



The City of West University Place

A Neighborhood City

CITY COUNCIL

Bob Higley, Mayor
Kevin Trautner, Mayor Pro Tem
John P. Barnes, Councilmember
Lauri Lankford, Councilmember
Ed Sobash, Councilmember

STAFF

David J. Beach, City Manager
Alan Petrov, City Attorney
Thelma Gilliam, City Secretary

CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

The City Council of the City of West University Place, Texas, **met via audio/video conferencing** in a workshop and regular session on **Monday, August 24, 2020**, at **5:30 p.m.** due to social distancing guidelines suggested by the CDC in light of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID 19).

Agenda items were as follows:

WORKSHOP (5:30 PM)

1. Call Workshop to Order / Roll Call (Remotely)

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner called the workshop to order at 5:30 p.m. Mayor Higley, Councilmembers Barnes, Lankford and Sobash, and City Attorney Petrov were in attendance. *Note: Mayor Higley attended, but requested that Mayor Pro Tem Trautner preside.*

Staff attending via video/teleconference from the Council Chambers: City Manager Beach, City Secretary Gilliam, Police Chief Walker, and Assistant to the City Manager Thompson.

Staff attending remotely: Public Works Director Barrera and IT Director McFarland.

2. Communications

Matters related to city-wide communications. ***Mr. Dave Beach, City Manager***

City Manager Beach presented and provided a brief history of previous discussions and identified some of the City's positive messaging and some of council's concerns where staff is lacking in its city-wide communications. He also discussed some of the changes that have been made, options that were evaluated, and changes being proposed:

- Positives
 - Overall day-to-day messaging is good (street closures, service interruptions, activities)
 - Tactical messaging (hurricanes, water main breaks, COVID-19)
- Negatives/Concerns
 - Inability to quickly craft and disseminate messages (after hour communications/Public Safety issues)
 - Messaging content (recent notices regarding water chloramine and tax rates)
 - Strategic Messaging (Memorandum of Understanding, Noise Ordinance, ATT Rezoning)

- Changes/Action Since March 2020 Workshop
 - Reduced email notification categories (from 46 to 13)
 - Increased social media posts
 - Created a separate page for Swift911 (emergency alerts)
 - Ongoing cleanup and improvements to website

- Proposed/Planned Changes Since March 2020 Workshop
 - Swift911 will be used only during Emergency Operation Center (EOC) activation
 - Rename Swift911
 - Educate/Re-educate the public about the service and its purpose
 - Future expansion of service as City develops communication playbook and resources to deliver
 - New communications position
 - Quarterback for the City's communication playbook
 - Actively monitors social media
 - Ensures consistent messaging for citywide communication (non-public safety)
 - Actively manages strategic communications

- Future Options for Consideration
 - Joint 911 Dispatch Center with other area cities
 - Evaluating use of automated messages for dispatch non-emergency line to reduce call demand on dispatchers during police action

After the presentation, Mayor Pro Tem Trautner said he likes the idea of a full-time communications person, because he thinks it would be helpful to have a person in the loop, it would save people a lot of time, and it will make the process of communicating go more smoothly in some instances.

Councilmember Barnes said he agrees and thinks that a full-time communications person increases efficiency in the departments because staff will not be taken away from their primary jobs to handle communications.

Councilmember Lankford said she thinks communications is very important and she is happy that the City is looking at adding a position for communications.

Councilmember Sobash said he thinks there is a need for improvement in getting information out to the residents and said though a full-time position would address the strategic part it would leave a gap in the emergency responses because emergencies don't always happen between 8am and 5pm. He said he hopes there is a plan to have after hour communications without having to add 3 full-time positions. City Manager Beach said that's a whole separate issue in a way. He said with the added position, each of the departments will identify a contact person to work in concert with the communications position. He agreed that a single communications person is not going to fully alleviate the emergency issues and that it will take a culmination of things.

