

**City of West Orange
Monday, May 23, 2022
Special Workshop Session**

**West Orange Community Center
2700 Western Avenue (rear entrance)
West Orange, Texas
5:00 P.M.**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Randy Branch

Michael Shugart, Sr.

Lanie Brown (*arrived at 6:00 p.m.*)

Meritta Kennedy

Brent Dearing

Jay Odom

APPOINTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Mike Stelly

Chris Leavins

Jon Sherwin

David Roberts

Theresa Van Meter

Simmie Gibson

OTHERS PRESENT:

Jessie Romero

Matt Frederick

Call to Order

Mayor Branch called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m., announcing that a quorum was present. Council Member Shugart gave the invocation. The mayor then led in the Pledges of Allegiance to the American and Texas flags.

Discuss goals for FY23

Mayor Branch stated that he would like to hear from the new council members regarding the things they may have heard during their campaigns, along with any ideas they may have for the betterment of the City.

Council Member Odom presented the following items:

- In regard to transparency, he would like to receive monthly reports from department heads.
- A load limit sign needs to be put up on the west end of Burnett Street. One is already in place on the east end that is visible when turning onto Burnett from Irving, but there is not one on the west end when turning onto Burnett from Foreman Road.
- There are rolls of fencing piled up at Wesco that have weeds growing all around them. This needs to be cleaned up. This fencing has been sitting there for quite a while. Mr. Sherwin stated that the fencing belongs to Orange Crush, who leases Wesco. He will contact them regarding this matter.
- He wants to see more money added to the City's budget for mowing ditches. There are many vacant lots with ditches that need to be mowed. Some discussion followed about the possibility of spraying these ditches with weed killer. It was pointed out that the City does have an ordinance whereby property owners are responsible for maintaining the ditches adjacent to their property. Mr. Sherwin reported that he has already added a request in his proposal for next year's budget for funds to cover mowing abandoned properties.
- Zoning needs to be adopted to keep businesses out of neighborhoods. Chief Stelly stated that the City is currently zoned by ordinance.
- In regard to housing and development, the condition of mobile homes in parks needs much attention. They are not in compliance with the City's ordinance. He would also like to see the restriction on the age of a mobile home being moved into the City changed from "nothing built before 1976" to "nothing older than 10 years old at the time of application." Chief Stelly suggested consulting with Mr. Leavins to see if that would be considered discrimination, as long as the home passed inspection. Mr. Leavins responded that he has not seen this challenged anywhere. He feels that ten years is "pretty aggressive," although he has seen some cities set twenty-year limits. He added that the city would still be open to challenges.

- A quiet zone needs to be established at the Donnell Street train crossing. There is no need to blow the whistle there and then again a few feet further down the track at Dayton Street. Mr. Leavins stated that there are things that would have to be done in lieu of having a whistle. He understands these to be pretty expensive. Mayor Branch responded that it could still be looked into.

Council Member Dearing then questioned the status of the grant money that has been applied for to be used to upgrade the parks. Mayor Branch responded that that grant has not come through yet. Chief Stelly stated that it should have come through in April, but it did not. The mayor stated that, as soon as the grant funds come in, work will begin on the parks. Some preliminary planning has already begun.

Mayor Pro-Tem Kennedy asked if some of the bad boards could be replaced where needed in the parks before the grant money arrives. Mr. Sherwin replied that "the short answer is no." He explained that the Parks Department is out of funds in the maintenance budget. The mayor then added that whatever might be done now, could very well be ripped out and replaced later. "We would like to go in and do everything at one time if possible."

Mayor Pro-Tem Kennedy then asked if the second phase of the drainage project would come in the next year. Mr. Sherwin replied, "That's the plan." He explained that Schaumburg & Polk, Inc. had projected having plans ready for the second phase in about a year, which would be next February.

She then asked about the possibility of getting help from the Orange County Drainage District to clean out the gullies in town. Chief Stelly explained that the problem lies in that they have to have rights-of-way for their equipment in order to get access to these waterways. Not all property owners are agreeable to that.

Mayor Pro-Tem Kennedy questioned if the Orange County Economic Development Corporation is aware of all of the vacancies in West Orange. Chief Stelly responded that if they are listed with a realtor, the EDC is aware of them.

She then announced that she will be applying for historical markers to be placed at several different locations within the city. These markers can be paid for with Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) funds.

Mayor Pro-Tem Kennedy then questioned the status of signs for the Adopt-a-Street program. She would also like to have some type of recognition/motivation for the groups volunteering to participate in this program.

Council Member Dearing then asked for the status on the new fire truck. Asst. Fire Chief Gibson responded that it should be in Mississippi in mid-June and then a two-to-three month delivery to the city after that. Mr. Sherwin stated that he is still waiting on the change order to be returned.

Council Member Dearing then asked if any additional houses had been added to the list of those to be torn down. Mr. Sherwin responded that there are currently 14 on the list, with three ready to go out for bid. He is still waiting for the title searches to be completed on the remaining ones. He added that he would like to wait until there are at least seven or eight ready to bid out before proceeding in order to get a better price.

Council Member Dearing then asked if the City had an ordinance pertaining to residents having PODs in their yards, or at least to the length of time they can have them in their yards. Chief Stelly responded that there is no ordinance addressing this.

Mayor Branch explained that he would like the Council to come up with a five- or ten-year plan for the future of the City. He would like everyone to think about this.

Review future personnel and/or budget needs to achieve these goals

Chief Stelly stated that, should Chevron Phillips' (CP Chem) expansion come through, an increase for manpower would become a reality. The problem would be that the City will receive no tax dollars from them.

