

City Council Special Meeting
Meeting Summary
July 8, 2024

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey called the July 8, 2024, City Council Special Meeting to order at 4:00 p.m., City Hall Council Chambers, 1011 N. Coronado Drive, Sierra Vista, Arizona.

Roll Call:

Mayor Clea McCaa II – present (telephonically)
Mayor Pro Tem Carolyn Umphrey – present
Council Member William Benning – present
Council Member Gregory Johnson – present
Council Member Angelica Landry – present
Council Member Marta Messmer – present
Council Member Mark Rodriguez – present

Others Present:

Victoria Yarbrough, Assistant City Manager
Chuck Potucek, City Manager
Chris Hiser, Police Chief
Laura Wilson, Leisure, Parks, and Library Services Director
Sharon Flissar, Public Works Director
Matt McLachlan, Community Development Director
Jill Adams, City Clerk
Nathan J. Williams, City Attorney
David Felix, Chief Financial Officer
Jennifer Dillaha, Budget Officer/Management Analyst II
Adam Curtis, Marketing and Communications Manager
Elizabeth Wrozek, PIO
Tony Boone, Economic Development Manager
Barbara Fleming, Human Resources Manager
Kennie Downing, Chief Procurement Officer
John Healey, Sports Coordinator

Pledge of Allegiance – Council Member Johnson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Item 1 Acceptance of the Agenda

Council Member Benning moved the Agenda for the Special City Council Meeting of July 8, 2024, be approved. Council Member Rodriguez seconded the motion. The motion unanimously carried, 7/0. Mayor McCaa, Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey, Council Members Benning, Johnson, Landry, Messmer, and Rodriguez voted in favor.

New Business

Item 2 Discussion and Possible Action to Approve Resolution 2024-046, Intent to Enter into a Purchase and Sale Agreement with Castle and Cooke, LLC for the acquisition of real property known as the Pueblo Del Sol Country Club

Council Member Landry moved that Resolution 2024-046, intent to enter into a Purchase and Sale Agreement with Castle and Cooke, LLC for the acquisition of real property known as the Pueblo Del Sol Country Club, be approved. Council Member Benning seconded the motion.

Mr. Potucek briefed the item and explained the reasons for expediency.

Ms. Yarbrough went over the details of the purchasing agreement with Castle and Cooke and listed three dates of importance.

An explanation was given on how the agreement with Paradigm would work. The City would be responsible for major capital improvements.

Mr. Potucek went over some issues regarding water usage and noted that one well needs to be dug a little deeper. However, the wells are in good shape. The urban setting of the golf course is important, and blight is a concern. There are some capital improvements that will need to be done. The building would need to be remodeled. Other things that may need to be improved are the tennis courts. Lastly, he disclosed that he is a resident out in the area as well as some staff, but the City Attorney has opined that there is no conflict of interest.

The following people spoke in favor: James Pregler, Joe Kraps, Kelly Burns, Rick Barr (concerned about bidding process), Randy Groth, Cynthia Means, and Jeff Jennings.,

Terry Diffey spoke against the purchase.

Council Member Messmer stated that this is another difficult decision because for her, it is easy to say no because it is taxpayers' money being put into this and she wondered if this is the best use for that money, but it is hard not to say yes because it is important to save it. She shared that she talked to people to find somebody that wanted to say no, that this was a really bad decision because it would have been easy to go that way. However, every single person said that Council must do it and that it is the right thing to do. She voiced her appreciation to everyone who came out to the meeting and is supporting Council and noted that there are a lot of people pushing it down. Therefore, she hopes that not only today, but through the whole process that those individuals supporting Council make sure that this goes through and is a success.

