

CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE MINUTES

December 20, 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 20th day of December, 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 Dillingham, Gallagher, Griffith, Kovach, Lockett, Quinn, Spaulding, Mayor Rosenthal

ABSENT: Councilmember Ezzell

DISCUSSION REGARDING A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE CITY OF NORMAN, THE NORMAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, AND THE NORMAN CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU TO PROVIDE WAYFINDING SIGNAGE WITHIN THE CITY OF NORMAN.

Mayor Rosenthal introduced Mr. John Woods, Executive Director of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, and Mr. Stephen Koranda, Executive Director of the Norman Convention and Visitors Bureau, and said she appreciated their support of this collaborative process.

Mr. Steve Lewis, City Manager, said discussion of a wayfinding agreement began several months ago between Mr. Woods, Mr. Koranda, and City Staff to brainstorm ideas of ways to increase the number of people who visit Norman and to identify Norman as a destination. He said there had been several meetings and the following presentation had been prepared as a result of those meetings. He said wayfinding is a dedicated approach to make Norman a more visitor friendly community through coordinated signage and an opportunity to cross market some of Norman's destinations and attractions to some of those who are already in Norman attending a convention or an event.

Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, defined "Wayfinding" as a program designed to help visitors "find their way" around a new environment, listing Bricktown in Oklahoma City as an example of a successful wayfinding system. He said part of this process is to figure out where we want the visitors to go. He said people tend to navigate architectural and urban spaces by cognitive mapping and the program should be intuitive and easy to grasp including cross-cultural and language barriers. These programs usually include signs, symbols, colors, and images. He said wayfinding is intended to be an economic and business development tool to increase visits to Norman destinations by providing clear and inviting directions. Economic benefits are especially important to Norman where tourism, convention business, and sales tax generation are significant to our economy. He said local businesses would benefit even if they are not in designating districts because wayfinding routes purposely lead users past their businesses. He said wayfinding is needed to build awareness in Norman, makes us look friendlier to visitors, and does not just start at the entrances to the City but would actually get out into the interstate system and highway system. He said the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) would not let us just install our signs in the highway right-of-way but there are existing signs that should be looked at and could be changed to say what we want them to say.

He said Norman presently has wayfinding, provided examples, and listed some of the shortcomings to this system as a lack of consistency in sign material; support design; and fonts with no follow through in guiding a visitor to a specific destination and no branding showing people they are in Norman. He said ways to improve wayfinding were enhancing many recreational, civic, cultural, historic, and commercial properties currently not identified through current signage to make the community signage clearer and destinations easier to find. This would help create a sense of identity in specific "regions" or "districts" such as Downtown, Campus Corner, University of Oklahoma, Public Schools, shopping districts, etc.

He said national studies show that less than 10% of visitors stop at an information/visitor center and an estimated 10-30% use Global Positioning Systems (GPS) increasingly via Smart Phones. He said although this has changed things, the need for signs will never be totally eliminated and the branding element could be incorporated into the system. He provided examples of what wayfinding looks like and how it improves current signage and makes use of what currently exists. He said it is up to the community to determine the style and brand, possibly by a working committee that represents several different entities, i.e., Norman Public Schools, University of Oklahoma, etc. The design could be by area and district, types of activities (shopping, civic/cultural), and geographic.

Mr. O'Leary said the wayfinding process was a multi-step process starting with the planning and design stage which was critical because the sign must be of a type of material that would be easy to maintain. He said the sign shop in the Public Works Department would be maintaining these signs and there are approximately 35,000 regulatory and parking signs in Norman presently maintained. He said a large sign installed would cost \$1,500 to \$2,000. He said these signs will have to be maintained because they are sometimes knocked over by winds, have sun damage, or have been damaged by a vehicle. He said after these two steps are completed, a wayfinding system would be unveiled to the community.

He said staff is proposing to enter into the first phase, the Planning and Design Phase, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Norman, the Norman Chamber of Commerce, and the Norman Convention and Visitors Bureau (NCVB) has been developed. He said if this three party agreement is approved by City Council, a request for proposal will be sent out to a number of companies who help cities develop wayfinding systems. The Norman Chamber of Commerce and NCVB are proposing to provide \$20,000 each for funding the plan development. The plan development would involve the selection and hiring of a wayfinding consultant who would develop the plan. This would be followed by several public meetings and interaction with different agencies to develop a brand that everyone can agree on. He said the consultant(s) would serve on the steering committee as well as City staff and representatives from several different agencies. The City's responsibilities include preparing and distributing the request for proposal; facilitating the consultant selection process; awarding the contract for a wayfinding plan; participating in all elements of the wayfinding plan development; implementing recommendations of a wayfinding plan pending approval of an annual project capital budget by Council; and maintaining, repairing, and replacing wayfinding signage and appurtenances in perpetuity. He said if Council wishes to proceed, the MOU will be submitted for Council's approval in January, request for proposals will be submitted, and a contract with a consultant could be provided for Council's consideration by March with an anticipated completion date by the end of the calendar year.

He said the components of a wayfinding plan were to first assess what is already in place to see if it is working; establish criteria for qualifying wayfinding destinations; create a policy to determine who qualifies as an agency; receive recommendations of signage types and placement; select signage design elements; and then gather cost estimates for purchasing, installing, and maintaining the signs. He said several considerations for signs should be examined such as colors of sign sheeting, fonts and letter series to be used; text sizes to be used; and type of sign posts/hardware. He stressed the importance of these signs complying with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control (MUTCO).

He said criteria for qualifying wayfinding destinations would need to be established. He said not all destinations can be accommodated; there were private versus public; wayfinding versus advertising because most wayfinding systems do not include any kind of advertising; permanent versus temporary wayfinding signage listing banners for festivals and limited licenses as examples for temporary; kiosks have a specific place and could be placed on Campus Corner or Downtown; and branding.

Signage types and placement would need to be established to identify points of interest; delineate between districts and neighborhoods; designate historic districts; avoid sign clutter and duplications; avoid connection

between Wayfinding and advertising; standardization; capabilities for expansion; and appearance to project a positive image. He said Gateways into cities are a type of Wayfinding.

Mr. John Woods, Executive Director of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, said the Chamber is very excited about the project and a wayfinding plan would be a benefit to residents, businesses, consumers, and visitors. He said he perceived the opportunity for private investment, partnerships, or sponsorships of the signs after the plan is underway.

Mr. Stephen Koranda, Executive Director of the NCVB, said the Downtowners Association had been discussing ways to get people off the interstate to the downtown and he was glad this has evolved.

Councilmember Dillingham said this was a huge opportunity to maximize the benefits of Norman at relatively little cost because there are opportunities for grants and sponsorships.

Councilmember Quinn said this was a unique situation where the Chamber and NCVB are starting the process by providing funding and manpower and he appreciates it. He said Norman is different all the way down Main Street to Interstate 35 which calls positive attention to the City of Norman and a wayfinding plan would enhance this.

Councilmember Spaulding asked if these signs were subject to any federal regulations. Mr. O'Leary said currently all signs are regulated by MUTCD and the City has to comply and wayfinding has been added to MUTCD recently. He said the life of a sign is 10-15 years and there is a system in place to replace signs and this would be incorporated into the same system.

Councilmember Kovach said he would like to better understand what we are obligating ourselves to with the MOU, once the plan is in place, and we are obligated to fund it. How much control will Council and future Councils have over how much is funded at a time. Mr. O'Leary said there is no monetary commitment to the current agreement. He said there are many creative ways to fund the program and would be part of the plan development and he hoped there would be grant-funding opportunities. He said once it is started, there is a certain obligation although it is not very well defined at this stage. Councilmember Kovach a if certain wayfinding plans include the use of billboards and Mr. O'Leary said yes and the City could do this as well. He said a review of what we already have should be done first.

Councilmember Kovach said he gets many comments about the entryway into Norman and the closest thing Norman has is the stone sign on West Main which is not lit. He said it was hard for Norman residents who have always lived here to see the need for this but it was needed for visitors and new students.

Councilmember Dillingham said at this point our hands are not tied and we can define and determine all levels of what is appropriate for the City. She said it was important to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of every contribution, whether public or private.

Councilmember Gallagher asked if a total cost had been determined beginning to end. Mr. O'Leary said he did not have an amount at this point because it would depend on how long the process takes. He said depending on what the City wants, additional staff or other resources might be required to maintain the plan. He said it would not surprise him to spend at least \$20,000 to \$30,000 of City funds in a wayfinding plan. He said Salina received a \$100,000 grant from the Department of Transportation which started their program. Councilmember Gallagher asked what the percentage was between public and private funding. Mr. O'Leary said he did not have that information but would get it.

Councilmember Dillingham suggested looking into some of the companies that have been doing wayfinding to determine what kind of economic enhancement can be expected in a City that uses wayfinding as an economic generator. Mr. O'Leary said the selection of the firm is very important. Mayor Rosenthal said a variety of alternative financing methods should be examined when we generate the request for proposal.

Councilmember Spaulding asked how sponsorships would work in relation to future maintenance of signs and asked who decides when a sign needs to be replaced and notifies the sponsors. Mayor Rosenthal said these options should be examined before a plan is implemented. Mr. O'Leary said signs on the highway are put up and maintained by the Department of Transportation but the signs and any updates made are paid for by the sponsors.

Mayor Rosenthal said she did not hear objections and that the MOU should be brought forward in January.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Wayfinding Signage Memorandum of Understanding", dated December 20, 2011

The meeting adjourned at 6:22 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor