

Sierra Vista City Council  
Work Session Minutes  
February 7, 2023

1. Call to Order

Mayor McCaa called the February 7, 2023, City Council Work Session to order at 3:00 p.m., Council Chambers, City Hall, 1011 N. Coronado Drive, Sierra Vista, Arizona.

Mayor Clea McCaa – present  
Mayor Pro Tem Carolyn Umphrey – present  
Council Member William Benning – present  
Council Member Gregory Johnson – present  
Council Member Angelica Landry – present  
Council Member Mark Rodriguez – present

Others Present:

Chuck Potucek, City Manager  
Victoria Yarbrough, Assistant City Manager  
Adam Thrasher, Police Chief  
Brian Jones, Fire Chief  
Laura Wilson, Leisure, Parks, and Library Director  
Sharon Flissar, Public Works Director  
Chanel Kirkpatrick, Public Works External Service Manager  
Gabriel Squires, Public Works Internal Operations Manager  
Tony Boone, Economic Development Manager  
Dianna Cameron, Management Analyst  
Judy Hector, Marketing and Communications Manager  
Adam Curtis, PIO  
Matt McLachlan, Community Development Director  
Jill Adams, City Clerk

1. Presentation and Discussion:

A. February 9, 2023 Council Meeting Agenda Items ([agenda attached](#))

Mayor McCaa stated that on the agenda for February 9, 2023, is the call to order, roll call, invocation by Reverend Chuck Carlson of the Sierra Vista Community Church, and the Pledge of Allegiance led by Council Member Messmer.

Item 1 Acceptance of the Agenda – Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey asked about the work session minutes. Ms. Adams explained that she and the City Attorney were talking about this because the work session minutes have always been approved by the Mayor; however, in reading statutes, the City Attorney felt that they should be approved by the body that they represent, and therefore the minutes have been added to the consent agenda and will continue going forward.

Awards and presentations – There were no responses.

In response to Mayor McCaa, Mr. Potucek stated that there will be a JPA SEACOM Meeting that he will report on Thursday, February 9, 2023, noted that staffing is always an issue and a topic of discussion; although, things are looking better at SEACOM. In closing, he added that he will also have several projects to report on at the Thursday, February 9, 2023 Council Meeting.

Consent Agenda Item 2.1 Approval of the City Council Work Session Minutes of January 10, 2023 – There was no discussion.

Consent Agenda Item 2.2 Approval of the Regular City Council Meeting Minutes of January 12, 2023 - There was no discussion.

Consent Agenda Item 2.3 Discussion and possible Action of Resolution 2023-003, Inspections Services Agreement with the Arizona Department of Housing (ADOH), Manufactured Housing and Building Division (MHBD) – Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey commented that this item is an agreement with the Arizona Department of Housing, Manufactured Housing and Building Division because the City does the inspections for the State. She voiced her appreciation to Mr. McLachlan, who always takes the time to give a thorough background and noted that the last time this agreement was approved, none of the present Council Members were on Council; therefore, it is helpful, and she just wanted to say thank you for the comprehensive work that was done.

Public Hearing Item 3 Discussion and possible Action of Resolution 2023-004, Adoption of Chapter 34, Revenue Collection, Title III, Administration City of Sierra Vista Code of Ordinances, Sections 34.00 Definitions, and 34.01, Collections, and Declaring a 30-day Public Record – Ms. Yarbrough stated that item has been modified to add more explanation as to what the City is doing and what is being accomplished. There are delinquent accounts for many reasons for services, sewer, refuse, etc., and when those accounts are delinquent, and staff has exhausted all options to help people pay their accounts and make them current, they send those accounts to a collection agency. Mr. Felix had shared with her that something changed about a year ago. The City is no longer allowed to assess any fees, and the collection agencies assess a fee for pursuing these collections, which the City has been paying because the City cannot pass it on to the debtor, unless it is adopted into ordinance.

Ms. Yarbrough stated that this item will establish a new chapter, Chapter 34, Revenue Collection, under Title III, Administration. This chapter is going to establish four definitions and allow for the City to assess the fees for those collections to the debtor instead of the City having to pay for it. She added that this is a public hearing at this time to go out for a 30-day comment period, it will then come back to Council after the 30-day comment period closes.

Council Member Johnson asked when the City considers an account uncollectible and noted that he was aware that the City of Bisbee had a big problem. Ms. Yarbrough stated that she does not know the answer; but Mr. Felix does, and he has said that the City has a fairly low number of outstanding accounts, nothing like the City of Bisbee. Mr. Potucek stated that although, he does not have that number available, the City has a staff member dedicated to go after these accounts and she has done a good job in collecting. Therefore, the City's outstanding debt is not near what it was in the past, and this is just another tool. The policy decision for Council is whether they want the public to pay for the collection fees when deemed uncollectible or should the person that owes the debt pay for it.

Council Member Johnson stated that he would like to know the amount that is outstanding that is currently uncollectible, and when the City considers them uncollectible. Mr. Felix stated that technically it is 60 days that an account is considered legally delinquent. The first step for staff is to reach out to the people; but the main actual tool that is used is the Department of Revenue's debt set off. The City can legally go after people's tax refunds on any debt, sewer, sanitation, ambulance, leisure, when someone does not pay for their class, bounces checks, etc. This is done every year when it gets to the point of nonresponsive people that are no longer in the City, are a tenant and not an owner, which then means that the City cannot go after their property and lean their property. The City will take the refuse cans away from people that do not pay, which usually motivates them to set up a payment plan; but it is not a large amount of people. The City's whole receivable for all accounts is about 10 percent of the annual billing.

He further stated that a couple of years ago, State Law changed so that cities could go after the people for the collection fees. The usual collection charge is about 30 percent, not an insignificant amount. Therefore, staff thought that it would be fairer to go after them than making all the other residents, who are currently paying their bills. The City We usually write offs about \$30,000 a year in each fund to bad debt out of the \$3,000,000 plus revenue in each fund. The City of Sierra Vista is

very fortunate because staff does a good job, and most residents do pay. Lastly, he stated that the department is working with the Public Works Department on some other options for getting these accounts early. There are payment plans that people can request and be set up if they abide by it. The department is working out new procedures to save the refuse people time from pulling the can, where they can tag it and then they do not pick it up. The idea is also for the new staff member coming on board in the Finance Department to be more proactive on new accounts because realtors and landlord tenants do not bother telling people that they need to sign up for sewer and refuse service. Most cities own a water company, people go in and sign up for water, and there is their sewer and sanitation services, and they are all taken care of. Some people believe that Sierra Vista is the same, they sign up for water, run the water, flush the toilet, and do not think that someone else owns the system. Therefore, it is more proactive in the beginning because the new tenant coming in is not surprised a year later, with a \$400.00 bill that leaves a bad impression of the City, the people working, the landlords and the realtors. It also makes it very hard for them to pay. Lastly, he explained that this resolution is to try and get the money back from the people that owe on their accounts.

Mr. Felix stated that his department tried different collection agencies and collection agencies are literally the last resort because there is not much to get from them.

Council Member Benning asked if the service agreements with the customers spell out the number of days an account is considered past due and goes to collections. Mr. Felix stated that for the ones that sign, it is set out by the interest rate charge of the State Statute allowable rate.

