



WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, March 24, 2004, for the purpose of discussing the status of the Astronomy Club Observatory.

Mayor Pro Tem Roberts called the meeting to order at 8:05 p.m. It was held in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V. J. Putens, and Mayor Pro Tem Rodney M. Roberts. Mayor Judith F. Davis was out of town.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; Kristen Ward, Community Planner; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Matt Elliott, president, Doug Love, vice-president, and other members of the Astronomy Club; and Sheldon Goldberg, Advisory Planning Board.

After showing several slides of the observatory dome and telescope, Ms. Ward said that when the observatory was discussed at last year's Capital Projects meeting, there was an understanding that the City would put up \$10,000 and the Club \$20,000 of the costs. Council asked to have several issues addressed prior to scheduling another work session, including access, hours, and maintenance. She said the agreement drafted by the Club was satisfactory to the City Solicitor. She said the City needs to take ownership after the agreement is signed because of the zoning restrictions.

Ms. Ward then read through the draft agreement with Council. She said as things stand, the Club is responsible for getting liability insurance and that LGIT cannot do it. Standard coverage is \$1 million per person per occurrence. Mr. Putens questioned whether the Club should have to pay for this if the City is the owner. He also said the cost of the City permit should be waived if this is to be a City structure.

Mr. Roberts asked about ADA compliance. Ms. Ward said there are steps into the dome to get to the viewing platform that cannot reasonably be modified for wheelchair access. Club members always have telescopes available at ground level, however, and they believe this should be adequate.

Regarding paragraph #2 in the agreement, Ms. Mach said she was not clear on whether the City would be fronting the entire amount and being reimbursed by the Club or not. The Club currently has \$17,000, but it does have other ongoing expenses. The Club reimbursed the City \$4,500 of the approximately \$9,000 it has spent. After considerable discussion, it was agreed that the City would spend up to its \$10,000 limit, then the Club would spend as much of the \$17,000 that it can afford, then the City will pay the balance and be reimbursed by the Club. Although there is not a firm estimate on costs, it is likely that there will be a funding gap of \$4,000-\$5,000. Mr. Elliott volunteered that they have a large telescope they could sell to raise funds. Ms. Mach said she really did not want to force them to sell equipment; rather, she wanted to force them to come up with a fundraising plan. Mr. Putens suggested that the

agreement state that a payment plan will be negotiated at such time as the final costs of the project are known, in order that both the Club and the City will have full information.

Ms. Mach also asked if Public Works staff would be undertaking any of this work. Ms. Ward said they would not, other than possibly at the entrance. She said some work would likely be done by Club members.

Mr. Herling asked about public attendance. Mr. Love said they had recently attracted about 200 for the lunar eclipse and 20-30 for star parties.

There was discussion of security, which is a matter of some concern.

Mr. Roberts asked about electricity. Mr. Elliott said the telescopes are battery-powered, and they are looking into solar panels for recharging them rather than using a generator.

In paragraph #13, Ms. Mach questioned the prohibition against all admission fees, since holding a fundraising party would not seem to be an inappropriate activity. It was mentioned that donations were not prohibited.

Regarding the personal property taxes the Club is still paying on its equipment, Mr. Putens suggested the City take ownership of the equipment and lease it back. Mr. McLaughlin said he would prefer not to handle it that way, since if that practice were carried over to other clubs and organizations, the City could acquire a great deal of miscellaneous equipment. He suggested raising the matter with the state again to find out if all possible avenues had been pursued in seeking exemption.

Mr. McLaughlin said that when the agreement was revised, it would be placed on the agenda of a regular meeting for Council action.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher
City Clerk