

Meeting of: COLUMBIA HEIGHTS CITY COUNCIL
Date of Meeting: March 2, 2020
Time of Meeting: 7:00 pm
Location of Meeting: Council Chambers
Purpose of Meeting: Work Session

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL – The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

Present: Mayor Schmitt; Councilmembers Buesgens, Murzyn Jr., Novitsky and Williams

Also present: Lenny Austin, Police Chief; Kelli Bourgeois, City Manager; Renee Dougherty, Library Director; Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Erik Johnston, Police Captain; Dan O'Brien, Assistant Fire Chief; Charlie Thompson, Fire Chief

1. Columbia Heights Library Facility Use Policy

Bourgeois stated the last update of the Facility Use Policy was in 2018, restricts use to residents and nonprofits and has not been administered consistently by Library staff. She became aware of the lack of consistency a few weeks previously, had informed the Council and seeks counsel on which types of groups, residents or people could use the facility, as well as use outside of Library hours, fees to be charged and parking. The current options are: a) eliminate all public use of the Library's community rooms (history room, conference room and craft room); b) retain the current policy use and define "resident" and "nonprofit;" and c) open all the community rooms to all groups. Staff seeks clarification for options "b" and "c" regarding parking capacity, managing the community room after hours when a fee is charged or possibly charging a fee for all room reservations, which also requires additional custodial work. During after business hours, there are no staff present to monitor or address issues that may occur. Parking capacity may also be an issue if large groups using the community rooms take away parking availability from general Library users.

Dougherty clarified that the hourly fee for Library rooms increased to \$30.00 per hour beginning January 1 of 2020. Schmitt noted that the increased fee is not indicated in the current Facility Use Policy. Buesgens inquired whether an increase would cover the additional janitorial work. Bourgeois said charging across-the-board for room use would be more easily administered by Library staff, citing hourly staff rates of \$24.50 for administrative assistant and \$18.00 for custodial and does not factor in utilities, the building itself or the Library Director's time. The additional cost of \$15.00-20.00 per hour is just to generally empty garbage and vacuum the community room (the history room, craft room and conference room within the Library space itself is already taken care of by the custodial staff). Dougherty stated that custodial staff only comes into the facility after hours, so they are not present to clean up between meetings if rooms are being reserved.

Novitsky he would prefer that rooms not be rented after hours if staff cannot be present to monitor. He could support a small fee to help offset costs for the community room but none for the three study rooms and meeting room 132 because they would likely be used by small groups or residents.

Murzyn Jr. supports having someone to monitor and clean the community room if open after hours, determining what the cost would be per hour with those services.

Schmitt inquired about what problems the Library is having after hours, as it has been implied that it is a serious concern. Dougherty said she wouldn't separate the rentals during or after hours;

complaints have been made about parking capacity, renters not complying with the policy about food and set-up. She asked the Council whether room rental fees could be waived for nonprofits which may not have available funds but need meeting rooms or training space. Schmitt prefers that no fees be waived, the same reasonable fee (\$30.00) be maintained for the community room whether during or after hours but no fee for the smaller rooms. She said the main problem is back-to-back meetings being reserved, not allowing enough time for clean-up and set-up, and thinks room reservations should not be made beyond 9:00 pm or 10:00 pm (currently 11:00 pm).

Dougherty said the Library is hiring a custodial worker, whose hours would be 10:00 pm to 1:00 am. , though she didn't know if that timeframe would change.

Novitsky inquired as to what the repercussions are if a renter does not comply with the Facility Use Policy, and Dougherty said there are none currently. Novitsky suggested the Library consider a damage deposit to ensure the rooms would be returned to their normal state after events.

Dougherty said the Library is having some issues collecting fees for after-hour rental fees, and Buesgens said the rooms should not be rented until renters have paid their fees and Novitsky agreed. Schmitt asked for Hansen's input in how fees are collected for the Recreation Department. He said a \$100.00 damage deposit is collected for the larger park facilities, Sullivan and Huset, and the other outdoor park facilities have a rental fee but was unsure if they require a damage deposit. The damage deposit checks are destroyed if no damage has occurred. In addition, he said the Recreation Department staff provides the clean-up service between and after rental uses during the summer.