Council Member Benning asked if this statement can be added to Chapter 34 that provides timelines because this way there is also a policy in place and not just an agreement. Mr. Felix stated that it can be done.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey asked if there is already an established policy and procedure. Mr. Felix stated that there is set policy and procedure as staff works through with the people, staff contact them through the mail a certain number of times; but it is amazing how many people are sent a bill and they never get the bill until it is the collection notice and all bills have gone to the same address.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey asked about other third parties that the City uses for delinquent bills. Mr. Felix stated that the other third party is the debt set off through the State, and in the past when the department collected deposits and ran soft credit checks on people - that company offered a collection type service, but it was not a collection agency. It was a service that helped collect the bad debt, another type of settlement agency.

New Business Item 4 Discussion and possible Action of Resolution 2023-005, Adoption of Cochise County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan 2022 – Ms. Flissar stated the purpose of this resolution is to identify hazards for the Cochise County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) on behalf of the City of Sierra Vista, i.e., natural hazards, fire, flooding, things that are predominant in certain areas of the County. This effort is required by FEMA to be updated every five years. The current update took staff about a year to complete while working with other staff around Cochise County and the result is a Plan, about 300 pages long. This action by Council will adopt the Plan on behalf of the City of Sierra Vista.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that she is aware that this is required before applying for any grants and asked if there are any plans to apply for the infrastructure grant. Ms. Flissar stated that this is something that the Department is looking into because the staff is all about going after grants when the City qualifies for those.

Council Member Rodriguez wonders if the City has ever missed out on a grant due to the City not having this Plan and noted that the 288-page Plan has good information and is another resource for anyone who would like to know who owns certain land, if they are not going through GIS, or they want to see a map, or find out if the property is in a floodplain. He also noted that some of the plans have not been updated since the 1980s or 1999, which are concerning; but he hopes that people

are working on those.

Item 5 Discussion and possible Action of Resolution 2023-006, Intergovernmental Agreement with Pima Community College for a Joint Program to train Paramedic Students – Deputy Fire Chief Dever stated that the resolution is for the Sierra Vista Fire Medical Services and Pima Community College to join into an agreement that allows the Sierra Vista Fire Medical Services employees to attend paramedic training through Pima Community College in Tucson. This agreement will also allow Pima Community College paramedic students to complete their field training alongside approved Sierra Vista Fire Medical Services paramedics.

Council Member Johnson asked why the City would be sending its paramedics to Pima rather than to the local Cochise College. Deputy Fire Chief Dever stated that the Department currently has some employees that live in Tucson and because of the scheduling, it is easier for them to attend class at Pima and do their field training time in Sierra Vista.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he likes the program because there are a few people from Douglas and vice versa; therefore, this makes sense. This could also be considered a recruiting tool and it could be a positive thing when people are considering going elsewhere because of things like this. He asked about the number of paramedics attending the class since it is being opened to Pima. Deputy Fire Chief Dever stated that the City currently puts three students through per year. Currently there is only one who lives in Tucson; but next year, there is an employee that lives in Tucson and would like to attend the Pima College Class. The number depends on the employee who wants to go and there is a vetting process for those students who would like to attend; but the Department does not see it being a big hit on the City's paramedic program for Cochise College.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he knows that the Department only pays for so many per year and asked if more slots will open since there is now two places to go for training. Deputy Fire Chief Dever stated that it will not open anymore slots. The Department allows three people per year for staffing, and it just makes it easier for scheduling. One good thing about the Pima Community College class is that it is shift friendly, which does not affect staffing for that day.

## B. [Discussion on Boards and Commissions](#)

Mr. Potucek stated that staff is near the end of the Council revision process and there have been several meetings; but staff is bringing this back to Council one more time, primarily because there is now a new mayor, Mayor McCaa, and this will give him a chance to weigh-in. Essentially what was talked about was changing the Board and Commission structure to a more closely mirror of the Council's efforts with regards to the General Plan. This involve some consolidation of commissions as well as additional responsibilities for the commissions that are being proposed:

- Economic Development and Tourism;
- Transportation that will cover not only airport and transit, but streets, pedestrian, paths and bicycling, a more all-encompassing commission.
- Neighborhoods instead of just West End that expands from the West End to the entire community.
- Environmental stewardship that the City currently has, Environmental Affairs Commission.
- Parks and Recreation;
- Consolidating Arts and Humanities, Cultural Diversity and Library into one.
- Commission on Disability Issues; and
- Youth Commission.

Staff is proposing that the City currently keep the Commission on Disability Issues and the Youth Commission. During the last work session, there were a few items where there was some discussion and may still warrant that, one was a proposal by Councilman Johnson to move tourism to the Parks and Recreation Commission. Currently it is still in the proposal for Economic Development and Tourism Commission. Two, there was some discussion about neighborhoods, and the concern that the West End may feel like maybe they are not getting the attention that they have

held for so long, and three, combining Arts and Humanities, Cultural Diversity and Library Commissions into one.

Once this goes through and the Council is comfortable with the reconfiguration of the commissions, staff would propose that those people that are on commissions, if one of the new commissions ends up with more than seven people, that all would stay on until attrition and their terms would end and come down in a smooth fashion as opposed to telling somebody they can no longer serve. Council would then go back to the practice of approving membership in terms for commission members and filling them, which right now falls under the City Manager's purview. There is a process that Council will need to go through with the resolutions and Ms. Yarbrough has prepared that.

Ms. Yarbrough stated that when staff is ready, those resolutions will be brought to Council. There are three separate actions that are needed. Staff first tried to combine them into one, but it was the most unwieldy resolution ever seen; therefore, it was separated into three different actions. There will be one resolution that will create the new advisory commissions, there will be another resolution to reestablish the Council advisory commissions that are not combined with the other commissions, and those are the Commission on Disability Issues and the Youth Commission, unless Council wants to make changes. The third resolution is to dissolve all the nonregulatory commissions because they would have all changed.

Mr. Potucek stated that assuming after Council discussion wishes to proceed, staff would put this on the Council's next agenda in in February and then Mayor McCaa can go ahead and make the liaison assignments for the Council.

Council Member Benning stated that he liked the new proposal, does not mind tourism being combined with economic development because they go hand in hand. He asked if the commissions would go to a seven-member commission because it was lowered to five members. Mr. Potucek stated that the proposal would be to go back to seven.

Council Member Benning asked about waiving term limits for individuals if there are no new applicants. Council Member Rodriguez stated that Council is not going to kick somebody off a commission because they are terming out when there is nobody else to backfill them. He added that he would rather have somebody that still wants to do the job and get a waiver to do another term.

Council Member Messmer asked if commissions serve a two-year term. Council Member Benning and Rodriguez stated that it is a two-year term. Mr. Potucek stated that the Council Handbook establishes all the rules and if there is a desire to change this, then staff would bring that back to Council as well; but most of this is covered in the handbook.

Council Member Johnson asked why there are term limits on the commissions. Council Member Benning agreed; but disagreed and noted that there can be people on a commission that have been on the commission for 20 years that do not leave, and then there is no new blood on the commission as a voting member.