Councilmember Lankford said residents are sophisticated and active and said the City needs to get notices out timely. She said staff is too lean to handle those things and thinks residents would get a much better and consistent message about what's going on and "hot" issues with a communications person.

Councilmember Lankford said she is happy that there will be a restriction regarding Swift911 and changing its name to something else. She said if the City focuses Swift911 on what it's intended for and clearly communicates the purpose to residents then the City should not have the same problem with not being able to handle after hours. She said people will understand that police officers need to work on police things and that the City has a lean staff.

Councilmember Sobash asked if the position will have other responsibilities. City Manager Beach said first and foremost the position's responsibility will be communications and if there happens to be "down time" he will be able to keep that person busy.

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner said in terms of using automated messaging he wouldn't want a voicemail tree. He said residents like being able to call and get a person. City Manager Beach said if automated messaging was used, it would be for limited messaging and most likely have pre-recorded messages for select circumstances.

Mayor Pro Trautner said in regards to a Joint 911 Dispatch Center he is thrilled with police services and thinks residents highly value the police and dispatchers and think they do a good job. He said he wouldn't want that level of service to get diluted with a joint dispatch center that might become a large bureaucratic organization. He said he can't fully appreciate how joining together a 911 dispatch center with Bellaire and Southside, for example, would improve service to West U.

Chief Walker spoke on the idea of a dispatch center and said that most of the time PD is staffed really well in dispatch, but it is during those rare times when something happens and they are not staffed well that the additional resources can help handle what's going on in West U. Fire Chief Taylor added that joining dispatch centers would also provide more situational awareness during an event that involves other agencies and would lessen the confusion if all the information is going through one center. He also said the additional staff with a joint dispatch center would allow for specialized trainings and certifications.

City Manager Beach said a joint dispatch center is not something he is saying the City will do, but only that it is something that the City should look into.

Mayor Higley said he is glad to get underway with a communications position.

Before ending the workshop, Councilmember Beach confirmed that it is the consensus of Council to move forward with hire a communications person. He said is will reclassify an existing vacancy in the 2020 Budget and then Council will take formal action for the 2021 Budget to approve that position.

3. Adjourn Workshop

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner adjourned the workshop at approximately 6:15 p.m.

REGULAR MEETING (6:30 PM)

4. Call Regular Meeting to Order (Remotely)

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner called the Regular Meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. *Note: Mayor Higley attended, but requested that Mayor Pro Tem Trautner preside.*

5. Roll Call

Mayor Higley and Councilmembers Barnes, Lankford, and Sobash attended via audio/videoconference.

Staff attending via video/teleconference from the Council Chambers: City Manager Beach, City Secretary Gilliam, Police Chief Walker, and Assistant to the City Manager Thompson.

Staff attending remotely: Public Works Director Barrera and IT Director McFarland.

6. Pledge of Allegiance

Councilmember Lankford led the Pledge.

7. Public Comments

This is an opportunity for citizens to speak to the Council relating to agenda and non-agenda items.

There were no comments from the public.

8. COVID-19 Update

Matters related to COVID-19. *Recommended Action: Discuss and take any desired action. Mr. Aaron Taylor, Fire Chief and Emergency Management Coordinator*

Chief Taylor reported:

- Statewide trend of new cases have continued to gradually decline.
- Regional positivity rate has continued to improve.
- The Texas Medical Center reported that the 7 day average for the positivity rate in the Houston area is 6.7 percent compared to 8.6 percent last week and 16.8 percent last month.
- As of yesterday, the Texas Medical Center is at 91 percent saturation for the ICU capacity, compared to 97 percent last week.
- Harris County Public Health shows that West U now has 42 confirmed cases – 8 active, 34 recovered, and 0 deaths.

Chief Taylor also reported that Tropical Storms Laura and Marco have not affected the City's response to COVID-19 and that staff is making sure that plans associated with emergency operations related to both storms include social distancing and other necessary safety measures.

