

September 7, 2021 Work Session

The City Council of the City of Idaho Falls met in Council Work Session, Tuesday, September 7, 2021, in the Council Chambers in the City Annex Building located at 680 Park Avenue in Idaho Falls, Idaho at 3:00 p.m.

Call to Order and Roll Call:

There were present:

Mayor Rebecca L. Noah Casper
Council President Michelle Ziel-Dingman
Councilor John Radford
Councilor Jim Freeman
Councilor Jim Francis
Councilor Lisa Burtenshaw

Absent:

Councilor Thomas Hally

Also present:

Pamela Alexander, Municipal Services Director
Josh Roos, Treasurer
Eric Day, Division Fire Chief
Brad Cramer, Community Development Services Director
Kerry Beutler, Community Development Services Assistant Planning Director
Duane Nelson, Fire Chief
Scott Grimmett, Fire Marshal
Ryan Tew, Human Resources Director
Michael Kirkham, Assistant City Attorney
Randy Fife, City Attorney
Kathy Hampton, City Clerk

Mayor Casper announced a vacancy in the City Clerk's Office, noting this position has been advertised for replacement.

Liaison Reports and Councilmember Concerns:

Council President Dingman had no items to report.

Councilor Burtenshaw stated discussion is occurring with Dustin Pancheri and the Parks and Recreation (P&R) Department regarding the use of Noise Park.

Councilor Freeman announced the splash pad is open.

Councilor Francis stated, per the Idaho Falls Police Department (IFPD), the School Resource Officer (SRO) agreement and the Project Underground Railroad grant will be presented for Council approval in the near future.

Councilor Radford stated the bike path map has been posted on the city's website, he believes a pamphlet regarding the bike path may also be available at the Chamber of Commerce. He also briefly reviewed upcoming Imagine IF events.

Review: Ambulance Collections and Write-offs:

Mayor Casper indicated write-offs occur on an annual basis, with the ambulance account being the largest write-off. She stated ambulance collections were not performing well, therefore, Director Alexander created an inter-

September 7, 2021 Work Session

departmental committee that has assisted with the ambulance accounts which have resulted in improvements. Director Alexander noted there was a request in the previous year for call volume and write-off comparison. She also noted Division Chief Day, as a co-chair of the committee, reviews the medical necessity of all claims. Division Chief Day reviewed ambulance call volume from 2006-2020, stating the number of calls has doubled in this timeframe. He also reviewed ambulance write-offs by year and call volume, noting the Medicaid expansion pushed more individuals out of the insurance column into the Medicaid column. Director Alexander stated electronic billing did not occur prior to 2014, and any claims that were missing information were sent back to the paramedic. She also stated the city entered into a contract with Whitman in 2014 with all billing occurring electronically which stream-lined the process. She indicated during this time the majority of claims were stale due to address issues. Director Alexander reviewed combined totals of ambulance write-offs – Medicare-52%, Medicaid-26%, contractual (Division Chief Day explained the facility contracts)-5%, collection agency-15%, and hardships-0.2%. Division Chief Day stated Medicare and Medicaid are non-negotiable federally mandated rates and the city has no control over those particular rates. Director Alexander stated a Request for Proposal (RFP) was submitted with a contract awarded to Professional Credit in 2016. She briefly reviewed the Professional Credit active platform. She also stated Professional Credit collects in all states, and has been collecting 11-12% on new accounts. She noted there is a hardship policy, monthly committee meetings, and quarterly meetings with Professional Credit. She recognized the committee members. Director Alexander briefly reviewed the collection industry timelines. She stated the total write-off request amounts to \$2,547,555.25, which is approximately \$93,000 less than the previous year. Division Chief Day stated all avenues are being pursued to collect on ambulance billing, including collection from automobile insurance. Per Councilor Freeman, Division Chief Day stated disputes are typically an educational process. Director Alexander clarified an individuals' insurance may not include coverage for ambulance. General discussion followed regarding the catch up of previous claims, and the Medicare expansion. Division Chief Day stated the percentage of Medicare patients has increased up to 21% while there are fewer patients in the Medicaid column. He explained the Ground Emergency Medical Transport (GEMT) stating this is a program through Medicare that reimburses transport agencies for the difference between the cost to provide the service and what Medicaid actually pays. He indicated this program will be looked at by several entities once passed by the legislation, and he believes this will have a huge impact. He also indicated the city is close to 50% of cost of what Medicaid pays. Mayor Casper believes when Medicare and Medicaid are mixed with the other write-offs, it appears the city is not being effective with collection methods. She questioned if these accounts should be split. Director Alexander stated the committee has been focused on the categories although she indicated the charts could be adjusted. Division Chief Day stated actual cost for services must be provided for the GEMT, and actual costs are closely-lined with the charges independent of payers. He also stated studies are performed with other departments to ensure the city is comparable with charges. Councilor Burtenshaw believes the city never expected to collect Medicare and Medicaid, therefore the collection rate appears to be 85%. Councilor Freeman believes the service provided is a bargain for the citizens. Per Councilor Radford, Mr. Fife is unsure if the rate could be adjusted for eligibility for the service. Mayor Casper stated this item will be included on the September 9 City Council Meeting agenda.