Council Member Johnson stated that the term is every two years and so there is an opportunity for someone else to serve if they want to toss their hat in the ring. He further stated that he does not believe that kicking somebody off is the right way to go.

Mr. Potucek stated that the practice of term limits started for that very reason several years ago because there were people that were monopolizing positions on commissions. The Council at that time established term limits, but if there is a term limit and reappointment process, then Council can change out if Council cares to do so.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that the Council Handbook covers a lot of that and asked if the Board and Commission Practices and Procedures would be updated. Mr. Potucek stated that it would need to be updated.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that Council can talk about all those details when they update it, but currently staff would like for Council to provide feedback on the list of commissions. She added that it makes sense to put tourism with economic development and noted that at first, she did not understand why, but now she does since it goes with the sports tourism and maybe that is one of those areas that they can come together on certain projects, i.e., the Arts and Humanities Commission with the West End for the murals, etc. She noted that she is no longer concerned about the West End Commission not having a voice on the on a newly established Neighborhood Commission because they will be tied to the General Plan elements to keep the focus on the community preservation and revitalization if there are people from different neighborhoods.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey asked if there is also consideration on putting together a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). Mr. Potucek stated that he believes that this Transportation Commission can cover the needs of the TAC, but the TAC has a specific purpose with transit.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that the combination of the Arts and Humanities and Cultural Diversity was not well received by either Commission, but there is currently only one commissioner on the Arts and Humanities Commission and maybe now is a good time to reinvigorate it with the commission combination.

Council Member Johnson stated that he still disagrees with putting economic development along with tourism because they have two different roles. There have only been one or two meetings with the Economic Development Commission and there is one coming up during the month and he will be meeting with Mr. Boone and Dean Packer to discuss the vision of the Economic Development Commission. Tourism will help economic development in a way, but tourism does not create new businesses. It is not going to give brick and mortar, touch and feel. He added that he is aware that the City is doing a great job with Tour de Zona, and it is a great event that brings money into the City, but he does not believe that the two of them belong together. He shared that he sat on a tourism commission in a previous life as well as an economic development commission and they are two totally opposite things. Their missions are totally different.

Mayor McCaa asked if tourism should be with Parks and Recreation. Council Member Johnson stated that it makes more sense, but he is aware that Council Member Benning does not like that. He added that events come through Laura Wilson and her team, Parks and Recreation. Council Member Benning noted that Parks and Recreation does not plan events. The director and her staff do all that planning. The Parks and Recreation Commission talks about what the parks need, what the park master plans are, how to bring things to that park or a park or different parks, how we build a park like is being done over at Roadrunner Park.

Council Member Johnson stated that maybe tourism should stand on its own.

Council Member Benning asked if the City is a part of the Cochise County Tourism Council. Mr. Potucek stated that it is primarily staff from the different communities in the County meeting together and it is different than having a citizen/tourism commission. Currently there is a Tourism Commission.

In response to Mr. Potucek, Ms. Hector stated that there is currently only one commission member, and that individual is interested in helping and would like for the City to provide information to people who are coming to Fort Huachuca so that they know what businesses there are, what things there are to see and do in Sierra Vista. The other person who termed out on December 31, 2022, worked at Cochise College in the Continuing Education Division, and recognized that Cochise College does contribute to tourism because people will come to the community to attend classes, special events, the brown bag lunches etc. They are looking at bringing people to Sierra Vista for the enjoyment, the many assets that the City has, and not just the hiking trails or the sports fields.

Mr. Potucek stated that the other option is to consider if a Tourism Commission is needed, and in response to Council Member Benning, stated that he is the representative on the Cochise County Tourism Commission.

Council Member Messmer stated that tourism might fit with the Arts and Humanities and Cultural Diversity Commissions because all of those have events.

Council Member Landry stated that she likes the breakdown of using the General Plan elements and a lot of this makes sense. She added that every group's job involves tourism; therefore, personally she feels that tourism is everywhere. The discussion taking place is about finding a place for tourism because it does not fit anywhere, but maybe it is everywhere and does not necessarily need a commission because it is not like there are 20 members wanting to have a Tourism Commission. She then asked if making changes after Council goes forward with this is going to be tricky. Mr. Potucek stated that not at all.

Mayor McCaa suggested having tourism with the Cultural Diversity Commission. Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that maybe they should just get rid of it. Council Member Benning agreed with Council Member Landry.

Council Member Johnson stated that he also likes Council Member Landry's idea because this is all their jobs. Council and staff are all into the tourism business because they want people to come stay, pay taxes, and build their lives in Sierra Vista. He further stated that he is somewhat protective of the Economic Development Commission because he fought hard to get it and he does not want it watered down with other elements that do not apply.

Council Member Benning stated that he agrees with Council Member Johnson and noted that all the commissions are going to benefit each other in the long run. If the Neighborhoods Commission does what they it is supposed to do and the Parks and Recreation Commission does what it is supposed to do, it is going to enhance economic development and it all plays in otherwise the City would not have the commissions. Council is throwing pennies in a well, wishing some of the commissions are going to grow this beautiful thing, when it is inherent in everything, i.e., including Cultural Diversity in everything that is done. He stated that he does not believe that a Tourism Commission is needed because having a representative with the County, to tie in what the City is trying to do and not be opposites is good. He noted that he does not see people rushing to the stage to join it. Council Member Johnson concurred.

Council Messmer stated that the City's own tourism is very important. Yes, the City should work with Cochise County for tourism, but Council is the City of Sierra Vista, and they need their own tourism. The commissions have been mish mashed for a while and now that they are being re-restructured, if no one takes down the other two commissions, she thinks that it is very important that the City have its own tourism commission.

Mr. Potucek stated that if an event is being put on by Ms. Wilson, she is going to work with the Marketing and Tourism people to help make that successful. If there is a question about tourism or people coming into town for economic development, certainly the City can provide the staff support to do that. He further stated that he is not sure that the City necessarily needs a tourism commission when the City currently has a tourism staff structure to support the City's tourism, and he could not agree with Council Messmer more, sitting on the Cochise County Tourism Council, in that the City needs to have its own tourism.

Council Member Benning proposed not to have a Tourism Commission because in looking at the General Plan, there is no tourism in the General Plan, but things that are going to attract people to the City, where the City needs a commission to help build those. The City has a staff member, whose job is to market and sell Sierra Vista. There is nothing in the General Plan stating that Council would like to increase tourism by this much, make tourism spectacular. Lastly, he stated that the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Parks and Recreation Commission brought Tour De Zona to Sierra Vista because of what was shown to them as far as the environment, parks, etc. Tourism is in everything that the City does from going to the League of Cities to Douglas to the County Fair, they are going to sell Sierra Vista; therefore, having a commission telling Council how to do that is not going to help, especially if Council does not have a mission for them.

Mayor McCaa asked that in going forward, may Council state that they have dissolved tourism and sprinkle it into the other commissions.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he would like for the one person that is still on the Tourism Commission, who feels that they are contributing, to be able to contribute to tourism staff with feedback as needed, or as they come up with something, or to be able to pick a commission and attend their meeting to provide feedback.