Regarding the parking issue, Novitsky thinks promoting the lot across Central or using the Fairview ramp would be appropriate as they are not too great a distance from the Library.

Schmitt suggested the Library create two Facility Use Policies, one specifically for the community room and a separate one for the other rooms. Dougherty added that reservations are not currently taken for the smaller rooms. Schmitt then said a policy be written up just for the community room with a rental fee of \$30.00 per hour.

Schmitt referenced the Facility Use Policy Responsibility form and said there should be an identification required to ensure the renter is the same one using the room. She also suggested a sign be placed on the room's refrigerator stating "not for public use," so there is no confusion about who is authorized to use it. Dougherty said the current policy excludes alcoholic beverages and food in the room, though exceptions have been made for City events. Schmitt said "light refreshments" need to be defined in the policy and the Library is responsible for enforcing their own policy.

Murzyn Jr. said the rental hours should be no longer than 10:00 pm, so that the new custodial person may begin clean-up at that time.

Dougherty asked for Council clarification about the groups authorized to rent the room.

Buesgens said it should be open to everyone as a public space, which taxpayers have paid for: “The policy that the Library facilities are open to organizations engaged in educational, cultural, intellectual, charitable, advocacy, civic, religious or political activities, as an example, of an inclusive statement of the limited uses of this facility.” Bourgeois suggested it be even broader, as it would then exclude residents and commercial businesses, and Buesgens agreed. Bourgeois said fundraising and commercial uses, where money would be exchanged, seem to be the two prohibited most often and everything else is open for public purpose. Schmitt thinks fundraising events should be prohibited and most libraries adhere to that. Novitsky agreed with no fundraising or commercial rentals and thinks all renters should pay the \$30.00 rental fee, also supporting that the facility not be rented unless it can be monitored by staff. Buesgens said limiting after-hour use could curtail some groups who need to meet after normal working hours. Schmitt said the room was created for after-hour use; and if there is a problem with clean-up, etc. from a particular renter, then the room should be denied a second time.

Murzyn Jr. and Williams agreed with Novitsky that a Library staff person should be present for after-hour rentals.

Further research is needed to compare the rental fee with other similar community rooms in the area.

Final Council consensus is that there needs to be a rental charge and damage deposit for any groups using the community room. Murzyn Jr. said the rental fee should include coverage for Library staff monitoring the rental at the time and custodial staff after the rental. Novitsky said another option might be to rent the room only once per day.

2. EAB Update

Hansen said the EAB update includes two items: 1) the grant award for EAB management for public side trees and 2) private side trees. With EAB now confirmed in the City, the focus is now on the private side trees, as the EAB for public side trees has been in place for about five years. The update also includes the City’s cost share impact and an alternative to that, laying out a preferred contractor management plan for EAB management.

One missing piece was getting tree removal contractors on board to get preferred pricing and then work directly with homeowners for private side ash tree removal, and that has now been done and include four: Nick’s Tree Service, Northeast Tree Inc., Arbortec Tree Service and Rainbow Treecare. Another piece is that there may be private ash trees that homeowners wish only to treat (after inspection by City forester) and not remove, and those contractors include Rainbow Treecare and YTS Tree Care, which would be fixed pricing.

Staff would like to move forward with the policy and then remove the 25% tree share for private side trees, as there are currently about 3,000 to 4,000 private side ash trees and would pass the City’s overall budget for ash trees.

Buesgens asked whether there is any financial assistance available to homeowners who wish to plant new trees. Hansen said, beginning this year, tree planting beds are being planted, which may be available to the public in containers after growth in public parks.

Hansen would like to bring before the Council a resolution, as the current policy set in 1975 for elms is not clear.