Councilmember Sobash asked if there is any news on reimbursements for the City for COVID-19 related expenses. Fire Chief Taylor said staff is working on those numbers. He said there are hard costs and indirect costs, but he doesn't have those numbers right now but will get them and provide them to him.

9. Consent Agenda

All Consent Agenda items listed are considered to be routine by the City Council and will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Council member requests in which event the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the agenda.

A. City Council Minutes

Approve the City Council Workshop Minutes of August 10, 2020. *Recommended Action: Approve Minutes of August 10, 2020. Ms. Thelma Gilliam, City Secretary*

B. Setting Public Hearings for 2021 Budget and 2020 Tax Rates

Matters related to setting public hearings for comments relating to the 2021 Budget and 2020 Tax Rate. *Recommended Action: Set public hearing dates. Ms. Katherine DuBose, Finance Director*

C. Rescheduling Meeting Dates

Matter related to rescheduling regular City Council meeting dates. *Recommended Action: Reschedule the October 12 meeting to October 5, the November 23 meeting to November 16, and the December 21 meeting to December 7. Mr. Dave Beach, City Manager*

Councilmember Lankford noted that there were changes made to the draft Minutes prior to the meeting and asked that the City Secretary include those changes in the final draft of the Minutes. City Attorney

Petrov confirmed that because the revised Minutes had been distributed to Council before the meeting, the revised set of Minutes could be approved this evening.

Councilmember Sobash moved to approve the Consent Agenda with the revised set of Minutes. Councilmember Barnes seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED.**

Ayes: Higley, Trautner, Barnes, Lankford, Sobash
Noes: None
Absent: None

10. Recess Regular Meeting to Convene Workshop on Virtual Gate Project

Matters related to the City's Virtual Gate Project. *Recommended Action: Update on Phase I Proof of Concept and discuss Phase II schedule.* **Mr. Ken Walker, Police Chief**

Mayor Higley moved to recess the regular meeting and convene the Workshop. Councilmember Sobash seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED.**

Ayes: Higley, Trautner, Barnes, Lankford, Sobash
Noes: None
Absent: None

Chief Walker presented this item and provided an update to Phase I of the Virtual Gate Proof of Concept (POC). He said the POC period started on July 27th and would end on August 27th and that the current target capture rate is 95% to 100% (with 3 days remaining).

Councilmember Sobash asked if there was a specific number of captures or just a range. Chief Walker said staff does have specific numbers for the different cameras and the 95 to 100 range is an average for all of them.

When Councilmember Sobash asked why there is a difference in the capture rates, Chief Walker said that it could have been due to weather or a vehicle that passed by that had the license plate covered. City Manager Beach added that the system is designed to meet a 90 percent capture rate or greater. He said there could be a lot of reasons and that staff will pose that question to the contractor and engineer.

Mayor Higley asked if a car that enters West U gets missed by a camera as it enters, is it subject to an exit view when it leaves West U. Chief Walker said, yes, once the system is built out all of the entrances and exits will have cameras and confirmed there will be a high probability that the vehicle's license plate will be captured upon entering or exiting West U.

In response to Councilmember Barnes' question as to whether the cameras will be aimed to capture both the front and back license plates, Chief Walker responded definitely the rear plates and in some locations the front plates, also.

Mayor Higley asked if there is a law in Texas that prevents a person from hiding or obscuring license plates and Chief Walker responded, yes, there is a law against it.

Councilmember Sobash asked in those instances where the license plate isn't captured is there a video record of the make and model of the vehicle and/or is there additional data captured. Chief Walker said there is a video of the vehicle. Councilmember Sobash confirmed with Chief Walker that for each failed license plate read there is at least a video of the vehicle.

City Manager Beach reiterated that staff will consult with the contractor and engineer to look at the POC and identify what the issues were for those misses.

