



Finance Committee Meeting  
February 23, 2016  
First Floor-North Conference Room, City Hall

**Present:** Vice-Mayor Gwen Wisler (Chair) , Councilman Cecil Bothwell,  
Councilwoman Julie Mayfield

**Staff:** Barbara Whitehorn, Tony McDowell, Frank McGowan, Greg Shuler, Paul  
Fetherston, Cathy Ball, Alex Carmichael, Roderick Simmons, Mark Halstead,  
Chris Gentile, Nikki Reid, Pat Liguori, Ken Putnam, McCray Coates, Melissa  
VanSickle

**1. Approval of Minutes**

**Councilmember Mayfield motioned to approve the minutes. Councilmember Bothwell seconded. Motion was approved unanimously.**

**2. Updates/ Reports**

**Aston Park Tennis Center Quarterly Report (Roderick Simmons)**

Mr. Mark Halstead provided an overview of the Aston Park Tennis Center quarterly report. After fee increases last year, staff has seen an increase in attendance but a decrease in the number of pass holders. The increase in attendance can be attributed to an increase in operations and more accurate tracking of court use. Now, staff is able to track actual visits and not just passholder information. In terms of passholders, there has been a decrease of 30%, which is due to an increase in passholder cost. This decrease was previously estimated by staff and although the number of passholders has decreased, some previous passholders have now chosen to pay the daily court fee.

**Nature Center Quarterly Report (Chris Gentile)**

Mr. Chris Gentile presented a summary of the Nature Center Quarterly Report. The first two quarters show that the City is now only subsidizing \$123,000 of the Nature Center. With increased revenue, less burden is taken off of the taxpayers. Some initiatives have already begun and there has been an increase in attendance from last year. That increase in attendance is due to marketing, tourism, and people visiting from outside the county. Also, Buncombe County now contributes a portion of each ticket sold in the County, allowing County residents outside the City of Asheville to receive a reduced ticket rate. Moving forward, the Center will begin building a new front entrance with a Tourism Development Authority (TDA) grant, which is set to be complete in July 2017.

### **3. NEW BUSINESS**

#### **Proposed Fee and Charges (Tony McDowell)**

Ms. Barbara Whitehorn explained that fees and charges are an ongoing process and need to be reviewed to identify adjustments. Councilwoman Mayfield noted that many are part of adjustments that are already in the works and therefore there is no need to disrupt those.

#### **US Cellular Center**

Members first inquired about the changes to fees and charges at the U.S. Cellular Center. Mr. Chris Corl provided an overview, explaining that some fees and charges are becoming packaged deals. There is a new proposed fee of \$2.50 for internal purchase requests. Currently, there is no fee for customers who purchase tickets over the phone, which requires staff time. Ticket Master charges a \$7.00 fee, therefore staff is recommending placing a convenience fee for those who call to buy tickets. Members discussed the convenience fee and asked about charges at comparable places. Most other arenas charge at least half of the \$7.00 Ticket Master fee.

Upon consensus, members suggested increasing the fee to \$5.00, identifying it as a convenience fee for buying tickets internally over the phone.

#### **Aston Park**

Moving forward, members reviewed Aston Park and agreed that the fees and charges were consistent with the previous set plan and projections. Members also agreed that the Nature Center fees were following their plan to decrease subsidies. Vice-Mayor Wisler noted that there is no more increases of admissions fees for the next three year period. Next year, staff will begin to look at changes

#### **Water**

Water rates gradually increase as planned. Commercial vs. residential rates were discussed and Ms. Whitehorn explained that the City is going through a new study that will update rates and therefore staff will have more information next year. Vice-Mayor Wisler inquired about whether the study will look into water utilization vs. a flat fee. Staff indicated that the study will look into all components of the rate.

#### **Stormwater**

Currently, Stormwater fees are in the middle of a planned increase. Councilwoman Mayfield inquired about the cost of Stormwater projects and priority areas. Ms. Barbara Whitehorn and Mr. McCray Coates explained that Stormwater is an enterprise fund and staff is currently working with a consultant to develop a priority list of projects to identify target areas that are feasible to address. Staff also continues to look for opportunities to partner with other organizations. Mr. Coates provided the example of the City recently partnering with the Corps of Engineers to complete a large Stormwater project.

### **Vehicle Tax/Parking**

Ms. Barbara Whitehorn discussed the new legislation for vehicle tax. Councilman Bothwell inquired about exploring options for lowering parking rates for City residents to offset the raised tag fee. Mr. Ken Putnam explained that there are challenges in identifying those who are City residents in parking garages. Councilwoman Mayfield inquired about the movement of funds to Transit. Staff explained that council will be able to look at options for the penny tax but suggested waiting for a full analysis of that issue.

**Councilwoman Mayfield moved to recommend all of the fees and charges adjustments to full Council, with an increase to the proposed U.S. Cellular Center convenience fee of \$2.50 to \$5.00, and a recommended full \$20.00 increase for the car tax. Councilman Bothwell seconded. Motioned was approved unanimously.**

### **Solid Waste**

According to the rate increase plan for solid waste fees, the City is behind a year. This year the fees will be at \$10.50 and staff recommendation is to continue on the plan to increase to \$14.00. The average rate across North Carolina is \$168/year and currently the City of Asheville is at \$126/year. With a \$14.00 rate, the City would be in a place to consider a Pay As You Throw (PAYT) system, which would address waste reduction goals. Vice-Mayor Wisler discussed increases made in previous years and the potential of looking at a PAYT model. Members also discussed commercial vs. residential waste. Mr. Greg Shuler noted that currently, commercial waste collection is not consistent but staff is beginning to review commercial collection rates.

**Councilman Bothwell moved to recommend the Solid Waste increase, Councilwoman Mayfield seconded. Motion approved unanimously.**

### **Review & Recommendation Concerning the Replacement of a City-owned Telecommunications Tower at 166 Reservoir Rd (Nikki Reid)**

Ms. Nikki Reid provided a background and map of the property and the towers. Ms. Reid further explained that the City is attempting to replace the lower tower. After comparing with other rates, staff estimates a cost of about \$275,000, which would be split between three parties. Members discussed the use of the towers and aesthetics. Ms. Reid mentioned that staff anticipates landscaping with the project to further buffer the tower.

**Councilmember Mayfield motioned to recommend this item go to full Council, Councilmember Bothwell seconded. Motioned approved unanimously.**

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:42 p.m.