Council Member Landry thanked everyone for being present and sharing their thoughts and concerns, as well as all those people watching online. She shared that Council received a lot of e-mail comments that Council read and appreciates and stated that there have been many discussions and a whole lot of research that has gone into this. She voiced her appreciation to staff for all the hard work on researching options and noted that there has been a lot of thought, effort, and time put into gathering information. She stated that it is not just a golf course, it is more and shared that she lives along the golf course. She further stated that she spoke to the City Attorney to make sure that she did not need to recuse herself, but he has stated that it is fine. She added that every day people are out early walking their dogs, walking in the evenings with their family, some are barefoot on the grass, which is great. There are people that are retired that golf every single day. They spend time with their family golfing, they take golf lessons, and it is a really great place to hang out, it is a way to still have independence when living along there, and it is a golf cart drive away to hang out with friends and to stay active. Therefore, she feels that this is very important. However, some people do not realize that they are always welcome to go there. There are a lot of different organizations that hold their meetings there, there are tournaments, which bring people from all over the place. Although,

this is not the heart of the community, it is part of the pulse of the community, and although, this is not an ideal situation, it is much better than the alternative. It would be a detrimental to the community not to support this.

Council Member Benning thanked everyone that came out to the meeting and spoke. He noted that he thought that there would be more nays due to some of the messages that he received, which he understands, but the golf course does make money. The golf course did exactly what it was supposed to do, and it made Castle and Cooke money off the backs of hardworking Sierra Vista residents that moved to Sierra Vista for the ambiance. Council Members do not vote in one direction and Council Member do not look at one direction. Council Members look at the entire city and they have been supporting, giving assets and revenue, and budgeted items to the West End. They have been taking care of the parks and other areas in Sierra Vista. Now, there is an opportunity to keep something that brought people here. He shared that he retired from the Army here, and he has met people, his Drill Sergeant in 1988, who he meets almost every Sunday at the golf course because it is a gathering place. There are organizations that meet at the golf course because it is a gathering place and it is one of the only places where there can be meetings, weekly meetings, monthly meetings. Although, it was a private course, it is now open to the public and the Council is going to make sure that the management company that is being brought in runs it in a correct way. The golf course makes money. It made money for Castle and Cooke and now the golf course will be used to keep people in the community and to continue to bring people to the community. There is an opportunity to make money and it is not being used as a write off and noted that he will not state that Castle and Cooke did, but it sold houses. It did what it was supposed to do. The City can operate it better and more efficiently. The City does a lot of things for the community, and this is not about picking one area or demographic. It is a retirement community. A golf course in any city has its purpose. PDS is known for their greens, and it probably has the hardest greens in Southern Arizona. It is challenging and makes it different than a lot of other courses because it is not a link style course. Therefore, at the end of the day, Council owes it to the City, not just the local houses surrounding that area to keep something that brought people out to Sierra Vista. Lastly, he stated that people say that this is a retirement community, but the average age is 44 years old. It is not a retirement community and the Council services and tends to everybody because that is what Council is supposed to do. Council sits at the dais and makes hard decisions because that is what Sierra Vista residents voted for them to do.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that Council has received a lot of comments and on the surface, this looks like a city behind a failing golf course, but that is not what is happening when looking at the potential. There are so many things that could be done that people that work there have wanted to do for years, but unfortunately Castle and Cooke has gone against. They did not want to grow, nor did they want to make the place better. The Council Members are going to make sure that the City works with a company who does not think like that because Council wants the best outcome possible for the situation. Everyone sees the potential and although, it is a \$30,000 a loss, the City has no agenda as noted on some emails, texts, and phone calls. He voiced his appreciation for all the comments on something that affects the community, thanked the people who came out to the meeting, thanked the staff that has done some amazing research to include looking at other companies, looking all over for the best solution in the shortest amount of time to an unrealistic timeline that Castle and Cooke has provided. He noted that staff has given Council facts so that Council could make this quick decision to vote on because the alternative is not good. There are probably 320 houses that touch the golf course, and if the golf course were to go into disrepair, disarray, all the weeds, etc. would all be in everyone's backyard, which would be horrible for the community. He shared that he is at Winter Haven every month on the third Saturday doing smoke detector checks and he meets a lot of

people that live by themselves, but they feel safe, which is very important, and he would not want that to go away. He noted that the blight would be horrible as well the vacancy that would happen to an open pit if the golf course was abandoned. There are about 30 employees that work there, as well as volunteers that are important to Council. The plan for the City is to keep that going, to keep it flowing and become more profitable than it has been. He added that the Council members are not golf experts, and the City is not going to take over and run it. This is a big misconception and noted that professionals do what they do and that is who the City is going to hire. It is not a demographic, PDS is for all ages and there are many reasons for people living in that area. In closing he recommended that people with gift cards to use them fast because before they are no longer valid.