He added that he would like to see all of the City's records digitized. He stated that "we are running out of room." Council Member Shugart asked for a "ballpark" cost to have this done. Chief Stelly responded that he had gotten an estimate four or five years ago of about \$100,000. He added that

there are probably 400 – 500 boxes of records upstairs in storage at city hall. The mayor stated that there are companies out there that do this. We can at least look into it. Council Member Dearing suggested hiring an additional employee to do this. Chief Stelly responded that the problem with that is that we would have to create an entire system. How do you digitize them? Microfilm? Pdf? What are these going to be in ten years? He added that it will all have to be indexed, as you will have to be able to “search” for these records when you need them.

Mayor Branch brought up the possibility of needing traffic lights on Western Avenue again once CP Chem is up and running. We are also going to be having more heavy trucks travelling on city streets.

The mayor stated that he is very pleased about all of the grants that the city is receiving, but he feels that sooner or later, these will stop, and the city will need to figure out how to handle everything that it needs to on its own, including all of the “extras” that will be coming along with CP Chem – extra traffic, extra street work, etc.

Chief Stelly reported that the City will be seeing an approximate 9.5% increase in property, liability and workers’ comp insurance for FY23 and about a 7% increase in employee health insurance. Another substantial increase will be continuing rising fuel costs.

As far as personnel needs, the Chief stated that he knows that he has some people now who are looking elsewhere because they want to get out of police work. He added that he doesn’t know if the city can compete with what industry is offering.

Chief Stelly stated that he will be asking for an additional patrol unit in the FY23 budget as the Code Enforcement Official is using one of the patrol cars that was kept an additional year.

He would like Council to look at a new pay column for the department’s “specialized team.”

His building is going to need some sheetrock repair due to some damage caused during the A/C repairs. There are also some sheetrock repairs needed at city hall, some cracks that need repair as well. As far as security updates, our camera systems are old analog systems. They need to be updated.

Mr. Sherwin reported that he has been looking for a truck driver for over seven months. He needs someone with a CDL license.

Council Member Dearing questioned the status of the generators for the lift stations. Mr. Sherwin replied that they are in process. He also asked Mr. Sherwin if he was still waiting on the engineers for the plans for the wastewater treatment plant. Mr. Sherwin responded that he was still waiting.

Mayor Branch asked Mrs. Van Meter how things were in her area. She responded that, as long as she can keep everyone she currently has in place, things would be good. She reported that bids are currently being accepted for the new LED sign to be placed in front of city hall. She is also working on a Request for Proposals for a redesign of the City’s website. Both of these projects will be grant-funded.

The mayor then asked if the Fire Department had anything to report. Council Member Shugart called it their “wish list.” Asst. Chief Gibson stated that he does have a list of items that will be requested in the FY23 budget:

- FireHouse software is phasing out. Upgrade to cloud-based system will cost \$7,000, with annual support at \$4,000.
- New cascade system (old one can longer be repaired)
- Additional radios
- Additional SCBAs
- Updates to station
- Training program (coincides with the new software system)
- Service truck (can haul additional hose and other supplies & equipment to fire scenes)
- A couple of sets of bunker gear a year, as needed

He reported that the trucks are scheduled to be pump-tested again on June 1st. It is getting to the time of year when all of the equipment needs to be tested. He added that he has tried to have the cascade system serviced twice this year, but the company is unable to get the parts. Chief Roberts stated that the SCBA bottles in the station now are out-of-date and can no longer be re-tested. Council Member Shugart asked how many should be budgeted for each year. Asst. Chief Gibson

responded that he plans to request three in the next budget. He has six coming in through grant funds if/when they come in. He added that, although it is not on his list, all bunker gear is supposed to be cleaned and tested annually. He has gotten a cost to do this of \$150 to clean, test and repair each set (per set).

Council Member Shugart asked if there were currently firefighters without radios. He was informed that there were. Mayor Pro-Tem Kenned asked if there were radios being paid for frequency that are not able to be accounted for. Chief Stelly responded that there is a master list of radios that we pay for per month for the radio tower. Asst. Chief Gibson stated that all of the radios they have out right now are the newer style radios. Any others are not usable. There should not be any that are not accounted for, as they were turned in. Chief Stelly asked him where these radios were turned in. Asst. Chief Gibson responded that the two radios that were in the trucks were sent with Mike Zeto, but he came back and said that they could not be reprogrammed. He added that they never got those radios back from Mr. Zeto. He said he dropped them off at the Police Department. They are turned off, however.

Mayor Branch then informed those present that he plans to have a workshop session once per quarter, with the next one to be held in August. He also stated that all department heads, and the fire department, need to be working on their budgets.

Council Member Brown then stated that she, along with everyone else, is glad that Western Avenue is fixed and repaired. Drainage is always the biggest topic of discussion. Another is cleaning up the dilapidated houses in the city. She is concerned that there is no zoning in West Orange and suggested forming a zoning committee. Mr. Leavins asked if the city had done a "comprehensive plan." He was told that it had not. He explained that this comprehensive plan is generally the first thing that has to be passed, then everything else builds on that. The Government Code requires this plan.

Council Member Dearing suggested the following:

- An outdoor movie night in the park
- A splash-pad at Caffey Park
- New lights and stands at Caffey Park

Council Member Brown commented that possibly some of the local industries might sponsor the splash pad.

Council Member Brown then stated that there is a need for a bridge to get to the fire hydrant on the south side of South Street. Chief Roberts responded that it would be ideal if the Water District would move it to the north side of South Street.

Establish plan of action

Mayor Branch asked everyone to keep in mind the things that had been discussed at this meeting and to expand on those and possibly others at the next workshop to be held in August.

Adjourn

With there being nothing further to be presented at this workshop, mayor adjourned the meeting at 6:32 p.m.



Randy Branch, Mayor

ATTEST:


Theresa Van Meter, City Secretary

