



CITY OF NORMAN, OK CITY COUNCIL BUSINESS & COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING

**Municipal Building, Executive Conference Room, 201 West Gray,
Norman, OK 73069
Thursday, December 05, 2024 at 4:00 PM**

MINUTES

The City Council Business & Community Affairs Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Regular Session in the Executive Conference Room on the 5th day of December, 2024, at 4:00 p.m. and notice of the agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray and on the City website at least 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Peacock called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Present:

Councilmember Ward 2 Mathew Peacock (Chair)
Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant
Councilmember Ward 6 Joshua Hinkle
Councilmember Ward 8 Scott Dixon

Absent:

Councilmember Ward 5 Michael Nash

Others Present:

Mayor Larry Heikkila
Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman
Mr. Anthony Francisco, Director of Finance
Mr. Chris Mattingly, Director of Utilities
Ms. Shannon Stevenson, Assistant City Manager
Mr. Jason Olsen, Director of Parks and Recreation
Mr. Rick Knighton, City Attorney
Mr. Scott Sturtz, Director of Public Works
Mr. Scott Martin, President and CEO of Norman Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Sandra Simeroth, Administrative Technician IV

AGENDA ITEMS

1. CONTINUED DISCUSSION REGARDING CREATION OF A TAX INCREMENT FINANCE (TIF) MASTER PLAN.

Item 1 was not discussed. Discussion will take place at the January 2025 City Council Business and Community Affairs Committee Meeting.

2. DISCUSSION REGARDING SHOPPING CARTS.

Ms. Shannon Stevenson, Assistant City Manager, addressed the ongoing issue of abandoned shopping carts throughout the city of Norman, stating the City's intent to reduce neighborhood clutter, improve public image, and reduce business-related costs. She highlighted the broad impact across several departments, particularly Parks and Recreation and Utilities, which manage 10–15 carts weekly.

Ms. Stevenson emphasized the public safety concerns caused by carts in traffic and drainage areas, which often require resource-intensive responses. In Summer 2024, a major encampment at Lindsay Street and McGee Street, heavily populated with carts, cost the City nearly \$50,000 to remediate. A similar cleanup near 12th Street SE and Alameda cost \$5,000.

Chairman Peacock stated those costs equate to a month's worth of shelter expenses.

Ms. Stevenson said in May and June 2023, Staff met with the Business and Community Affairs Committee and the Chamber of Commerce about the cart issue. In October 2024: Staff met with major retailers; one primary retailer who is responsible for 90% of carts attended and committed to rotating weekly cart retrievals citywide and hiring a landscaping service to assist with recovery.

Councilmember Hinkle asked if retrievals would include blocked drainage sites. Ms. Stevenson clarified the retailer will retrieve only visible, street-side carts. City staff will still handle more complex removals involving hazardous materials and encampments.

Chairman Peacock suggested retailers be notified via the Action Center reports. Ms. Stevenson agreed, noting the retrieval service is not on-call and staff follow-up will be necessary.

Staff intends to track data over a six-month trial period, then reconvene with the retailers in April 2025. Ms. Stevenson also outlined research into other cities' approaches, including a company in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Cart Repo, which retrieves and resells carts. The City of Tulsa has recently partnered with Cart Repo and TEAR (Tulsa Authority for Energy Recovery), leveraging a \$100,000 grant.

Item 2, continued

Councilmember Holman also requested more information on Tulsa's partnership with Cart Repo and further voluntary retailer compliance without requiring police involvement

Chairman Peacock acknowledged Cart Repo's success in collecting 2,000 carts in one month in Albuquerque.

Mr. Jason Olsen, Director of Parks and Recreation Director, said Staff is often diverted from regular duties to retrieve carts, which can take 20 minutes to an hour, or require heavy equipment when in creeks.

Councilmember Grant asked if the City contracts cart retrieval. Mr. Olsen replied that Parks Staff handle most recoveries unless deemed hazardous.

Mr. Chris Mattingly, Director of Utilities, said his supervisors also retrieve carts to prevent road hazards.

Mayor Heikkila asked how Staff handle contents of abandoned carts and Mr. Mattingly said the trash is disposed of by Staff.

Ms. Stevenson reviewed systems in Fort Worth, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; Austin, Texas; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Santa Monica, California. Cities vary in enforcement, penalties, and containment requirements. She said Pittsburgh uses a Prevention and Retrieval Plan requiring each store to file a retrieval method with the City.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Chairman Peacock suggested focusing on containment systems, as individuals stealing carts often cannot pay fines.

Councilmember Grant asked which city had the most effective system. Ms. Stevenson indicated she would research further, including a report on Atlanta, Georgia, where carts are not visibly an issue despite a significant homeless population.

Discussion included possible fines.

Mayor Heikkila expressed concern about placing financial penalties on businesses instead of individuals and warned of cost pass-throughs to customers.

Councilmember Hinkle supported proactive business involvement and suggested an ordinance requiring cart locking mechanisms for businesses with large inventories.

Chairman Peacock proposed an ordinance with flexible options (e.g., A-B-C or A+B solutions).

Item 2, continued

Councilmember Grant favored flat fines for accountability and inquired about standard community service hours.

City Attorney Rick Knighton said a \$200 fine typically equates to 20 hours of community service, historically supervised by part-time staff.

Ms. Stevenson noted fines in other cities range from \$100 to \$1,000 for repeat offenders and \$100 to \$500 for retailers.

Councilmembers Dixon and Holman supported shared accountability and community service options over incarceration or fines for low-level offenses.

Councilmember Holman requested data on Geo-fencing technology used by retailers.

Chairman Peacock requested a cost-benefit analysis of current Staff hours and costs related to cart retrieval versus investing in a permanent solution.

Ms. Stevenson mentioned two primary policy paths; individual accountability (fines/community service) and business responsibility via containment systems or plans.

Councilmember Holman supported requiring businesses to register their containment/retrieval plan with the City.

Councilmember Hinkle proposed a shopping cart permitting fee. Councilmember Dixon suggested a tiered fee system based on cart recovery incidents.

Future Steps:

- Conduct more detailed cost/resource analysis.
- Track and monitor cart activity and recovery data.
- Continue research on best practices and enforcement models.
- Reconvene with businesses in March 2025, followed by a BACA meeting in April 2025 to determine the Council's policy direction.
- Consider community education and engagement strategies.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 5:06 p.m.

ATTEST:


City Clerk




Mayor