Schmitt inquired about how much is budgeted for City and boulevard tree replacements, and Hansen said \$350.00 is budgeted per public side tree removal (averaging 12-15" diameter tree) and the approximate budget for tree replacements is about \$11,000.00 range and the recent one-time \$100,000.00 grant award over a three-year period will help with publicly-owned tree removal and replacements. In recent years, the average is 100 trees replaced annually.

Schmitt said the main goal is to remove the diseased trees and the cost to homeowners for removing those trees would be costly. Hansen added that when one ash tree is diseased, all nearby ash trees will succumb as well.

3. Selection of Vendor and Update on UAV Purchase

Austin said Police, Fire and Public Works have been working on the UAV program over the last few months and have come up with a purchase plan that will be presented to the Council on the next Consent Agenda.

For the Police Department, Austin said the UAV will be used primarily for emergency incidents involving things such as searches of suspects involved in crimes of violence as well as high-risk situations. Other uses will be scenarios involving missing persons, crime scene mapping and photos, and other high-risk situations. He said there is currently legislation being drafted at the State level regarding the use of UAVs, in terms of law enforcement use, and so the policy in place prior to going operational with the UAV will be in line with whatever is laid out at the State level.

For the Fire Department, Thompson said the drone would be used for reconnaissance during fire situations, overhead shots during cause and origin (such as for suspected arsons), preplanning target areas, training events and emergency management (damage assessment).

For Public Works, Hansen said the UAV would be very helpful in asset management (infrastructure and buildings), thermal imaging, mapping public improvements and tree inventory.

Schmitt inquired about privacy concerns for the public, and Austin said legislation is being processed regarding when law enforcement may use UAVs. He said privacy is a major concern and the City's policy would be modeled to protect the privacy of citizens as much as possible.

Johnston said data management would be part of the policy as well. He described the drone would carry two cameras or a camera and spotlight, depending on the configuration. The most expensive part of the project is a thermal camera, which would be a third of the project cost, and has heated batteries that would allow it work in the Minnesota climate.

He said two drone vendors were contacted, but only Maverick Drones responded with a quote. Staff from Police, Fire and Public Works visited their site and determined their drone suited the City's needs, one large and one small for tighter areas. Of the \$47,200.00 budgeted, \$44,400.00 would go towards the drones and the remaining set aside for training purposes. Drones would be stored in cases likely within the Public Safety building.

Buesgens inquired about when the drones would be delivered. Johnston said international shipping may be a factor, now with the coronavirus situation, but said the target date is around June of this year.

4. Medical Dispatch Calls for Service

Thompson said, following the Public Safety Staffing Study, staff recommended the Fire Chief work with the City Council to establish a priority list of medical calls that the firefighters respond to based on emergency priority dispatching codes. Working with the Anoka County Dispatch, a mutual agreement was made as to how, when and what types of calls should be considered for removal from the dispatch service call list. In 2009, the Fire Department responded to 1,694 medical calls for service and 2,214 in 2019. Some general medical calls included elderly female not feeling well, person tired and can't go to sleep, female in 1950s with stomach pain, 17-year-old male feeling like he may pass out, rectal bleeds and 81-year-old needing help to get up in a nursing home. Analysis is being made on medical calls, lifting assists and medical alarms because of the amount of false alarms being received. The Fire Department will respond to all necessary calls, but approximately 1,400 calls could be decreased for those calls deemed non-emergency.

O'Brien said the goal would be to filter out such general medical calls such as flu symptoms, nosebleeds, headaches, nontraumatic back pain, certain types of behavioral emergencies and lift assist in care facilities (who have staff on hand). He described the dispatching service process and that there are checks-and-balances in place.

Buesgens asked if the issue has been addressed for Crestview, as their staff has not been allowed to assist with lifting. O'Brien said their campus has a nursing home, assisted living with full-time staff, and two senior apartment buildings, assisted by the Fire Department.

Thompson said he is confident the new policy is in line and will work well.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Novitsky, to adjourn. All Ayes, Motion Carried.

Meeting adjourned at 8:12 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Nicole Tingley, City Clerk/Council Secretary