Discussion: Imagine IF:

Director Cramer stated this has been a collaborative effort, he expressed his appreciation to all those involved. He also stated draft documents will be available in the near future. He reviewed current and upcoming milestones stating the plan is anticipated to go before the Council late in the year, depending on the feedback. He noted plans are continuing to change and the document will change and grow as well. Director Cramer reviewed the document with general discussion throughout:

September 7, 2021 Work Session

Introduction – a connection to the past and how that affects the future. Director Cramer stated one of the aspects for an update was the growth that Idaho Falls is experiencing and the concerns heard from the community that Idaho Falls will lose who it is as a city. He indicated there is a brief summary of the growth period and timeline of Idaho Falls that indicates the town uses its resources in innovative ways, including people. The introduction also ties the land with the agricultural roots, ensuring those historical aspects remain true. Director Cramer stated the 17 plan elements that are required by the State are included in each section, and a graph regarding the legal aspect is included in that specific section. He also stated staff worked hard to tie this plan to the Strategic Plan with help from Agnew Beck. He noted the quotes from the Strategic Plan shows how directly related the plans are. Director Cramer stated this will address what developers and neighbors need to know as development applications come forward. The plan specifically references City Action Teams, which will be used to tackle issues raised by the community. The plan also describes how planning needs to change. Director Cramer explained the ‘triangle’ indicating the widest part refers to the Comprehensive Plan and Map and the triangle gets narrower with policies, projects, and programs and the less discretion there is as a city (Zoning and Subdivision Codes, and Development Applications).

Methodology – this includes background research, data, trends, and economic. Staff also conducted department interviews for importance and concerns which Director Cramer believes lead to some good conversations. He is hopeful the departments feel represented. Director Cramer stated community engagement occurred as staff wanted to ensure the community drove conversations with issues they felt were going on in the city. He also stated the first survey has been reported on, the second survey received nearly 400 responses, and public comment will continue throughout the adoption process.

Growth Philosophy – defines the philosophy on how the city grows. Director Cramer stated staff looked at the growth patterns and rates from the 2020 Census and then reviewed how the population and land grew. He reported that based on the trends there were three (3) potential scenarios: stay at the same rate of growth; accelerated rate; and repeat of 1950-1960 where the population doubled. He indicated if the population stayed the same by 2030 there would be approximately 74,000 people, accelerated would be 84,000, and doubled would be 123,000. He explained if the rate of land consumption stayed on course the amount of land that would be required is a large number. Director Cramer stated discussions have been occurring for years on how to focus growth inward, and infill has been working. He also stated staff is proposing to move into Urban Transects, versus low- or high-density areas, that are more descriptive of what is actually happening on the land. The proposed transects are Parks and Open Space, Future Development, Industrial, Suburban, General Urban, Mixed-Use Centers and Corridors, Urban Core, and Special Use. Director Cramer believes this change will have a much broader description. He displayed examples of existing developments as well as a proposed map with a reduction in the overall boundary which was committed to in the Area of Impact (AOI) discussions. He also believes the proposed plan map is simpler, and is more diverse.

Imagining IF – City-wide Housing. Director Cramer identified five (5) themes. He stated staff focused on Accountable Implementation that has been outlined as best practice by the American Planning Association Document. He noted the plan has very few directives and timetables. He explained the tables in each section.

