue request to replace the GFFR Snorkel 1985 Articulating Boom aerial apparatus. He reported that the apparatus has been in service since 1970, and that its primary mission during the 40-year period was to rescue trapped people from medium-rise buildings and to provide an aerial master stream to prevent fire conflagration from building to building. He explained that this piece of equipment has 107,000 hours of operation and has been used on countless multi-alarm fires. It has exceeded its useful life span by at least 15-20 years. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) states that the service life of a frontline fire apparatus has been 10 years, with another 10 years as a reserve apparatus, as long as the apparatus has been maintained according to the manufacturer's specifications and national inspection and testing standards. The NFPA also recommends that safety be the primary concern in the retirement of an apparatus. The main reasons to remove the 1970 Snorkel from emergency service are its obsolescence, the lack of proper safety features, and the probability of mechanical, electrical, hydraulic and structural failure.

Snorkel is out of the fire service business, and it is unlikely another company would be willing to refurbish such an antiquated vehicle. NFPA doesn't recommend refurbishment of any apparatus older than 10 years since it cannot be made to comply with current safety standards. Aerial apparatus safety devices and manufacturing practices have significantly changed since 1970, and personnel safety has vastly improved for fire apparatus.

Mr. Hester noted that the City should be prepared to provide the necessary response apparatus, equipment and manpower to control the anticipated situation. NFPA standards for high-occupancy buildings such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes, refineries, high-rise buildings, etc. are four pumpers and two ladder trucks, but the GFFR has made due with three engines and one truck. Medium-hazard occupancies such as apartments, offices, mercantile and industrial occupancies require three engines and one truck.

Mr. Hester explained the need for an Aerial Platform because there are approximately 540 structures in Great Falls that cannot be reached with a 35' ground ladder. Using aerial apparatus even on residential fires has become more critical due to modern building materials and methods that do not provide a safe platform for firefighters to work from and risk falling through the roof.

New aerial platforms have a 1,300 pound lift capability and tested two times their capacity. Tools and staff can be moved from the ground to the floor or roof that firefighters need to work on in one motion. Victims can be moved to the rescue platform and then to the ground. A 100-foot platform would allow firefighters to reach most mid-rise structures. The platform can also be used as an anchor for rope rescue such as the rescue of trapped people from a bridge or the river. With the construction of the new Federal Court House, the additions to Benefis, etc. where setbacks are involved, a longer reach is necessary.

Possible funding options include a lease purchase. Oshkosh Finance, a subsidiary of Pierce Fire Apparatus, provided a quote of approximately \$110,000/year for 10 years for a \$925,000 truck.

Mr. Hester expects the next aerial apparatus to give as much service as the last one.

Commissioner Bronson asked how much lead time would be involved in getting a truck. Mr. Hester responded that delivery of an in-stock unit could be one month; however, to build one from the frame up would take almost a year. He noted GFFR would like to apply for a Department of Homeland Security Assistance to Firefighters Grant. In previous years, \$.80 on the dollar was awarded. When the instructions for the 2010 grant become available, he commented that he will apply for the grant if the Commission so directs. It would take several months to know if GFFR was successful in securing a grant. However, if a truck is purchased during the grant period, GFFR would still be eligible for the funds if awarded the grant.

City Manager Greg Doyon asked the Commission for direction on whether or not to pursue a new aerial apparatus. The Commission unanimously agreed to authorize the City Manager to direct staff to begin the preliminary options for funding and replacement of the GFFR aerial platform.

3. GREAT FALLS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

Brett Doney, President of the Great Falls Development Authority, presented a PowerPoint presentation on new strategic priorities for the City of Great Falls because the economy has dramatically changed since the original plan was developed three years ago. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the economy in our region were analyzed and the GFDA Board adopted an updated strategic plan. The results identified three main problems. First, Great Falls has grown more slowly than the State, and the State has grown more slowly than the rest of the country. In order to create opportunities for our youth and to attract investment into the community, a steady growth rate is needed. Second, Great Falls is too dependent on military and security operations, and has very little impact on decisions that impact 34-39% of the base economy. Great Falls is also a service center for the Golden Triangle, mostly commodity agriculture. To diversify and grow different parts of the economy would help balance the economy in Great Falls. Third, Great Falls is a low-wage community—below the average in Montana, and Montana is well below the national average.

GFDA has a vision of a vibrant community with a growing, diversified economy and more high-wage job opportunities. Priorities for the next 2-3 years are building on the base values of integrity, transparency, collaboration, fiscal prudence and be goal driven. He reviewed seven strategic priorities: -Great Falls Prospector (connecting Great Falls with national network of site selectors), -Targeted Marketing, -Great Falls Industrial Park, -Electric Transmission Capacity, -Angel Investor Network, -Brand Great Falls, and -Team Great Falls. They also considered three blocks to these priorities: -Weak Competitive Position, -Weak Market Presence, and -Missing Long-Range Community Development Plan and Unified Leadership. Mr. Doney reported GFDA is currently focusing on getting the Prospector site launched, having 3 or 4 lots on the market in the Industrial Park by summer, and beginning the Brand process. In April, GFDA plans to earnestly focus on marketing. Progress reports on each of the priorities will be forthcoming.

Mr. Doyon commented that Mr. Doney's reference to our over-reliance on the military should

only be viewed as a simple recognition that it is critical to diversify our economic base, and the regulations passed by the Commission greatly impact economic development.

4. FIREFIGHTER CONTRACT NEGOTIATION UPDATE

Mr. Doyon explained that contract negotiations with the firefighters have been constructive and good progress has been made. However, there is a very strong concern from the firefighters that they are not competitive in their pay structure with other comparable Class 1 communities. He questioned the Commission on their desire to increase the firefighters pay structure.

Commissioner Burow commented that the cost of living in Great Falls is less than the communities that are being compared. He believes a competitive wage can be paid to retain staff, but also noted that the taxpayers want the City to tighten its belt.

Commissioner Jolley noted that wages in Great Falls are low; Great Falls is a poor community.

Commissioner Bronson disagreed that Great Falls is a poor community. He noted that the potential call volume criteria must be considered, and the extensive training involved in this very dangerous occupation. He also questioned whether the general public has been thoroughly informed of what is expected of our fire and law enforcement people.

Mayor Winters agreed that Great Falls is not a poor community, and commented that it is important to consider the value placed on fire protection.

Commissioner Jones commented that he would like to send a message to the City employees that the Commission values, respects and appreciates the work firefighters do. He recommended Mr. Doyon negotiate the best contract possible (but not balance the budget on the backs of the employees).

Mr. Doyon reported that negotiations are close, at least for year one (they are at approximately \$57,000 between what has been proposed and what has been offered). He does not consider city ranking, but rather the ability of the community to generate revenues to meet its needs. He felt the offer that was made was as far as they could go. Beyond that, the Commission may have to make some decisions. Since some of the firefighters were in attendance, Mr. Doyon would like them to consider what the Commission has mentioned before returning to the negotiating table.

ADJOURN

There being no further discussion, Mayor Winters adjourned the work session of February 2, 2010, at 6:56 p.m.