Mayor McCaa stated that the one person will be stretched thin. Council Member Rodriguez stated that he does not see this person going to every commission meeting, just the ones where the person feels that input is necessary. Mr. Potucek stated that staff can make sure that this person has an opportunity to serve, and this person can also choose which area might be most pertinent to their interests as well.

In response to Mayor McCaa, Council Member Johnson stated that he believes that there is a consensus. Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey noted that if a need rises where there needs to be a new commission, they can always make changes.

C. Discussion regarding resuming Community Services Presentations and Meet and Greets

Mr. Potucek stated that this item stems from Council Member Benning's request to bring back meet and greets and community service presentations. He explained that under former Council Member Calhoun's leadership, the City had dedicated some time once a month to invite a nonprofit organization to come before Council and provide an update in terms of what their activities were, perhaps give them a little publicity or some exposure. This fell away during COVID, but Council Member Benning has proposed bringing those practices back and try to do that at least once a month.

He further stated that he is aware that Mayor McCaa does his own meet and greets, but in the past there have been meet and greets primarily at events like the Farmers Market, in the mall, or other community events that the Library and other places had people attracted to. The Council Members would staff the booth and staff would support setting that up.

Council Member Benning stated that part of his vision was what former Council Member Calhoun brought to the table, but with nonprofits and businesses. Everyone on Council goes to the businesses and talks to business owners, etc. and eighty percent is what makes the City a city of small businesses; therefore, he would like to dedicate five minutes for them to shine, not a business of the month or of the week because they are all businesses that are doing outstanding. He suggested that the first work session of the month be a nonprofit and the second work session of the month be a business, and that the business or organization be picked out by Council like it used to be done.

Mr. Potucek stated that at the time the Council wanted to entertain businesses, but it could be considered a gift under the Gift Clause. This is something the City Attorney would have to investigate. There are a lot more businesses than there are nonprofits, and Council focused on nonprofits in the past.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey asked if the presentation would be five or ten minutes. Mr. Potucek stated that it is 15 minutes.

Council Member Johnson stated that Mayor McCaa did a great job during his campaign of highlighting businesses throughout Sierra Vista, and he applauds that. This process has also been supplemented by Cool FM Online, but he is unsure how much more the Council needs to do. The Council needs to focus on businesses, and he would rather hear from the nonprofits because those



are the ones that are in need and worthwhile to hear from as well.

Mayor McCaa concurred with Council Member Johnson and stated that nonprofits are near and dear to his heart, noted that they are the ones that need help because they are doing it out of their pocket.

Council Member Landry stated that she likes the idea of having groups come in and talk about what is going on, even if it is a group coming in four times a year, i.e., the Salvation Army talking about their Red Kettle and when that kicks off because this is a great way to have the individual come in and share more information. She shared that when Saint Vincent de Paul came in to bring in their request for their parking lot, she did not know as much about them as she did afterwards when they gave their presentation. Thereafter, she was able to share with others the information and this is a way to also increase community engagement. Lastly, she agrees that nonprofits and groups like that would be great to bring into the meetings because they do not have a lot of money for marketing like businesses do.

Mayor McCaa stated that there is a consensus to move forward with this.

Council Member Benning stated that all that is left to do is to find out who invites and when. Council Member Johnson stated that rather than having two a month, he would prefer once a month. This way the system is not being taxed because there are a lot of not for profits that could profit from a presence in the City Council Chambers.

Mr. Potucek stated that staff can reach out from his office to various nonprofits and make invitations and take suggestions from the Council if they have people lined up, which would make staff's job easier too. Ms. Yarbrough stated that the way that it was done in the past and it can be done again, is that staff would ask Council for their selections on who they would like to have invited. Staff then created a schedule and would let Council know and then the City Manager's administrative staff would coordinate with the nonprofits.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he thinks Council Members will be open to it when it comes to this list, if there is a time sensitive one to make sure that they can present.

Council Member Benning stated that Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey and himself had the Meet and Greet at the Farmer's Market. It was a fun time; they had a free booth, and they still have the material to set up. He added that Ms. Hector has flyers that can be handed out. Lastly, he stated that he is all for doing it again, but he does not know how often.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he liked the rec and rolls, and they can dunk a Council Member. Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey suggested different venues and not always the Farmer's Market.

Mr. Potucek stated that the Farmer's Market was just convenient, but there are other events that occur at different location, i.e., the library or the mall.

Council Member Johnson stated that there is an event coming up on Wednesday, February 8, 2023, in the Council Chambers, an open house for a grant project.

#### D. Update on public input to Chapter 94 amendments

Ms. Wilson updated Council on input received regarding the public hearing item proposing City Code amendments to Chapters 94 and 90. The public comment period began on January 13, 2023, and will end on Friday, February 10, 2023. There has been quite a bit of feedback, more than anticipated; therefore, staff thought it would be a good idea to summarize the comments collected thus far. All the detailed comments are available for review at any time in the Council Reading Room. The City has received 33 comments through engage or e-mail, and all the comments have been specifically related to the proposed e-bike language and nothing related to the other

amendments, which were adding the definitions for the park types and the ball fields and making a minor correction regarding the sanctioning of events. A current summary of the feedback includes 33 comments because duplicates were taken out. Currently 16 comments are recommendations to do nothing and leave well enough alone; three comments were about defining park trails and establish a speed limit, but not ban the classes of bicycles; four would like a speed limit and the banning of level three e-bikes; eight were for a speed limit without banning the level three e-bikes; an e-mail concerning the Public Information Office posting to the engaged platform on behalf of a citizen, which was due to a citizen having issues posting their feedback and so Mr. Curtis stepped in and helped him like he would for any citizen. There was also a request for public record due to a technical issue that there was with uploading wave files from a couple of the Parks and Recreation Commission meetings; however, the issue was dealt with by having staff do transcriptions that were submitted as a response to the public records request and that is available for the public as well.

The public comment period is still open through Friday, February 10, 2023, which is the last day of the 30-day comment period. Staff will give a final summary brief on this issue to Mayor McCaa and Council regarding the public's final feedback during their next work session scheduled for February 21, 2023, and at that time Council will have an opportunity to request any edits to the proposed amendments prior to the vote at the next Council meeting scheduled for Thursday, February 23, 2023.

Ms. Yarbrough stated that after going through all the feedback and talking with Ms. Wilson, staff is recommending no change when it comes to e-bikes. ARS §28-819, electric bicycles, states that electric bicycles share all the same rights and privileges. It also says that unless the Council decides otherwise that class three e-bikes are not permitted on trails except in multi-use paths, except when they are beside a street. There are two trails in the City Park System that would exclude class three e-bikes if absolutely nothing was done, Garden Canyon Trail and the Multi-use path that is in between Buffalo Soldier Trail and Avenida Cochise. She further stated that if Council chooses to do nothing but allow e-bikes in all multi-use paths and all trails, staff suggests the revision to allow class three e-bikes on all trails as well.

Council Member Johnson stated that one of the comments that he read was about courtesy on the multi-use paths, hikers give way to bicyclists, and bicyclists give way to horses. He added that he had spoken against banning class three e-bikes on any trail because there are a lot of people that use them that are disabled and still want to get out and ride. However, the proposal is a good one. If someone is going to use these trails, they should be aware of the rules and use common courtesy which will go a long way to solving any issues. He further stated that there was a gentleman who spoke about speed limits, but he was expanding that into areas that the City has no jurisdiction.