Geography – Director Cramer stated staff preferred this to be simple, manageable, and general. He also stated staff wanted to have more people involved so they had large geographic areas. He believes the city needs to continue to engage in these areas, and one of the recommendations is to have a consistent and robust engagement program with neighbors. He indicated this program will be ongoing for the next 2-3 years. He also indicated the draft proposal is a starting point and only contains three (3) themes instead of five (5) themes including housing, transportation

September 7, 2021 Work Session

and connectivity, and community health. These plans will have tables, actions, issues, objectives, and area maps. Director Cramer displayed and explained Area 3. He stated staff intends to do an annual review, adding any major updates would occur every 3-5 years instead of 7-10 years. Per Councilor Freeman, Director Cramer reviewed departmental discussions and contributions. Per Councilor Radford, Director Cramer stated he learned that every single neighborhood in the city loves accessory dwellings. He believes this may be due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) as multi-generational housing has increased. Mr. Beutler noted there was feedback regarding block parties. He stated the plan stresses how important neighborhoods are to maintain the identity as a city and keep the smaller town values. Mayor Casper believes the engagement process was interesting and effective, although she expressed her concern for the community expecting quick results as this was information only at this time. Per Mayor Casper, Director Cramer stated the second survey addressed citizens had been heard in the first survey, addressed the concerns raised, listed actions that will address the concerns, and asked citizens if the city had gotten their concerns correctly addressed and heard. He believes there will be individuals that will always feel they are not heard. Brief discussion followed regarding Rental Assistance Advocacy Groups. Per Mayor Casper, Director Cramer stated staff intends to explore, investigate, or study. He believes this could be the starting point. Director Cramer agrees that resources available to do something might not be available, but he feels that it deserves to be explored, or studied. Per Councilor Freeman, Director Cramer stated the area map currently works for big data collection, there is a specific plan for downtown and south downtown, and it would make sense to create a whole section for each area like the lettered streets. Councilor Radford stated he attended some of the meetings and he believes there is pride and identity around a name of an area. Councilor Francis believes it may be less divisive not to label neighborhoods as they are diverse in their own way. Council President Dingman believes homeowners and renters wants the maximum flexibility. She also believes higher-density residential is going to increase and the city will see an increased amount of pushback from individuals who are used to single family (R1) neighborhoods, while the same time hearing from residents stating that a new “starter home” doesn’t exist. She indicated, per the upcoming neighborhood meeting discussion, it has been shown there is less conflict when developers can speak to neighbors, however, there is tension when determining what is and is not Council’s role. Mayor Casper questioned how to facilitate growth outside of the AOI boundaries. Director Cramer stated this is addressed by state law, and owner-initiated cities can grow past their AOI. Per Mayor Casper, Director Cramer stated conversations with the county regarding the city’s Comprehensive Plan would occur before it gets to Council. He noted the advisory committee includes the county. Brief discussion followed regarding neighborhood block parties. Councilor Burtenshaw stated people desire to have the look and feel of Idaho Falls which will come down to having the walkable livable neighborhoods, not just miles and miles of walls. Per Councilor Burtenshaw, Director Cramer stated staff interacts regularly with developers regarding infrastructure, realizing there are challenges. Brief comments followed.

Discussion: Requirement of Neighborhood Meetings Proposal:

Director Cramer stated the proposed ordinance is largely based on a guidebook developed several years ago that is handed out to developers. The guidebook is based on research from other Idaho cities. Director Cramer stated neighborhood meetings would be required as part of an application for preliminary plat, planned unit development, rezoning, or conditional use permit. He also stated a neighborhood meeting would be required prior to submittal of an application. He reviewed Section 6 of the proposed ordinance, noting concerns from a neighborhood meeting must be addressed. Director Cramer emphasized, due to the added time to the process, a public hearing would no longer be required at the city level for a preliminary plat, unless a petition is signed per Section 2 of the proposed ordinance. He believes those hearings are not effective and are not accomplishing what they were originally intended to do. He also believes this proposed ordinance will save time in some areas while adding time in other areas. Councilor Radford expressed his concern when the land use map is changed. Mr. Fife stated the law is set up so individuals should not have a say for regulations per the legislation. He believes there is due process with the

September 7, 2021 Work Session

expectation of predictability. He noted conditions could be added if they are reasonable, however, because rules are set in the subdivision codes the Council doesn't have to decide what is law. He stated any changes for input would require legislative action. He also stated a neighborhood meeting adds a process that does not currently exist. Per Councilor Francis, Director Cramer stated public hearings are required for quasi-judicial items. He also stated preliminary plat hearings are not required by state law. He noted the city chose to hold public hearings for preliminary plats to try and get the neighborhood meeting concept started. Also per Councilor Francis, Director Cramer stated city staff does not intend to attend the neighborhood meetings. He also stated the public hearing notice is 300', which comes from State code. Councilor Radford believes any neighborhood meetings should expand beyond the 300', and possibly include social media notification. Per Councilor Francis, Mr. Fife counseled against the councilmembers attending neighborhood meetings. General discussion followed including the flow chart of the process. Director Cramer stated this ordinance will be presented to Council at a later time for approval, and is proposed to be effective January 1.

