



**CITY OF LA MARQUE
CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MINUTES
of
July 31, 2023**

City Council Special Minutes of the City of La Marque Budget Workshop held on Monday, July 31, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. at 1109-B Bayou Road:

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Mayor Bell called the meeting to order at 10:00am.

2. ROLL CALL

Present:

Keith Bell, Mayor

Joe Compian, Mayor Pro Tem, District B

James Ross, Councilmember District D

Zoom:

Kimberly Yancy, Councilmember District A - 450 Summer St., Boston, MA 02210

Michael Carlson, Councilmember District C - 208 Washington St., Moser, OR

Other Staff:

Cesar Garcia, City Manager

Rick Sailer, Director of Public Works

Susie Kou, Director of Finance

David Merryman, La Marque Fire Chief

Randall Aragon, La Marque Police Chief

Gilberto Rodriguez, Sergeant, La Marque Police Department

Forrest Gandy, Lieutenant, La Marque Police Department

3. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Invocation led by Mayor Bell and Councilmember Ross led the Pledge.

4. NEW BUSINESS

Items presented to the Council for discussion and possible action:

- 4.1. Review and Discuss Proposed Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Departmental Budgets and all Funds

Fire Department

Fire Chief David Merryman presented on behalf of the La Marque Fire Department. He shared the diversity report covering multiple demographics and the certifications required for EMTs, Captains, Engineers, and Fire Marshal. He also discussed the policy involved with hiring and promotions and the certifications that each level must complete within the first 90 days.

Chief Merryman discussed the budget requests of adjusting the uniform budget due to new hires and need to maintain their equipment to remain compliant with State regulations.

Council questioned why there was a zero amount in the communications line item of the Fire Department Budget. Chief Merryman clarified that it is a city-wide cost that is handled by IT. Council requested a breakdown of communications costs to see the trends and if it should be broken down by department.

Council asked for the description of the Deputy Fire Chief's role. Chief Merryman explained that he oversees day-to-day operations, maintenance of trucks, and plays a major role in Emergency Management Operations.

Council asked for a separate description of the Fire Marshal's role. Chief Merryman stated that the Fire Marshal is contacted for any cause and origin that may need to be investigated as an act of arson. The Fire Marshal is also in charge of filing the criminal charges and working with law enforcement throughout the case. The Fire Marshal is also in charge of the smoke detector program for the city.

Council requested information about the role of the EMS Captain. Chief Merryman indicated that this role is specific for anything medical related and is the point of contact for the city's medical director. The EMS Captain must maintain the DEA License and all EMS State licenses and help with all continuing education for EMS certifications.

Chief Merryman then stated the two priorities for this budget year. His first priority is to increase staff and continue retention efforts. His second priority is to remount a third ambulance to his current fleet to balance out the current aging of the vehicles and costs for repairs. Council questioned why he was asking for a third captain to be assigned to which Chief Merryman countered with each station has three shifts and to have a captain on each shift would be incredibly beneficial to set tone and morale. He noted that it is the captain's responsibility to ensure that everyone knows their part and knows how to do it smoothly and effectively.

Council and Chief Merryman reviewed the numbers and there was a discrepancy in the calculations provided by the Fire Department. Chief Merryman apologized for the error and said he would return at a later date with the updated information.

Parks

Parks board members Mike "Rock" Bock and Tonia Griffin presented information pertaining to the last fiscal year and the projects they want to see accounted for in the current fiscal year's budget. Mr. Bock indicated that since the creation of the

parks department under Public Works, the majority of their requests go through Rick Sailer.

Ms. Griffin highlighted several items the Parks Board completed in the previous fiscal year. The board has now created a Parks and Recreation social media page which focuses on marketing the parks throughout the city. This has allowed citizen participation, to which she announced that many are pleased with the updates provided through their website. She shared that the board members frequently go out to the parks and help with the maintenance logs. She stated the board has created a log with information for each park that needs maintenance.

Council indicated that the city needs to do a better job with the parks and noted their frustration with the lack of communication between the Parks Board, Public Works, and Council. Council then asked about the current allocation of \$30,000 to the parks. Public Works Director Rick Sailer stated that the budget has significantly increased since 2021 and now the city is contributing resources such as staff and maintenance. Director Sailer also indicated that the \$2 mandatory park fee with the utility bills has been very well supported but only brings in approximately \$6,000 per year.

Council advocated for training opportunities for the board members and commissioners. The budget showed a line item for \$1,000 for conventions and travel budget and \$250 for manuals and subscriptions. Director Sailer stated that this budget is strictly for the paid staff.

Council stated the park equipment is dilapidated and needs repairs or replacement. As part of the Safe City Initiative, it is the city's number one focus to ensure safety within the parks. Other issues noted were poor lighting, request for higher police presence to deter vandalism, need for community engagement to beautify the parks, improve the softball fields, and proper fencing. The City is looking at liability issues if the dilapidated areas are not fixed. Council expressed their disappointment over the lack of work done for the parks and should be taking much better care of city owned property.

Council then recommended that the Parks maintenance budget be increased to \$40,000 for this fiscal year and to continue looking for grant funds and use current grant funds to update the parks.

Police Department

Chief Randall Aragon gave a presentation showing the accomplishments of the department over the past fiscal year, discussed the crime rate statistics, and presented the goals for the department in the upcoming fiscal year. The goals for the 2023 - 2024 fiscal year are to continue to develop a positive organization culture in the department, continue the community policing efforts, and continuing to work on the CompStat program. These goals are all helping with preventing and controlling crime.

Chief Aragon also discussed the current staffing needs and items needed by the department. He presented a total of 17 requests, all in order based on needs. These

requests included building and storage needs, cameras and computer equipment for police vehicles, and personnel matters.

Mayor asked about vehicle acquisition. Chief Aragon stated that ten vehicles were ordered in 2021, however only four came in and waiting on cameras. The other six vehicles are not even through manufacturing. Chief Aragon emphasized the need the vehicles and asked for an additional 5 vehicles to cover patrols and undercover while waiting on the six vehicles that the city already purchased.

Mayor Bell questioned Chief Aragon about the Executive Assistant position and asked for clarity from the City Manager. City Manager Garcia stated that there is only one Executive Assistant on staff and all other departments have an Administrative Assistant. Chief Aragon stated that the mental challenges and decision making, as well as service to all on the Police Department, handling sensitive information and taking on special events as part of her role as his reasons for making the request to change his current assistant's title to receive more pay. Councilmember Ross requested to change the position to a straight salary instead of hourly pay, which Chief Aragon supported. Mayor stated that it is in the hands of the City Manager to decide if there should be a change from hourly to salary on this specific position.

Council also discussed the need for the records retention project and discussed the cost of \$178,000 for the creation of electronic files. Sergeant Gilberto Rodriguez of the La Marque Police Department noted that records have different timeframes to be destroyed and most records must remain for 75 years after the accused person's death. Chief Aragon suggested moving the police records to Building A.

Mayor Bell emphasized his support for adding drones and K9 officers to the police force but stated he is not seeing the need for records needing a new building at this time.

Financial Audit

Mr. Carr with BrooksWatson & Co. presented the current information from the ongoing audit and noted that they are on track for an unmodified opinion. He clarified that this means that this report is the highest opinion that the firm can give and there are no material mistakes or errors in the information provided by the city. The final report for the Audit is expected to be presented at the next Council meeting.

Council discussed the current amortization schedule and the current status of bonds with special consideration for bonds with uncommitted balances. City Manager Garcia confirmed that some of the funds are earmarked for current projects, including sanitary sewer repairs that will cost approximately \$110,000, and the Westlawn Drainage Project that is estimated at \$600,000.

Yancy asked about the \$750,000 for renovations of municipal buildings and verified that the request for \$550,000 for Police Department facilities were included in this amount. City Manager Garcia confirmed and also explained that this account also helped with repairs from Hurricane Harvey to complete necessary work from damages to the fire station and City Hall. He also noted that there are other

structures and the service center that will also be utilizing the funds from this account.

Mayor Pro Tem Compian commented that if funds haven't been used within 5 years, the uncommitted funds can be used to pay down debt. Finance Director Kou stated that the city refinanced the bonds in 2017 due to the market. She also shared that the original debt issuance is what is listed on the reports but has changed since the city financed in 2017.

Mayor Bell requested the need clarity on grant funds vs certified funds.

Finance Director Kou shared that all federal funds are under federal audits as these funds may be coming from multiple agencies, and the city has five calendar days to pay federal grants upon completion of work in order to qualify for the grant funds and not have to pay the funds back. She stated that the city must have the money available and ensure no other commitments to these funds.

Mayor Bell reemphasized that the city hires an auditor but also federal government has an auditor to ensure federal funds are being used correctly. Mayor also asked about the current bonds and the committed amounts the city needs to consider for projects. City Manager Garcia indicated that \$600,000 is currently committed for a GLO match for the Westlawn Drainage Project and an additional \$110,000 is committed to sanitary sewer repairs, which leaves the city with approximately \$2.3 million available for utility system infrastructure, wastewater treatment plant renovations, and other needs.

City Manager Garcia, Finance Director Kou, and Council also discussed ARPA funds. City Manager Garcia stated that these are federal funds that are less restrictive than other grants. The city has requested community input and see what is applicable. Director Kou noted that the ARPA funds are currently invested and earning 5% interest but are very liquid.

City Manager's Office

Mayor Bell asked for further discussion regarding the request from the City Manager's budget for a Project Manager and Program Coordinator. Based on observations, Mayor Bell stated that he would not feel comfortable with these roles at this time but rather would like to see an additional supervisory role in the City Manager's Office. He emphasized that it is not that the City Manager is doing a poor job but rather the current role oversees 12 departments and does not want to keep adding to that number. Councilmember Yancy agreed with Mayor's stance for assistance in City Manager's Office and suggested an Assistant City Manager role.

City Manager Garcia indicated that the final package for the 2023 - 2024 budget will be distributed to council on August 1, 2023.

NO ACTION TAKEN

5. EXECUTIVE SESSION

The City Council for the City of La Marque, Texas reserves the right to adjourn into executive session at any time during this meeting to discuss any of the matters listed above, as authorized by the Texas Government Code Section 551.071 (Consultation with Attorney), 551.072(Deliberations about Real Property), 551.073 (Deliberations about Gifts and Donations), 551.074 (Personnel Matters), 551.076 (Deliberations about Security Devices), and 551.087 (Economic Development)

NO EXECUTIVE SESSION

6. ACTIONS TAKEN FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION

7. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Compian made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Ross seconded.
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

***Meeting was adjourned at 4:41 p.m.*

Keith Bell

Mayor

ATTEST

Kierra K. Nance, TRMC

City Clerk