Mr. Potucek commented on the process and noted that it is amazing on what the City gets feedback on, and one thing is for sure, the people seem to love the multi-use paths, they are used, they are cared for, and they are certainly a benefit to the community; therefore, he is happy to get the feedback and he thinks that the feedback helped staff in terms of forming a recommendation for Council. He added that he would recommend making a blanket speed limit, but he is unsure if that is necessary.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he has talked to people on the trails, and they have stated that it is just trail etiquette that people need to be aware of. He suggested a City video of people out on the trails talking about issues, i.e., headphones on and not paying attention, a horse or person running out of nowhere and knowing which direction to move to.

Mayor McCaa stated that Council will wait on the results of the comments and then vote.

Mr. Potucek stated that this item would be on Council's next meeting, two weeks from Thursday, February 9, 2023. Police Chief Thrasher stated that the Police Department gets complaints and noted that the State Statute is right. He further stated that all the City's multi-use paths currently allow class threes under State Law except for two as well as the path between Cochise College and Buena. The Department has taken the approach of not enforcing those just because somebody

makes a right turn from a path that they are on. The preference would be that all the trails are the same regardless, so that the Department does not have an enforcement issue.

E. [Discussion on Transit Fares](#)

Ms. Flissar stated that the staffing situation is something that everyone has heard a lot about over the last couple months. Unfortunately, the situation with staffing has not improved and in fact, she received a retirement notification from one of the full-time drivers during the week that will be working its way through the process, which just makes the situation even more difficult and there may be some additional changes coming down the line because of that. Currently in the budget there are seven full-time positions, and there are three of those currently filled. There are six part-time driver positions, and currently they have zero-part timers, and there are three administrative positions, a supervisor and two techs, and currently there is only one of those positions filled. Overall, the Department's current vacancy rate at Transit is 75 percent. This increases stress on the staff that are left, and it becomes a very difficult situation where everyone must pull extra and there is only so long that folks can be asked to do that. There are two staff on temporary assignment over at Vista Transit, both administrative staff. One is Chanel Kirkpatrick, Public Works Manager, who is handling the Transit Supervisor duties in addition to her regular job duties. There is also a management analyst, Andrea Castanon, who is over Transit helping with phones, paratransit scheduling, and doing what she can. Both of those staff are now over at Transit full-time.

Unfortunately, the options in backfilling CDL positions are very limited. The transit drivers have a CDL with passenger endorsement. The Department has a limited amount of other CDL drivers in Public Works, but they are all needed to do their regular job. Most of the CDL's are in refuse and there are no extra drivers available on most days to run the refuse routes and some days they must run fewer drivers than they would like out on the routes due to people being out sick, on vacation, the inevitable stuff that comes up. The Department has several hires in process that are working their way through; however, that process takes time.

Council Member Johnson asked about the systemic problem with staffing in Transit. Ms. Flissar stated that there are several difficulties in attracting drivers with CDL's. CDL drivers are in short supply nationwide, so just finding people with a CDL is difficult. The Department is willing to train CDL drivers because they have a CDL trainer on staff that can provide that training to people; however, once they get their CDL, they have a lot of other employment opportunities available. The other factor is the high-capacity vehicles in the post COVID era. This is not a unique situation in Sierra Vista and not an original struggle, but there is just not as many people that want to be bus drivers in the post COVID era. It raised awareness on virus transmission and in addition to that, the federal mandates for transit lasted a lot longer than for the general population, and the City did lose some drivers due to that. They had to continue wearing masks long after a lot of other mask mandates were lifted and that was difficult on them.

Council Member Johnson asked if the City is underpaying salary-wise. Ms. Flissar stated that Human Resources has looked at salary level and Council approved a variety of salary increases over the last year as well as benefit changes, and all of those are very positive things; but it is just a super tough labor market out there. Unemployment is extremely low and finding people that want to drive buses is extremely difficult.

Mayor McCaa asked if there is an issue as to why the people in the process have not been hired. He also asked if there could be a contingency hiring to bring them on early. Mr. Potucek stated that there are two full-time and two-part time that are in the process awaiting finalization of the background, but fingerprinting is the issue with regards to the time involved. However, he authorized Ms. Flissar to go ahead and proceed with the hiring of those four individuals contingent on them passing the background so that they can get the CDL training underway.

Mayor McCaa asked if those four cannot be on the street yet because they do not have CDL's. Mr. Potucek stated that there are two levels of training. There is the CDL and then also the Federal

Transit Administration in ADA training on top of that. This adds another layer of complexity because if it was just a CDL doing refuse, then they would go through the normal training, but there is an extra layer of training that needs to be done with transit drivers.

Council Member Benning asked if the position is being advertised with a CDL. Ms. Flissar stated that it is without a CDL, but if people have a CDL, the Department will take them. They just do not currently see a lot of applicants coming in with the CDL because of the overall national shortage of CDL drivers.

Council Member Benning asked if a time limit is put into place that once hired, they owe for the training. Ms. Flissar stated she does not believe that they do for Transit, and that is a tenuous issue because on one hand you want to recoup your investment and on the other, that could hurt your attraction to what is already a difficult to fill position.

Mayor McCaa asked if there is a signing on bonus or any kind of incentive. Mr. Potucek stated that the City does not have anything like that.

Council Member Messmer asked about the length of the training for the CDL. Ms. Flissar stated that it can vary based on the individual, how quickly they pick up the skills they need. The process alone, realistically can take two or three months and that is after they are on board. It does take time because they have material that they must study to prepare for the CDL. Then the tester must test them for their CDL, and then they can start job specific training. On Vista Transit Operations there is stuff like how to connect the wheelchair in, etc. Therefore, it is not a quick or easy process to get through; however, they do receive assistance as much so that they can make it through that process. The best-case scenario that they are still looking at is several weeks to be able to have any of those new hires on the road.

In response to Mayor McCaa, Ms. Flissar stated that the retirement notification was received yesterday, although they knew that this person was going to retire. Therefore, before that person's last day, the plan is to look at the schedules and see what changes must be made. Unfortunately, she does not have that answer right now because this is all new. Mr. Potucek stated that the other thing that they are looking at is having Ms. Downing in Procurement look at the possibility of contracting out drivers as the School District is currently doing that for their bus drivers. Unfortunately, the City cannot piggyback on their contract, but there are companies out there that do that. This might cost more, but maybe the City would have a more consistent supply of drivers by doing that.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey asked Ms. Flissar if she has time to conduct exit interviews and find out what the issues are, i.e., salary. Ms. Flissar stated that there have been a variety of reasons given, but she cannot go into too much depth on some of them due to privacy reasons, but they are across the board. Salary is not one specifically that people have given. They have stated other job opportunities, need to step away from a job for a while due to a personal situation, which are quite a few, but there has been a bunch of different reasons given. Mr. Potucek stated that it is not an easy job because they are dealing with the public all day and there are some things that can arise.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that he has heard that it takes so long to get hired when he has had his little huddles with people, staff, or people that want to work for the City. He added that it is upsetting to hear that repeatedly and noted that there is a problem somewhere. He further added that he knows that one of those is the background check/fingerprints. There seems to be no streamlined process that can be looked at to check the status of an employee that is getting hired, i.e., a flow sheet. Lastly, he added that when he meets the guys that he knows have CDL's, he has been told that they have referred someone, but by the time it took for the City to call them back, they had been hired somewhere else. This is a problem that must be fixed and perhaps it needs to be made into a totally separate job when it comes to this because the City is hurting bad for employment. This is not helping the process. If anything, the City is trying to throw money at the situation and doing what can be done to help. Sign on bonuses would probably help, but when it comes to CDL drivers, there are only so many to go around. In closing, he stated that the CDL

drivers on Fort Huachuca are happy because they drive two times a day, get paid well, deal with soldiers all day and they are very quiet and respectful. It is the same pool of CDL drivers, and they are going to go where the money is and where it is a less stressful job. He would like to have the feedback on exit interviews to know what is not being addressed.

Council Member Benning agreed with Council Member Rodriguez and asked how long it takes to get hired, from the day that someone is told that they are hired until they can hit the road. Ms. Flissar stated that the process with the full background check, until they can have someone on the road is probably four months. However, Mr. Potucek has allowed drivers to proceed without the background check.

Council Member Benning asked if the new hires are doing something during that time full time. Ms. Flissar stated that when they are hired after their background check is cleared, yes, they are doing CDL training, learning the different aspects of their job, and becoming acquainted with Vista Transit. When they are in the door the Department has something for them to do and even though they might not have a CDL because they can do other non CDL tasks, i.e., driving the paratransit van, answering phones, etc.

Mr. Potucek stated that the City can contract out background checks, but it will cost more, and it is the fingerprinting that is the catch. The City has no control over the fingerprinting process, and it may sound easy to say that those will be waived and take the chance, but the City has been burned by that in litigation big time.

Council Member Benning asked about the fingerprint requirement. Ms. Flissar stated that the fingerprinting process is something required by the City. It is a supplement to what is referred to as the online background check, which is what a lot of youth sports organizations, if they are looking for volunteer coaches, do online that can come back in a day or two; however, fingerprints must be taken by the Police Department. Then they go up to DPS, the FBI and at the FBI, they are there for a period which used to be, two, four weeks, maybe six max, but now it is seven weeks. There are some that take eight weeks to come back from the FBI. Police Chief Thrasher stated that this is a criminal history check through the FBI database for both Arizona State criminal history and what they call that the Triple I, which is the Interstate Compact. It must go up through DPS, which then checks it through both their database and the federal database for the criminal history. Under the regulations, the Police Department is only allowed to run criminal history for law enforcement employment, not regular city employment. The Police Department cannot run a CCH Triple I criminal history check. It must run the fingerprints through the FBI. He further explained that the City takes the prints as soon as the person comes in, they get sent to the FBI and they wait for that to come back to find out what their criminal history is. The only thing that you can check in Arizona is the Arizona stuff through public access to court information, but that does not have everything in it and does not have the dispositions of them and that kind of stuff.

Mr. Potucek stated that this is not the only area where the City has this issue. SEACOM is another area, and he is willing to take the risk to bring people on board contingent upon them passing their background check, which is the fingerprinting. However, the City will see some attrition and will be paying people that are going to leave, which is currently happening at the SEACOM Academy.

Council Member Benning asked if the City goes through a different level than the education system. Police Chief Thrasher stated that it is the same thing, but what the education does is each teacher goes and gets their own identity, verified print card. The teachers do this on their own and then when they get hired, before they can even get their teacher certification, they must prove to the State that they have been through that. It is a whole different system and if they were to produce an IFP card, they probably could get through the system if it is still a valid card because you must update those with DPS.

Mr. Potucek stated that somebody with a CDL can go drive for Walmart or Frito, not have to go through all this process and probably make more money. The benefits may not be as good, but they can go and get hired right away. The City is dealing with federal grants, which require to go through

this process.

Council Member Benning asked if some routes will not be running. Ms. Flissar stated that currently there are three full-time drivers plus a tech who has a CDL that can drive and has been driving on a regular basis. The Department consolidated two routes back in May/June into what is now the yellow route. In December due to increased shortages, some changes were made to the timing of the routes. The Department did not consolidate or cut any additional routes, but basically cut an hour off the weekday route and lost some time on the weekends as well. The Department does not like having to make those changes, but at the same time, four full-time employees, counting the tech who can drive, is 160 hours of capacity in the week. The Department must stay below that to be able to run the routes.

Council Member Benning asked about ridership numbers. Ms. Flissar stated that ridership trends through COVID were steady. There was a downturn at the beginning of COVID, but things have been steady since then. She noted that she provides ridership charts as part of the Executive Report every two months. Some months there will be a temporary dip, and then it comes right back up the next month. Prior to COVID, ridership numbers were higher, but it is difficult to gauge the level of that drop and the reason is because the routes were changed right before COVID (did not know that there was going to be a pandemic). The summer before COVID, Transit went from a Hub and Spoke System, which is all the routes go out and then they come back to the Transit Center. They all link at the Transit Center and then they transfer to a different bus. As an example, if someone was going from the West End to Walmart, very popular route, they would have to do a transfer at the Transit Center; however, that was changed right before COVID and went to one seat rides. Now they can get on at the West End and get to Walmart without having to transfer buses at the Transit Center. This made the system a lot more efficient and a lot less confusing for people by staying in the same seat the whole time. However, counting ridership changed. If they got on at their home on the West End, they were counted once, and when they got on another bus at the Transit Center, they were counted again. Under the current system, they are counted only once, when they get on the bus, unless they choose to make an additional transfer at the Transit Center and go down to the mall. Therefore, it is difficult to gauge the drop in ridership because Vista Transit was still adjusting to the new routes and trying to get a year's worth of data and COVID hit right in the middle of it. However, anecdotally in talking to the drivers, Vista Transit did see a significant drop during COVID which is consistent with what transit agencies across the country saw.

Council Member Johnson asked for data on unique riders. Ms. Flissar stated that the Department did a study several years ago; however, that was pre COVID and pre route changes. She further stated that she can provide that number to Council later, but yes, they did go through a process to count the number of unique riders.

Council Member Benning asked about transit fares. Ms. Flissar stated that there has been an increase in hesitance with handling money that was seen in the early days of COVID. A lot of places would not give change and Vista Transit never gave change to begin with, but they had to count out all the money that people would put in the fare box. A lot of transit agencies that were still operating fare-based systems put a moratorium on fares during COVID. The City was one of those agencies that did that around eight months. Coming out of COVID some transit agencies including Sun Tran in Tucson have chosen to make that change permanent. There are a lot of different reasons for that, but they saw positive impacts to transit operations where maybe things did not get hit as hard as they could have because fares were free to help people out during a very difficult time.