Council Member Johnson quoted Mark Twain, "golf is a good walk spoiled." He noted that he has had several discussions with some key board warriors lately about this whole issue on Facebook and they say golf is a dying sport. Therefore, he did some research and found that it is not. The National Golf Foundation showed 24.8 million golfers in 2020 in the United States. There are over 60 million worldwide and that was up from the COVID era of 2019. There are more youth playing ever golf since the Tigers Masters win. Women golfers are part of the surge with over 450 or eight percent increase over 2019. He shared that he gave up golf because of his rheumatoid arthritis, but it was a great game. Some individuals would rather let the property deteriorate thus lowering home values throughout the city, not just Winter Haven. This would lower the tax base and the City would lose the opportunity to receive a beautiful property that was appraised for \$1.6 million in 2020 and is probably worth more today for the forgiveness of \$600,000 worth of debt, which the City will amortize over time when the sewer fund is repaid. The Council does not want to lose the opportunity for a future event center that is already there. The Council would like to expand it and staff has already been looking into that. The City would lose the opportunity for future profits when the property is managed properly. In closing, he stated that he was monitoring City Council e-mail and would like to make it a part of the record. There were eight emails for Council voting for it and one against.

Mayor McCaa apologize that he could not be in attendance due to a family reunion that was scheduled for the past year. He voiced his appreciation to everyone in the audience and noted that it shows that they are concerned about the city. He noted that there would be an economic impact if the golf course closed and shared that he is meeting with Black Star Orbital in Phoenix and the perception of a golf course closing could be like a disease gone wild. The City Council does not want that. They look at the economic impact that this golf course has. The Huachucans do a yearly U.S. Open, which brings in about 70,000 a year, the Boys and Girl Scouts do a golf tournament which brings in about 20,000 a year, Lori's Place, who supports the Sierra Vista Police Department with forensic interviews, brings in about 20,000, and the University South Foundation brings in about 20,000. All this funding goes into scholarships, back into the community that supports the community as well as Cochise County. It would be a detriment if this golf course goes away. He acknowledged Ryan Hightower, Cynthia Means, Jeff Jennings, James Pregler, Terry Diffey, Joe Krabs, Kelly Burns, Rick Barr, and Doctor Randy Groth. Lastly, he stated that he cannot let this golf course go and he hopes that everyone will supports the Council going forward. In closing, he thanked the city manager, assistant city manager and staff for doing an amazing investigation on how to get this golf course and to sustain it. Therefore, he cannot let this go and he will be voting for it. He agreed with Council Member Benning in that Castle and Cooke made money - golf course makes money.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that there is nothing that she could add that has not already been said. She further stated that there were a lot of excellent points made by her fellow Council Members and Mayor McCaa. The Council received quite a few emails and it was funny to her

how she did not realize how many people have her cell phone number until something like this comes up because she sees a lot of these people in person; however, in talking to her customers throughout the day, she realized that there was a pro and con list. Some were valid and this is not an ideal situation, but a lot of that has to do with timing. One of Council's main concern was that the timing for public comment which was not going to be sufficient. The Council wanted to make sure that there was enough time for everyone to provide feedback before Council made a big decision. In closing, she thanked everyone for taking the time on a Monday night to be in attendance.

The motion unanimously carried, 7/0. Mayor McCaa, Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey, Council Members Benning, Johnson, Landry, Messmer, and Rodriguez voted in favor.

Adjournment

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey adjourned the July 8, 2024, special meeting of the Sierra Vista City Council at 5:13 p.m.

A recording of the Council Meeting is available at:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8PtUplbkQsixlhSy-jeR_Q/videos