

**City of West Orange
Friday, July 31, 2020
Special-Called Council Meeting**

**West Orange Community Center
2700 Western Avenue (rear entrance)
West Orange, Texas
1:00 p.m.**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Roy McDonald
Michael Shugart, Sr.

Shirley Bonnin
Brent Dearing

Dale Dardeau
Randy Branch

APPOINTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

David Roberts
Theresa Van Meter

Simmie Gibson

Mike Stelly

Jessie Romero

Call to Order

Mayor McDonald called the workshop to order at 1:00 p.m., announcing that a quorum was present. The invocation was given by Mayor Pro-Tem Bonnin, followed by the Pledges of Allegiance to the American and Texas flags.

Regular Agenda

Discussion regarding the Fire Department budget – Assistant Fire Chief Gibson reviewed in detail the list of equipment totaling \$20,000 that is being requested in the 2020-2021 budget. He reported that he has found an air compressor with only about 85 hours of use on it with an original value of \$65,000 for sale for \$5,000. This is an 8-bank system. Chief Roberts added that this would be used to refill the air bottles. These bottles are being tested and certified twice yearly, not on a quarterly basis.

Chief Roberts continued by stating that he understands that everything for the Fire Department is very expensive, but some of these things are really needed because of safety issues. Ignoring these issues could fall back on the City and back on him. Mayor McDonald stated that all equipment needs to be properly maintained. The chief agreed.

The discussion then turned to the grant that has been awarded to the City for fire protection needs. It is divided as follows: bunker gear: \$34,375; air packs \$92,000; fire truck \$315,000. Council Member Branch asked how soon the truck would be able to be ordered. Mayor McDonald responded that if the City writes its own specifications ("specs"), it will take longer and cost more than if buying through a cooperative purchasing entity such as Houston-Galveston Area Council (HGAC).

Council Member Branch stated that the reason Chief Roberts and Asst. Chief Gibson were even here at this time was because the City was not satisfied with the way the Fire Department had been being run. They are trying to get this "up to snuff" and he thinks they should be supported in any way possible. He added that he is sure they understand that they cannot be given a blank check, but the City needs to support them and not tie their hands.

Mayor McDonald replied that the City needs to buy what is needed the most. "We just cannot buy everything at once." Council Member Shugart asked Chief Roberts if he had prioritized his list. Chief Roberts responded that he needs eight more sets of bunker gear and a new fire truck. Asst. Chief Gibson stated that everyone he has talked to about trucks are members of both HGAC and Buyboard.

Chief Roberts stated that they are wanting a custom cab. It is safer in the event of a rollover. It also has storage and has a better turning radius for the streets in West Orange. The City of Orange Fire Department brought a truck to the meeting for Council to see. Chief Roberts stated that it is very similar to what the WO department is wanting to buy.

Mayor McDonald stated that whatever specs are submitted will have to go before Council for approval.

Discussion regarding issues involving the Fire Department and the City – Chief Roberts asked that anyone with a problem involving the department call him to discuss it. If there is a problem, he wants to know about it.

Mayor McDonald stated that the radios were programmed without going through the City's communication officer. He added that he was personally not comfortable with the way they were programmed – with police department frequencies on them. He does not believe that to be necessary, unless only for the Chief.

Chief Roberts replied that these radios are programmed the same as the McLewis and Mauriceville Departments, and Pinehurst has most of them, as well. He has done some research and just found out that he can have the radios fixed so that they can be heard but not keyed on. He added that information that could prove valuable to his firefighters may be heard on these channels, such as roadblocks that might hinder their response time to a fire, or even an active shooter on the scene to which they are going.

Council Member Dearing asked for input from the Police Department. Chief Stelly replied that he does have a problem with it. As an example, a firefighter with his radio on was in WalMart standing near someone suspected of a crime. When officers talked over the police channel, the suspect was able to hear them. This hindered their case.

Chief Roberts assured Council that his firefighters will not be responding to police calls. If that were to ever happen, they would be terminated from the Fire Department.

Council Member Dearing then suggested that the only radios with these frequencies be the Chief's and Assistant Chief's.

Council Member Dardeau questioned the number of calls in the City in a month's time. Assistant Chief Gibson responded anywhere from three to twelve calls, with there being probably six fires in the year that they have been in the department.

Mayor Pro-Tem Bonnin asked how many active firefighters actually live inside the city. Chief Roberts replied that there may be six on the list, but they are not active. At the present time, there is probably only one resident who is actually an active member. Mayor Pro-Tem Bonnin stated that she has a problem with this. Chief Roberts suggested having the new fire truck painted blue and silver in support of the WOS Mustangs. That might bring some attention to the department and encourage some new members. Council Member Shugart was in favor of this idea, but Council Member Dardeau wanted to keep the truck red.

The discussion then turned back to the programming of the radios. Assistant Police Chief Romero questioned the need for the police frequencies to be in the fire department radios if they have a dispatch center to which to respond. Chief Roberts stated that the Fire Department wants to keep hearing the frequencies, but block keying on them. Chief Stelly announced that in thirty days it may not matter anyway, as the Sheriff's Office is going to stop dispatching for the City. Chief Roberts asked if that would be just for the Police Department or for the Fire Department. Chief Stelly responded that he understood it to be for all.

Mayor McDonald asked each Council Member to give Chief Stelly their opinion on how the radios should be programmed so that a consensus could be reached.


Adjournment

With there being no further business before Council, the mayor adjourned the meeting at 1:58 p.m. with those wishing to going outside to look at the new fire truck brought over by the City of Orange Fire Department.



Roy McDonald, Mayor

ATTEST:



Theresa Van Meter, City Secretary