As part of the Short Range Transit Plan, other initiatives, and COVID, Vista Transit started looking at cashless systems to find out what is the feasibility for a small transit provider like Vista Transit to go cashless, safety of the employees and customers, and comfort level for everyone. Both the requests for information and request for proposal were put out and the City received several quotes back that were higher than was thought about 1/4 of \$1,000,000 just for installation and initial setup of this type of system. That does not include ongoing maintenance and licensing fees. These would hit on an annual basis, \$80,000 in ongoing fees. This also does not include the merchant transaction fees or additional costs associated with IT support. Those would be extra costs for the City as well.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey asked if this is the price for the fare box that was in the recommendation from the MPO Study. Ms. Flissar stated that the Short Range Transit Plan had a general recommendation to look at systems that would accept more types of affairs, not just cashless, the ability to take credit card payments, or whatever else people have. It was more of a general recommendation, but due to federal procurement laws, the City cannot go for one specific provider. It must be put out as part of a competitive process and that was done and received several quotes.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey noted that it was vastly different from what that study said that it would be, \$15,000 per unit. Ms. Flissar stated that sometimes things can change in going through the bidding process. That might have been for a bare bones type of system, but the City was looking for as part of this cost to go completely cashless and what was considered as part of the Short Range Transit Plan was just the ability to accept more payment types but keep cash. The City would have gone to having all busses equipped to have people buy a card and scan their card, but then that requires retrofitting the buses to be able to receive those types of scans like the big cities like Washington, DC or Chicago have.

Council Member Johnson quoted from page 81 of the Short Range Transit Plan: Although cost can vary among different contractors and different options, contractors offer new on-board fare boxes with smart card and smartphone readers can cost about \$15,000 per unit. The new fare boxes for all Sierra Vista Transit, 11 fixed route revenue vehicles could potentially cost approximately \$160,000.

Council Member Johnson commented that they went through many meetings to come up with the Transit Plan and nothing really came of it and although, he understands the COVID thing, he would like to move on from that. The MPO was talking about improvement strategies for the transit service in Sierra Vista. Specifically, to improve fare collection through these smart boxes. He added that he fought for increases in the fares and was kind of shot down because there are a lot of poor people that ride these buses. However, if they do not pay, the taxpayer pays.

Council Member Johnson continued on page 81 of the Short Range Transit Plan: Additionally optimized paratransit services and paratransit scheduling software along with online bus tracking.

The improvement Strategy 5 was expanded and enhanced bus network, extending service hours on key routes etc., and finally improve the public Transportation Safety Plan update. These are all things that were worked on, and they are contained in the document which is online. Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey noted that item six was approved in December.

Council Member Johnson stated that these are things that they looked at and he wonders why there is an MPO when nothing is done with the strategies/plans.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that those are all recommendations that were made if in the ideal situation, the City had enough drivers to implement those expanded routes and that money to install.

Mayor McCaa asked how many is enough drivers? Ms. Flissar stated that in her 23 years with the City, Vista Transit has not been around that long, but they are perpetually looking for drivers. It has never been this bad, but drivers are an ongoing need for Vista Transit. It is a high turnover position and a difficult job dealing directly with the public, a good amount of those members of the public have disabilities of some sort. It is not easy, and she commends the drivers that do it year after year because it is a difficult job.

Mayor McCaa asked if any routes would be cut because of the upcoming retirement. Ms. Flissar stated that they are still looking at that because she just found this news and there was no time to prepare it in advance of the meeting.

Council Member Rodriguez asked if there has been any contact with Fort Huachuca for the skills

program for the last year, when soldiers are either retiring or getting out of the Army to do SFLTAP to be a CDL driver for one year for the City, and still get their Army pay.

Council Member Benning stated that he was taught boats and horses were the same, a lot of money in and blank out. Transit seems to be the exact same thing. The City is putting a lot of money into something, trying to make it work, ridership's not going up, and he wonders if any time has been spent on looking at anything else or another way to get transportation to those that need it, besides the transit system. Mr. Potucek stated that historically this has always been a discussion point with the Councils that staff has worked with. It is the closest service that the City provides to being a social service and as such the City subsidizes that to the tune of about 50 percent. The City gets grants for 50 percent, and the City basically must cover out of the General Fund. Fare box recovery is a very minor percentage of the revenue that is taken into the system. The discussion point from Councils has been looking at that subsidy, \$400,000 to 500,000 a year. Generally, it might be a little more or less, but that is what has been put into this. The subsidy has been cut down by examining routes, seeing what is productive, what is not and making those changes as needed, which is how the City ended up with the current system. The staffing shortages are an acute thing, but that has always happened.

Mr. Potucek asked Council where to go from here? Does the City need large buses for the number of riders, examine who is riding because the preponderance of the riders are either elderly, disabled or low income. Is there another way to provide service to those people on call or something like that where there will not be all the capital expenses of buses and maintenance. It really comes out to how much is the City willing to subsidize the service for this population of people, and they will be present, if Council talks about getting rid of it. The people that ride it do absolutely need it.

Council Member Benning asked about the biggest van size where a CDL is not needed. Ms. Flissar stated that it is 15-passenger van and that many transit could not be fit in there, especially if some of those are disabled passengers because of the wheelchair lifts/access.

Council Member Benning stated that it is a necessity, but Council must make smart decisions.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that one of the recommendations by the MPO was to deploy paratransit scheduling software. Ms. Flissar stated that it is one that has not been done. By her count, they have done or are working on three of these currently, as has been noted, the issue of expanding routes is a bit of a moot point right now.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that since the one admin person is answering the phones and doing all the scheduling, this might be a good time to try that out. She added that she looked up the Sun Tran and it does not look like they have gone to a permanent free fare program. They extended the free fare. Ms. Flissar stated that they are referring to it as a pilot program. That is what a lot of them are doing to gage the impact of this. However, initial indications from those that have chosen to do a pilot program have been very positive, very few unintended negative consequences. One of those would be for transit providers that have longer hours than the City does. People staying on the bus all night because they do not have another place to sleep, and they can sleep on the bus, and it is warm. Obviously, Sierra Vista does not have that issue because the hours are much more limited and those type of things can be addressed with the policy change.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that in the limited research she did, the areas who offer that free fare for public transit, have a dedicated revenue source to offset the cost, a tax, university, or corporation who fund that missing revenue, and Sierra Vista does not have anything like that. Tucson does not either and theirs is about \$9,000,000 a year.

Council Member Messmer asked if somebody that already has their CDL can drive a different bus that does not require the extra training. Ms. Flissar stated that they can, and they would be able to drive anything at that point in time. The issue is the training process for Vista Transit policies, procedures, FTA requirements, everything that goes into running a transit system. Yes, they are qualified to drive with a CDL; however, to drive for Vista Transit, they have additional training that



they must do. As short as the Department has been lately, they have consolidated that training to the greatest extent possible to get people out on routes.

