



CITY OF AUBURN HILLS
City Council Workshop Meeting
Minutes

February 1, 2021

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor McDaniel at 5:30 PM.

LOCATION: Virtual Meeting

Present: Mayor McDaniel, Council Members Burmeister, Kittle, Knight, Marzolf, Moniz and Verbeke

Absent: None

Also Present: City Manager Tanghe, Assistant City Manager Grice, City Attorney Beckerleg, City Clerk Pierce, Assistant to the City Manager Skopek, Fire Chief Taylor, Police Chief Baker, Senior Services Director Adcock, Senior Services Program Coordinator Beckett, Recreation Director Hegdal, DPW Director Melchert,

2 Guests

The topic of the workshop was "SMART Bus Service Overview" presented by Senior Services Director Adcock and Senior Services Program Coordinator Beckett.

Ms. Adcock explained the history of how the SMART (Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation) bus program has evolved through the years. Ms. Beckett explained that SMART provides transportation in the tri-county area and offer fixed routes, connector service, ADA transit and a Community Partnership Program. Auburn Hills is an opt-in community. Opt-in communities form a partnership with SMART and ask its residents for a millage to help support this endeavor. Auburn Hills generates \$1.5 million annually for this millage. The next millage renewal is in the fall of 2022.

Ms. Beckett explained that the SMART partnership benefits include:

- Provides the City with two buses to operate (\$50,000 - \$60,000 each)
- Performs maintenance & service on the buses (24/7)
- Ombudsman to assist with our partnership
- Reports to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on our behalf
- Auburn Hills receives \$22,160 municipal credits through SMART
- Auburn Hills receives \$29,926 community credits through SMART
- Bus Driver Training
- Provides and maintains bus stops, shelters and signs throughout Auburn Hills
- Option for us to use a connector bus free of charge for programs within our city limits
- Sponsorship opportunities
- 4 ways our residents can travel in and round Auburn Hills
 - FAST buses (fixed routes)
 - Connector Service – curb to curb service operated through SMART
 - ADA Connector Bus – registration through SMART
 - CPP – providing us with 2 buses to operate

Ms. Beckett noted that the City participates in the Community Partnership Program (CPP) with SMART. She explained that as part of the CPP, SMART provides the City with two SMART connector buses to operate on our own. She noted that the City's transportation program is offered to our senior and disabled residents. In addition to the two buses, a Pacifica van was donated to the program by one of the residents. She pointed out that DPW services the buses, which operate Monday through Friday and travel within Auburn Hills and a five-mile radius.

Ms. Adcock explained that the riders pay \$2.00 each way and no one is turned away if they are unable to pay. She noted that in the future, she anticipates increasing the operating hours if funding is increased, which would come from SMART and the Municipal Credits. She pointed out that usage is expected to increase as people become more aware of the program and the population continues to age. She noted that they will help promote the SMART ADA bus, which will fill the need that the City program is unable to meet right now.

Mr. Knight commented that providing transportation for the residents of Auburn Hills is the primary function for Council. He noted that the City has a great service with what SMART provides and questioned if the City could provide more services with the same amount of funding. He suggested this be reviewed and studied before it is time for the millage.

Council questioned if there were any issues finding drivers and whether the buses could be used to pick up seniors for the summer concert series. Ms. Adcock confirmed that historically there has been a challenge in maintaining part-time drivers as the schedules are sporadic at times. She noted that it is rare that someone is denied a ride because a driver is not available. She noted that they are looking to hire a few more drivers. She further explained that the City did attempt the senior rides to the concerts, with a small fee as it was beyond the intent of the program. She noted that the fee seemed to be the barrier from participation.

In response to a question regarding the number of riders compared to other communities, Ms. Adcock explained that every community provides a different set of services. She noted that a monthly report is submitted to SMART, so they should be able to obtain information on the other communities. Mr. Kittle requested a list of communities who have opted-in to the program.

Ms. Beckett explained that it costs the City about \$60,000 to provide this service. With the revenue and Municipal and Community Credits, the City's contribution to maintain this program is around \$20,000.

Mr. Tanghe stated that once opted-out, you would no longer be regional and SMART would not stop within the City.

Ms. Beckett explained that the greatest need went to Great Lakes Crossing and Meijer. In September, 2019, SMART provided 240 riders in and out of those locations, the original point could have been any community, not just Auburn Hills.

Council expressed interest in exploring what the City could provide locally. Items to consider include how can we get our residents to where they need to be, not just how many users we can bring in on mass transit; what might be done to have our own system that would connect with SEMTA points; and consider contracting out for those needing to go a distance outside of the community, such as the VA hospital. In addition, consider the contingencies for bus breakdowns or accidents, long-term effect on the buses, and lifecycle of the buses. Council agreed that this community is aging and we will need to offer something more for our residents.

Ms. Verbeke noted that there may be a lot of employees who use the bus service to get to work. She expressed concern that this could hurt those individuals and businesses.

Ms. Adcock noted that if the City opts out of the SMART system, it loses the ability to collect any mass transit funding. It was suggested that DPW, Police, and Fire should be involved in the discussions. Mr. Knight stated that he would like to serve on that committee.

The meeting adjourned at 6:41 PM.

Kevin R. McDaniel, Mayor

Laura M. Pierce, City Clerk