

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR WORKSHOP MEETING
CITY COUNCIL
BOCA RATON, FLORIDA
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2007
1:30 PM

The Workshop Meeting of the City Council of the City of Boca Raton, Florida was called to order by Mayor Abrams at 1:30 p.m.

ATTENDING THE MEETING WERE:

Mayor Steven L. Abrams
Deputy Mayor Susan Whelchel
Council Member M. J. Mike Arts
Council Member Peter R. Baronoff
Council Member Bill Hager

Also attending the meeting were:

City Manager Leif J. Ahnell
City Attorney Diana Grub Frieser
City Clerk Sharma Carannante

1. BOARD INTERVIEWS:

There were no positions advertised.

2. PUBLIC REQUESTS:

Richard Kruse referred to the NW 12th Avenue roadway project near Boca Raton Middle School and reported on several traffic issues occurring in the area including buses forced to make sharp turns, resulting in a deep ditch in one of the swales, and cars bypassing speed bumps by using bus and deceleration lanes to avoid slowing down. He acknowledged the problems in getting a consensus of the neighborhood to solve these issues and advocated turn lanes at NW 8 and NW 12th Streets. Responding to Council, the City Manager explained that the road widening and the intersection improvements could be completed independently, adding that the neighborhood has submitted a proposal to the City; a determination has yet to be made. However, he noted that, fiscally, widening the road would not be an option at this time due to substantial increases in construction costs; more than likely, only the intersection improvements would be completed.

3. REVIEW OF REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS:

a. Questions relating to the agenda.

(Consent Agenda Item No. 3.i. – Resolution No. 12-2007 / Four applications to the State of Florida, Department of Community Affairs, for the Emergency Management Preparedness and Assistance Trust Fund Grant Program, relating to Utility Services and Fire Rescue Services) Council Member Arts noted that substantial City matches would be required and questioned whether these items are coming out of the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP). Mr. Ahnell stated that the City would have to pay for the water/sewer project, regardless of whether the grants were awarded; however, the item was budgeted. Regarding the Fire Rescue applications, if the grants were approved, Fire Rescue would have to reduce or cut something out of their CIP budget.

(Consent Agenda Item No. 3.a.1 – Janitorial/Custodial Maintenance Service) Council Member Hager asked what criteria is applied when the City considers outsourcing in general. The City Manager explained that staff routinely conducts cost analyses to determine whether services should be provided in-house or not; various factors, including quality and cost, are reviewed. He stated that a cost analysis on this contract was performed and staff determined that the City could not provide the service more cheaply. Responding to Council Member Hager, Mr. Ahnell provided additional information related to core competency.

(Consent Agenda Item No. 3.h. – Resolution No. 11-2007 / Work Order No. 7 with Harvard Jolly, Inc., related to construction administration services for the Western Library) Mayor Abrams questioned whether authorization for the new contractor to complete the western library would be coming forward. Mr. Ahnell advised that the item would be brought forward tomorrow night.

4. FUTURE AGENDA MATTERS/ITEMS OF COUNCIL/PUBLIC CONCERN:

There were no items for consideration.

5. CITY MANAGER REPORTS:

There were no items for consideration.

6. CITY ATTORNEY REPORTS:

The City Attorney had nothing to report at this time.

7. MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEMBER REQUESTS AND REPORTS:

Deputy Mayor Whelchel commented positively on the Allianz Golf Tournament and then mentioned the upcoming Festival of the Arts Boca. Mayor Abrams extended compliments to Ms. Whelchel and Council Member Arts, both of whom serve on the Allianz Board of Directors, for their work on this event.

Council Member Hager referred to the property tax crisis faced by Florida residents and asked the City Manager for his thoughts. Mr. Ahnell advised that staff is monitoring the situation. The general consensus of the public is that governments need to be restricted in the monies that come in and the monies that they spend. A number of proposals have been suggested to restrict how much money government agencies can take in, including doubling the homestead exemption and providing for portability. Unfortunately, both options would primarily benefit existing long-term, homesteaded properties; it would likely exacerbate the problems facing unhomesteaded properties and businesses. In addition, it appears that any restrictions would apply only to cities and counties – the School District and other taxing agencies would be exempt. Mr. Ahnell explained that if the City does not have the ability to raise additional revenues, then services would have to be prioritized and no department would be “off the table.” All services and programs would be reviewed, cost analyses would be conducted, and privatization might also be considered. He concluded his comments by stating that staff would continue to closely monitor the situation; whatever takes place will probably go to the voters in November or in the summer, should a special election be deemed necessary.

Responding to Council, Mr. Ahnell stated that many entities are involved in this issue and have taken the position that they believe in property tax equity but do not support caps on local governments. During discussion, it was noted that currently there’s a number of households that pay no property tax; the additional exemption would significantly increase that number, and non-homesteaded properties would be in the position of taking up the slack. Mayor Abrams advised that the cities agree the tax system is not fair; however, local governments did not create this system. Cities raise revenues through property taxes because the State requires cities to do so. He noted there are many solutions that cities can embrace, and the legislators have indicated that everything is “on the table” including how the property appraiser values real estate. Another option is to use the sales tax, paid for in part by tourists and visitors, to pay down and provide property tax relief. Mayor Abrams also indicated that the increased homestead exemption could be supported if it was applied fairly; for example, applying any increase in the exemption on the second \$50,000 of assessed value so everyone pays something toward the services provided. Mayor Abrams concluded by stating that many entities are involved in this issue, and anything appearing on the ballot will pass; the concern is to ensure that the measure(s) is fair and that the cities are prepared and can control their own destinies.

During discussion, it was noted that the City of Boca Raton has the lowest millage rate of any city of comparable size in the State. Consequently, Boca Raton did not receive the windfall from increased property values that other cities did. Unfortunately, it appears that the City may be penalized for being fiscally responsible.

Council Member Hager referred to the upcoming organizational meeting in March and asked the City Attorney to circulate the law relating to organizational duty as well as a transcript of the discourse that occurred at last year's organizational meeting.

Council Member Baronoff provided positive commentary on the Allianz Golf Tournament and then spoke to the recent Branding Forum. He confirmed with the City Manager that a report on that forum would be presented at an upcoming meeting.

The regular workshop meeting of the City Council of the City of Boca Raton, Florida, adjourned at approximately 1:56 p.m. on Monday, February 12, 2007.

Vanessa Hines, Assistant City Clerk