Discussion: Idaho Falls Firefighters Local 1565 Labor Agreement:

Chief Nelson stated the negotiation committee consists of himself, Human Resources, and Municipal Services. He also stated this committee spent several months meeting with the Firefighters Union, and he believes both parties made good strides with a good contract. Chief Nelson reviewed changes including paid hours, protective clothing (trade-off from health care premium), physical fitness equipment, sick leave accrual (how time is allotted, there is no change to the rate), payout of sick leave and the cap of sick leave, retirement payout and cleanup of vacation payout, vacation picks, training committee, retirement contributions, and compensation (1% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to longevity and step and grade). Councilor Burtenshaw noted this group is not part of the new employee compensation plan. Mayor Casper noted an executive session occurred prior to the negotiations where councilmembers expressed their thoughts regarding the parameters. Per Mayor Casper, Chief Nelson stated these parameters were based on 2.5% of compensation, health insurance (the group chose to use the city's insurance carrier), and the new city's compensation plan (there was concern that individual positions may not be compared directly to other fire agencies in like positions). He believes discussion will continue regarding the compensation plan. Mayor Casper stated this item will be included on the September 9 City Council Meeting agenda.

Discussion: City Code Amendments to adopt the 2018 International Fire Code:

Fire Marshal Grimmatt stated the proposed ordinance maintains everything that is built under the building code. He reviewed significant updates including the technology of buildings, working safely as firefighters with solar energy systems and battery storage in commercial buildings and residences, how to balance egress for fire emergencies and walk-down solutions in educational occupancies, emergency escape and rescue openings within buildings to help safeguard children, manage outdoor assembly events, and standardized inspections for mobile food vendors. Other changes that may be applicable in the future include plant processing and oil extraction facilities, and standardizing how to build and test emergency responder radio coverage in large buildings. Fire Marshal Grimmatt noted there are additional minor modifications with regard to fire protection systems. Per Councilor Radford, Fire Marshal Grimmatt stated the State of Idaho exempts sprinkler systems in single-family residential homes. Brief discussion followed regarding sprinkler systems. Mayor Casper stated this item will be included on the Sept 9 City Council Meeting agenda.

Calendars, Announcements, Reports, and Updates:

Mayor Casper announced Community Suicide Prevention will be holding their annual memorial walk on September 9, and their annual conference will be held on September 10.

September 7, 2021 Work Session

COVID-19 – Mayor Casper stated Health Districts 1 and 2 have invoked Crisis Standards of Care for hospitals. She also stated Crisis Standards of Care would have an immediate effect on the city’s ambulance service which would have a ripple effect on Emergency Medical Service (EMS)s workers. She believes, per discussion with Chief Nelson, there could be a peak of COVID in mid-October. She noted a mask requirement will not come from the health district. She believes individuals need to be voluntarily conscientious, and those who are not vaccinated could be hard hit.

Discussion: Association of Idaho Cities (AIC) Legislative Initiatives:

Mayor Casper stated AIC requested input from cities regarding legislative issues. She indicated items submitted by the city included broadband, camera record keeping, annexation, and balancing of the privacy for public and private individuals. She also stated the next step will include all proposals presented to the AIC board, all approved proposals will then be presented to the AIC legislative committee, followed by submission to the legislators during the AIC meeting. Mayor Casper stated AIC has hired a new lobbyist, who has provided information regarding the Idaho cities campaign objectives. Tactics include legislative meetings, pins, letters, talking points, publications, tour of duty, and an annual award. Mayor Casper briefly explained each of these tactics.

Discussion: Calendar Management:

Mayor Casper stated dates for the upcoming year are currently being collected by various departments. She noted the main calendar meeting will be held in December through coordination of the Mayor’s Office, Director Alexander, the Idaho Falls Power Executive Assistant, and the City Clerk. She requested any possible changes to the calendar be submitted prior to this December meeting. She also stated an effort is being made in the Mayor’s Office to create a more consistent schedule into the four (4) weeks of the month (and randomly a 5th week). Brief general discussion followed.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

s/ Kathy Hampton _____
Kathy Hampton, City Clerk

s/ Rebecca L. Noah Casper _____
Rebecca L. Noah Casper, Mayor