MINUTES
City Council Public Works & Utilities Committee

Wednesday, February 7, 2024 – 3:30 PM
City Council Chambers

Members Present:	Mac Morrow, Chair, Council Member Lauren Wise, Vice-Chair, Council Member Owen Carson, Citizen Member Mayor Maureen Copelof, Ex-Officio
Staff Present:	Wilson Hooper, City Manager Wesley Shook, Acting Public Works Director Dennis Richardson, Water Treatment Plan Supervisor Aaron Winans, WWTP Staff Becky McCann, Communications Coordinator
Guests:	Brian Wright, AECOM (via Zoom)

A. Welcome and Call to Order

Committee Chair Mac Morrow called the meeting to order at 3:31 pm.

B. Certification of Quorum

Communications Coordinator Becky McCann certified that a quorum was present.

C. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Mr. Wise, seconded by Mr. Carson to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

D. Approval of Minutes

1. January 3, 2024 Meeting

Motion by Mr. Carson, seconded by Mr. Wise to approve the minutes of the January 3, 2024 meeting as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

E. Engineering Firm Selection Criteria Discussion

Mr. Hooper informed the committee that the deadline to apply for the RFQ was yesterday at 5 pm. This morning, when I came into the office, we had four eligible submissions: one from CDM Smith, one from McKim and Creed, one from KCI, and one from Goodwyn Mills Cawood. He mentioned that this number would be

manageable for interviewing all firms. Mr. Hooper asked the committee if they would be interested in interviewing all the eligible firms.

The Committee reached a consensus that they would be interested in interviewing all four firms.

Mr. Hooper communicated that he wanted to receive feedback from the committee regarding what we should focus on, our priorities, and what criteria we should use when interviewing the firms.

Mr. Wright said that it would be important when interviewing firms in their ability to find the City funds and help acquire the fund to complete the project. Mr. Wright said that if all the firms have the capability and credentials to do the work then the committee should focus on experience with the City working with the firm and the people who work there.

Mr. Morrow said that some of the criteria for selecting a professional engineering firm are similar in that they relate to experience. However, I do think that the experience of the engineering staff and if we have worked with them in the past is important. He said that sometimes it may be the same firm that assists on a project, but it may be different engineers from various offices.

Mr. Hooper mentioned that the CDM Smith engineer that is helping us with the pump station project currently is based out of Greenville.

Mr. Carson asked in the RFQ, did the City layout a structure for how the selection would be made.

Mr. Wright said that we listed the criteria, but we did not say how it would be weighted.

Mr. Wise informed the committee that it will be important to select an engineering firm that has experience with projects similar to ours and all of its nuances both regionally with our lack of land and with finding funding is going to be key. He said, I am not sure how much locality will play into our decision making.

Mr. Carson said its more important for a firm to demonstrate that they have worked on projects in our region regardless of where they are from or based.

Mr. Hooper stated that he considers locality in terms of a customer service approach. He explained that if the firm were based in Asheville, it would be much more accessible than a firm located in Wilmington, for example.

Mr. Wright mentioned that while firms were asked to provide references for some of their projects, locality could be another factor weighing in on the decision-making process.

Mr. Wise asked, what do you think these firms are going to want to hear from us.

Mr. Wright responded the firms are going to want to understand how the project will be contracted, but it's not going to be that important at this point because we can work around contractual items. However, since we are asking for help to find funding, the firms will want to know if we have the funds to pay for this portion of the project.

Mr. Hooper informed the committee that discussions with the State have addressed the conditions that come with the $13 million from them. Notably, there are a couple, one concerning how much extra capacity we are allowed to purchase, and the other regarding the percentage of the State funds we can allocate to preconstruction costs. Mr. Hooper mentioned that he believes it is around 15% of the $13 million.

Mr. Wright added that the engineering firm will likely be interested in knowing if we want to expand the services to the County because it would expand the service area.

Mr. Hooper mentioned that we have discussed with the County at a very high level what it would take to make this a regional-wide system, but we have not specifically asked them if they would be willing to fund it.

Mr. Wise inquired how they are going to determine the capacity for which the County is willing to help fund.

Mr. Wright responded, 'It is going to be a challenge because we are not sure whether we want to build fifty years of capacity. It will also be interesting to see the history and experience the firms have working through the processes of alternatives. The most important question will be to know what we need to build before we start looking at alternatives of how to build it. Hearing about the firm's experience that they have had with other entities will be important.

Mr. Morrow asked if this study would be independent of water capacity.

Mr. Hooper explained, 'When I consult with the selected firm, I intend to tell them we need to increase capacity and to build the plant in such a way that if the County wants to tap on in the future, they can. The ability to project flows, creativity, insight related to the project, and funding would all be important factors. But most importantly, the priorities are experience, experience with similar regional projects, and developing ideas from scratch.' Mr. Hooper then asked the committee if they would like to interview all four firms on Wednesday, March 6th, and possibly start the meeting earlier.

Mr. Wright suggested that the committee may want to limit the amount of time given to the engineering firms to present and specify the topics we would like them to focus on.

Mr. Hooper proposed meeting at 12:30 PM to interview all four firms. He asked the committee if they would like to use scorecards or simply hear the presentations and then discuss among ourselves to decide on a firm.

Mr. Carson shared that, in his experience, his firm is always curious to know who is on the selection committee and how their process works. It is also helpful to have a scoring rubric in case the firm that was not selected calls and has questions about why they weren't selected.

Mr. Wright inquired whether the presentations will be over Zoom or in person.

Mr. Hooper responded, stating that the firms will be presenting in person, but Mr. Wright can participate through Zoom if he prefers.

Mr. Carson emphasized that the most unknown item, and where they are likely to be asked a lot of questions, will be the service area of the Wastewater Treatment Plant. From their perspective, it will be difficult to navigate. He suggested considering a question related to projections: how much more will the study phase cost as we scale up the service area.

Mr. Wright informed the committee that there are several ways to make projections. You can use census data to project population growth, but that is not as challenging as projecting the area you are going to serve. The larger and more undeveloped the area, the more difficult it will be to predict future growth. Additionally, you may want to consider the current method of dealing with sludge and whether you want to change it in the future. That may be something you want to include in your considerations.

Mr. Hooper stated that he will send a notice to the four firms, informing them that we would like to interview them in the afternoon of Wednesday, March 6th, and to standby for more information. He mentioned that Mr. Wright and himself will work together to develop a scoring rubric reflecting the committee's priorities. We will circulate that to the committee in the next few weeks before the interviews take place. Once the rubric is completed, we will inform the firms so they understand the evaluation process.

Mayor Copelof expressed concern about involving the County, as it often leads to delays. She emphasized the importance of balancing time considerations and keeping the project moving forward without unnecessary delays.

Mr. Wise mentioned that he would like a record to show that we attempted to reach out to the County. If they wish to participate, that's fine, but if they choose not to, I would like the record to reflect that.

Mr. Hooper responded, we first need to formally invite them to a discussion, and then we can proceed from there.

Mr. Morrow added, we will also need to know the costs involved.

F. Additional Comments

Mr. Hooper mentioned that at the next Public Works Committee meeting in April, there's an item that was raised in another committee but has broader implications. The item pertains to criteria for closing an in-use right-of-way at the request of a citizen. Currently, we have a procedure for closing an out-of-use right-of-way, but we've received a request from a citizen regarding a trail, so we need to create a procedure for such cases.

Mr. Winans informed the committee that the new chemicals being used at the Wastewater Treatment Plant are performing well. We have requested an additional month to allow for further testing.

G. Set Date for Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Public Works & Utilities Committee was scheduled for Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.

H. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:33 p.m.

Minutes Approved: March 6, 2024

X Mac Morrow

Mac Morrow
Chair, Council Member

X

Alex Shepherd
Assistant to the City Manager