Ms. Flissar stated that some of the driving factors for a fare free operation for Vista Transit would be limited fare revenue, and the trend towards cashless operations. Vista Transit is currently running on its fare box revenue each year about \$63,000 in actual revenue. For its standard passengers, their fare is \$1.25; for discounted rates, which is senior and students, they have \$0.60; paratransit is a more expensive at \$2.00. The total fare box revenue every year for Vista Transit is only about \$63,000. Meanwhile, the direct expenses to collect those fares are about \$57,000. Direct expenses include printing, selling passes, cash box maintenance, counting money, delivering the money to City Hall, finance reconciliations and the hours that staff spends counting out fares and working those reconciliations, \$57,000 a year. The system is about even currently in terms of fares and expenses, but that does not count for indirect expenses. As Vista Transit is trying to attract more drivers into the system, collecting fares is one of the biggest items of stress for the drivers because there are people who do not want to show their monthly pass if they have one, passengers who try to get on without paying the fare and the driver must make a decision by the side of the road, and people who get on and want change. A big item of stress for drivers is dealing with fares and there is really no way to account for that cost, another reason that the Department was looking at the cashless operation. Staff's recommendation is to establish fare free as a pilot program as is being done elsewhere. If they get those unintended consequences, they could always go back to fares exactly like was done after COVID. The possibility that going fare free post COVID maybe incentivizes some people to come back and try Vista Transit again, and a part of what is received in the grant funds is passenger-count based. Therefore, if there is a way to increase passenger counts and get more federal funding to help support the Transit System, it is to the City's benefit to do that.

Council Member Johnson stated that he did some research anticipating this and he appreciates what staff is trying to do. The latest FTA numbers that he was able to glean off the Internet were 2017 numbers and at that point in time, fare box revenues were \$96,000. Total operating expenses were \$870; therefore, the fare box operating recovery ratio off the fare box prices was 11 percent. He then looked up the RTA CTA where he originally came from back in Chicago, and their recovery ratio is 14.4 percent. According to page 84 of the Short Range Transit Plan, it said that the best practice target threshold is 20 percent recovery rate and even below the minimum metric of 15 percent. From the numbers being provided, it is nothing. If the City goes fare free – that is an increase of taxes on the people that are paying taxes.

Mayor McCaa asked the length of the pilot program being proposed. Ms. Flissar stated that it would be six months to start and then reassess at that point in time.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that it is not worth it to him if all that is being made is less than \$6,000. The expenses associated with collecting that money is a lot of effort to collect less than \$6,000, and yes, it is an expensive beast. It is one of those things where it should be done, and it is not about the money in this case. There are other revenue producing things that should be focused on i.e., fire season at the airport and the need to make sure that those airplanes do not get diverted. People go to work, go to Walmart, spend money because they get a ride, and the City is benefiting on those ends of the spectrum.

Council Member Benning concurred and stated that he does not think that any city gets 20 percent.

Council Member Rodriguez stated that the fare free is the solution to get the numbers up. Council Member Benning stated that this way the City can get more federal funds.

Council Member Benning stated that with Cochise College opening their dorms, he wonders if the bus stops in that area are being increased. Ms. Flissar stated that it is yet unknown the impact of the dorms, but those are those are coming, and they would figure out ways to make that work.

In response to Council Member Benning, Ms. Flissar stated that they do not charge people for stops.

Mr. Felix stated that the IT Department has come across computers and equipment going up drastically in the last year and a half. The ongoing maintenance cost of the fully cashless system is more than the fares that were taken in 2022 and the actual farebox revenue taking out paratransit was closer to \$50,000. Taking cash is costing the City \$7000 a year.

Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey stated that she was more surprised because that was one of the things the City was already looking into and actively working at attaining, when they gave out those numbers in December of 2021. Other than the Safety Plan, that was the one thing that was already actively being worked on. Mr. Felix stated that the prior supervisor for Transit, Mr. Cooley, had been trying to look for a cashless credit card option as well six to seven years ago even before that came forward; but the simple matter on why staff is recommending is that taking cash, whether it is done the way that it has been done, which is actually costing money, or going to a cashless system where the ongoing maintenance costs are not at the current rate going to even cover the cost of running the system. That is a losing money proposition, and not spending the taxpayer's dollars wisely. Spending \$5,000 to 7,000, losing money, taking cash, or running a cashless system does not make a lot of financial sense. It is cheaper for the City to transfer over \$50,000 from the General Fund, which then could also be used as grant match to further get stuff done in the Transit System that saves money in the long run for the system.

Council Member Benning asked if the City is going to rob Peter to pay Paul in any regards. He noted that when he looks at the budget, he does not want to see that funds were taken from somewhere else to fund the fareless system or try to raise taxes, because he will not do that. Mr. Felix stated that ridership is important for the formula because less ridership means less money from the federal government through the system, which then if Council wants to keep the system going, also means more local taxpayer dollars going to subsidize the system. Which again does not make financial sense.

Council Member Landry stated that with all the information that was given to Council, it seems that the pilot program is the way to go. Based on earlier discussion regarding pre COVID, post COVID and all the different changes going on, it seems like there needs to be some time to collect more data and to find out what way to go. Throwing out money when there is not much coming in and then also providing the service is very important. The pilot program is a good way forward, the best course of action at this time as more information is gathered.

Council Member Benning asked if ad space is considered on the busses. Ms. Flissar stated that they do sell ad space on the busses, but it is not a huge generator for the Transit System.

Mr. Potucek stated that no one makes money in transit, all transit systems are subsidized. The City of Sierra Vista's is 50 percent, and the ridership is such that the City is serving an underprivileged population. The public is not riding the bus system as much as the low income or disabled people, the population that needs the rides. Hopefully more people will take advantage of riding it if it is free, but failing that, Council needs to look at other solutions, be it dial-a-ride or running an uber system. Council needs to probably look at a whole different way or a new idea as to how to move this targeted population around the community safely and effectively otherwise the City will continue to face these issues with subsidies.

In response to Council Member Benning, Ms. Flissar stated that currently Greyhound is not operating out of Vista Transit. They pulled out right at the start of COVID when ridership numbers plummeted for intercity bus service. Vista Transit has reached out to them to see if they are interested in coming back, but at least now, they are not. There is just not the demand there.

In response to Mayor Pro Tem Umphrey, Ms. Flissar stated that the fare free will be active on March 1, 2023 up until July. The riders were being told that it is was going to be fare free in March because Vista Transit started prorating passes at the beginning of February. They were not charging people for an entire month.

Council Member Benning stated that he will be attending the MPPP Water Board meeting on Wednesday, February 8, 2023 and he will provide an update at the next work session.

Council Member Messmer announced that the Culture Diversity Commission will be meeting in 10 minutes; therefore, she will need to leave.

G. Future Discussion Items and Council Requests

Council Member Johnson commented that he attended the ADOT Board Meeting in Council Chambers and had to sit out in the audience on awful chairs. He requested to possibly fund enough chairs that will not put one's back to sleep.

Mayor McCaa thanked Council Member Johnson for his comment and added that he also has had the privilege of sitting in those chairs and he totally agrees. He added that he has some other ideas to spruce up of the Council Chambers; but he will meet with the City Manager to discuss that.

In response to Mayor McCaa, Ms. Yarbrough stated that the executive report and the mid-year budget review are scheduled for the next work session.

Council Member Benning reminded everyone of the Executive Session and pictures of Council on Thursday, February 9 2023.

3. Adjourn

Mayor McCaa adjourned the February 7, 2023, work session of the Sierra Vista City Council at 5:09 p.m.

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Clea McCaa II, Mayor

Minutes prepared by:

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Maria G. Marsh, Deputy Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jill Adams, City Clerk