

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

March 1, 2011

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a conference at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room on the 1st day of March, 2011, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray, and the Norman Public Library at 225 North Webster 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Atkins, Butler, Cubberley, Dillingham, Griffith, Kovach, Quinn, Mayor Rosenthal

ABSENT: Councilmember Ezzell

UPDATE REGARDING THE REGIONAL OUTDOOR WARNING SYSTEM POLICY.

Mr. Steve Lewis, City Manager, said on March 2, 2010, Norman citizens voted and approved at 62%, to fund a proposal that would allow the City to rehabilitate Norman's entire Outdoor Warning System (OWS). Since that time, Staff has been making some good progress and wanted to update Council on the new installation of the OWS and discuss educating the citizens about the new OWS and its capabilities. Mr. Lewis said Norman currently has a policy for sounding OWS and there are always a lot of questions as to when *should* and when *does* the City activate OWS. Staff felt this would be a good opportunity to address the OWS and policy since "storm season" is quickly approaching.

Mr. James Fullingim, Fire Chief, said Staff discussed the Regional Outdoor Warning System Policy (ROWSP) with Council in September 2010, and he said Central Oklahoma Emergency Managers (COEM), which represents the entire central part of the state, are in the process of addressing a regional policy. He said the City of Norman Emergency Operation Procedure (EOP) contains policy for sounding OWS and Council reviewed and approved amendments to this policy in the spring of 2010. Chief Fullingim said there have been discussions regarding the possibility to sound OWS during high wind and hail but it was determined that would not be practical, and although it is still an option in the ROWSP, it will not be one of the committed warning priorities.

Several cities/entities have been policy development participants (Policy Group) including Norman, Canadian County, Del City, Edmond, Midwest City, Moore, Oklahoma City, (OKC), Oklahoma County, Yukon, and Tinker. Chief Fullingim said the Policy Group has just released the ROWSP to the COEM and a couple of cities/entities have agreed to join the program already. Cleveland County does not currently participate in the policy development because they do not have an OWS.

The current activation policy in the EOP is very similar to the ROWSP and is designed to warn citizens of approaching tornadoes, using information from multiple sources including the National Weather Service, and sirens are activated if tornadic activity threatens any portion of the City of Norman. Norman's OWS will now be tested on Saturday, rather than Friday, to accommodate volunteer fire departments in other jurisdictions. Chief Fullingim said the OWS will be tested weekly but may be suspended for the following reasons:

- ❖ When the National Weather Service has issued a Severe Thunderstorm/Tornado Watch or Warning for Central Oklahoma region,
- ❖ Imminent threat of severe weather,
- ❖ Freezing temperatures below 32 degrees Fahrenheit, and
- ❖ Requests to not sound the system because of large outdoor special events, sporting events, or ceremonies

Chief Fullingim said jurisdictions may conduct a silent test of their OWS at their own discretion and Norman will do so daily and under certain conditions, i.e., Oklahoma University (OU) home football games. He said the audible testing was the only OWS testing in the past and is not nearly as important to determine if the OWS is functioning properly. Mayor Rosenthal asked if the new OWS signal will be similar to the old OWS signal or will it be a voice signal instead and Chief Fullingim said it will be similar to what citizens have heard in the past (with the old OWS).

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He said the primary difference is the directional sound will be constant, i.e., citizens will not hear the signal going away and coming back. He said the voice portion of the OWS will be activated after the audible warning is sounded, stating "this is a tornado warning" and other messages can be broadcasted in the event it is determined there is a need to alert/warn the community. He said another example of the voice portion of the OWS is alerting citizens that a "high lake wind warning has been issued and citizens need to get off Lake Thunderbird". He said the Oklahoma Lake Patrol would initiate the request and Staff would isolate only the OWS sirens that surround Lake Thunderbird when activating the warning.