City Manager Beach confirmed that the numbers presented tonight are still preliminary and that there will be a final report after the 30 days has ended and that if after the 30 days (August 27th) the capture rate remains above 90 percent, staff will proceed with Phase I of the installation. He said if the numbers do not remain above 90 percent, staff will come back to Council on September 14th with an update. Mr. Beach said staff's goal is to have Phase I completed by the end of the year.

When asked about the capability of facial recognition, Chief Walker said facial recognition is not included in this project.

City Manager Beach confirmed that the Virtual Gate project includes 40 locations, with the poles being strategically located so those poles that are outside the City limits were placed there because they eliminate the number of additional poles that would have been necessary to capture license plates coming into the City.

Councilmember Sobash asked if the cameras are able to pick up people walking in the City. Chief Walker said yes.

Mayor Higley asked if there is a way to immediately stop and/or ticket potential suspects by enforcing a strict application for obscured license plates. Chief Walker said some of the newer cars have distorted paper plates but he has been told that there is a way to get an alert when they system doesn't get a read. He said officer can be dispatched to the scene to check out the problem when an alert is received.

Councilmember Sobash asked about the status of the projected schedule. Chief Walker said things were delayed during the pole selection and due to a couple of other hiccups, but he thinks the City is in good shape. He said even though Phase I isn't scheduled to be completed until the end of December, he thinks it will be completed by the end of November.

Councilmember Sobash confirmed with staff that the project is approximately 3 months behind schedule.

Councilmember Lankford stated that the contract specifies that Phase I was to be completed 365 days after the issuance of the Notice to Proceed and she assumes that it was issued in May 2019. She said the contract also states that if the contractor did not complete the project within 365 days, the contractor would pay liquidated damages of \$400 a day. She asked if the City has gotten into that period, yet. City Manager Beach replied the City has not. He said when the contract was awarded, the contractor still had to identify the high points for communication and that was not discussed with Council until October 2019. He said technically the Notice to Proceed wasn't issued until November and so the completion date will put the City into December when the project is expected to be completed.

Councilmember Lankford said it seems that there were delays on the contractor's side and she is curious if staff can pin down the date of the Notice to Proceed and how it was affected by any Change Orders to move forward. City Manager Beach said he will research and provide an answer.

Mayor Higley asked if Council elects to move forward is there a way to get the project back on a timely schedule for delivery on behalf of the taxpayers of West U. City Manager Beach said he is comfortable that the Notice to Proceed start date was after approval of the layout. He said there are some Change Orders being finalized, which will have a monetary cost and extension/reduction of time.

Mayor Higley asked if the City would be able to deliver this project 3 months early to the taxpaying citizens of West U if Council does something today. City Manager Beach said no, Phase I of the project

is scheduled to be complete by the end of the year – maybe November, which would only be a month earlier.

Councilmember Barnes said one of the options before Council is to consider not taking a 2 or 3 month delay between Phases I and II and commence Phase II work while Phase I is still underway, thereby bringing the entire project to completion earlier. City Manager Beach responded that if Council wants to commence Phase II right after the completion of Phase I, Phase II can start by the first of December if not sooner. He said if Council holds to the original plan the contract for Phase II won't be awarded until February 2021.

Councilmember Sobash asked if the reason for the original 60 to 90 day delay was so that Council could assess the system after Phase I was completed and have some time to gather more information if necessary. City Manager Beach responded that he recalls a comment from at least one councilmember to have a pause between the phases to see how the system is performing and to see if it is meeting its intended purpose. Councilmember Sobash then asked whether it is also to give Council a pause before authorizing additional funding for the next phase. He said he is trying to find the advantage for the timing and has had concerns during discussions about proceeding to Phase II without data to justify performance of the system.

Councilmember Sobash said he would like to see data on the variability between locations that will come with the rest of Phase I. In line with that question, Councilmember Barnes asked if there is need for a 90-day gap between Phase I and Phase II to get that kind of data or could the gap be shortened while still maintaining enough of a gap to appraise data from Phase I. City Manager Beach said as the cameras are installed they will be connected to the system. He said as it progresses more and more data will be captured and read. Chief Walker said staff will be evaluating the data throughout Phase I and if something is seen that will give them concern they definitely would not move on to Phase II until they were sure it had been addressed.

Regarding the delay in Phase I, Chief Walker said the infrastructure took a lot more time than anticipated but that is now behind them and they are ready to move forward at light speed.

Councilmember Barnes said if data will be captured all through Phase I what about a shortened timeframe, say maybe 30 days, between Phase I and Phase II. City Manager Beach responded that's always possible. He said additionally, once more locations are added staff can come back to Council and arrange meetings with the contractor and engineer to evaluate the data.

Councilmember Sobash said there are a couple of profiles of the cameras in locations that are higher traffic densities than others so the impact will be higher in those areas, so if samples are obtained from a couple of the different profiles staff will be able to ingest that and evaluate the results and extrapolate that to some extent without a POC for each one. He said if the City is smart about where data is being collected and the different profiles of the cameras to represent a sampling of what it would look like, that would be helpful.

City Manager Beach clarified that the POC was for only two locations, not all of them. He said the two locations were to be monitored from 30 to 90 days to show that the system is meeting the capture rate. The two locations are on Buffalo Speedway (just south of Bissonnet) and on Holcombe (between Vanderbilt and Belmont).

Councilmember Sobash confirmed with Chief Walker that all of the POC cameras have been fully operational since July 27th. City Manager Beach said that some have been operational since the beginning of June. He said staff will have the ongoing data as new locations come online. He said once there are 6 or 7 more locations, staff can come back to Council with the new information.

Councilmember Sobash asked if the data being collected by the POC is operationalized and being used by patrol officers now. Chief Walker said yes and no. He said the system is already hooked up to a database that will record license plates and provide information on wanted vehicles, but that information is not being pushed out to the patrol officers yet. In response to Councilmember Sobash's question as to when it will begin being used for patrolling, Chief Walker said when the officers are trained to use the system, which would take about a week or two after implementation.

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner said he wanted confirmation that he received the answer to his original question as to what is the advantage of having a 90-day gap between Phase I and Phase II. He said he would think it would be helpful so that Council can assess to confirm that the bulk of the project is operating properly and make any necessary changes during the 90 days. He asked if that's correct or if that much time not needed. Chief Walker said if by the end of Phase I there are any problems staff won't by any means recommend going forward to Phase II until comfortable that it is working as it should. He said by the end of Phase I staff will know really well if it's going to continue to work well or not and at that point waiting to award Phase II will completely be a Council decision.

Mayor Higley asked Chief Walker what his recommendation that Council do today. Chief Walker said a decision doesn't need to be made tonight and recommended that staff come back before Council maybe in October to discuss the comfort level. He said if staff and Council are comfortable at that time then a decision can made how fast to move forward at that point. City Manager Beach agreed with Chief Walker's recommendation.

In response to Councilmember Sobash's question as to when all the cameras will be installed for Phase I, Chief Walker responded he believes by the of November but the contractor is saying no later than December 31.

11. Adjourn Workshop and Reconvene Regular Meeting

Mayor Pro Tem Trautner adjourned the workshop at 7:25 p.m. and reconvened the regular meeting.

12. Adjourn Regular Meeting

With no other matter before the council, the meeting will adjourn.

Councilmember Barnes moved to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:25 p.m. Mayor Higley seconded the motion. **MOTION PASSED.**

Ayes: Higley, Trautner, Barnes, Lankford, Sobash
Noes: None
Absent: None

Audio of the Council Meeting is available in its entirety on the City's website. You can also contact the City Secretary's office for a copy of the audio and/or for copies of any presentations/handouts.

Prepared by: City Secretary Thelma A. Gilliam

Approved by City Council on: September 14, 2020