Chief Fullingim said the biggest benefit of the ROWSP is there will now be a consistent OWS message throughout the region, which has been somewhat confusing in the past. He said for the past several years, Norman's practice has been to warn the public to "take shelter and seek more information", and it is now one of the ROWSP guidelines as well. He said all the participating jurisdictions/communities will be communicating to their citizens to "take shelter and seek more information" and he stressed it is imperative that people "go seek more information" via television or radio because not every individual who hears the OWS will need to take the same action, i.e., some citizens will need to take extra precautions due to the storm threat, while other citizens may not be in the path of the storm, etc.

Chief Fullingim said the "all clear" signal has always been an issue and can be very confusing to citizens. He said some communities have tried to use the "all clear" signal only to have citizens believe it was an alert for additional severe weather, rather than weather is now "all clear." Chief Fullingim said NO local jurisdiction will issue an "all clear" signal and citizens hearing an OWS siren over and over, i.e., every 10 or 15 minutes, etc., will indicate there is still severe weather, whether a new threat or moving into another area. He said a great example of a situation where the OWS could be issued multiple times is the severe weather/tornados that came through Norman in May 2010. He said during that particular storm, the OWS was activated three (3) distinct times due to the three (3) different severe weather threats. He said if severe weather persists longer than 15 or 20 minutes, the OWS will be activated again to ensure that the citizens realize there is still a threat of severe weather in the area.

Chief Fullingim said if Council wishes to adopt the ROWSP as Norman's activation plan, Staff will amend the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) to reflect the changes. He said a press conference is scheduled tomorrow, March 5, 2011, with the Oklahoma Emergency Managers Association to discuss and he requested Council's approval to add Norman's name to the list of communities participating in the ROWSP.

Chief Fullingim provided information about the new OWS and stated 54 new sirens have been installed and 45 of those were operational. He said the new OWS sirens are solar-powered and only require battery packs to be operational and hopes are to have a total of 60 sirens installed and operational by the end of next week. Chief Fullingim said Staff will move away from activating the old OWS within the next two weeks, but it will be left in place for a period of time as a backup while working out any new OWS details. He said one (1) control station is now onsite and has been used to activate Friday testing, and Staff is currently working on site details for the three (3) remaining control station sites. Chief Fullingim said the old OWS had 37 sirens and the new OWS will have a total of 68 sirens throughout the entire incorporated city limits of Norman. He said the new OWS will be functional and working well by the fast approaching spring severe weather season.

Councilmember Butler asked if the City would be divided into four (4) quadrants so that the OWS sirens could be separately activated and Chief Fullingim said the OWS will alert citizens primarily in quadrants, but has the capability of dividing the City into 16 zones. He said when narrowing the system down to 16 zones, it becomes difficult to ensure all citizens are warned because it takes more time to activate the system.

Mayor Rosenthal asked how Staff plans to educate the citizens about the new OWS and Chief Fullingim said he would like to speak at a scheduled press conference tomorrow to discuss and prepare the citizens for Saturday's (March 12, 2011) testing. He also felt future updates through media outlets might be needed to alert citizens to progress and changes in the new OWS. Councilmember Dillingham asked what the best practice to encourage citizens to "seek more information" and Chief Fullingim said all literature currently distributed has the message "seek more information". He said since all regional communities will be using the same message for OWS, hopes are the "seek more information" message will become more prevalent with time. Chief Fullingim said severe weather

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packets/literature will be distributed at schools and Mayor Rosenthal suggested putting information on the City's web page, Channel 20, and in utility bills to further educate citizens about the new OWS.

Councilmember Kovach asked if the OWS was on budget and Chief Fullingim answered in the affirmative and stated no change orders are expected at this time.

Council discussed and agreed Chief Fullingim should communicate that the City of Norman will be a participating community in the ROWSP and Staff should amend the Emergency Operations Plan to reflect the change.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint Presentation entitled "Regional Outdoor Warning System Policy," presented by James Fullingim, Fire Chief
2. Central Oklahoma Emergency Management Association Regional Outdoor Warning System Guidelines dated October 2010
3. News Release on behalf of Central Oklahoma Emergency Managers Association, dated March 2, 2011, in reference to Guidelines announced for outdoor warning sirens - DRAFT

The meeting adjourned at 5:52 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor