

City Council Work Session Transcript – 1/16/2024

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[9:00:41 AM]

We are a-t-x-n the City of Austin's Government Access Channel the city council. It is 9:00 in the city council. It is 9:00 in the morning on Tuesday, January 16th, 2020, for, almost said 2023. I almost made the first mistake of the year, but, caught myself so I have one in in reserve now. We are meeting in the city council chambers at Austin city hall, which is located at 301 west second street in Austin, Texas. We have a majority a quorum of the city council present. Currently we have two council members that are, with us virtually, council member Kelly and council member Alison alter. With that, welcome to everybody to the first work session or meeting of the Austin city council in the year 2024. I'm, pleased to tell you that we've had a busy, but safe weekend with. And the city staff has done a tremendous job over the weekend. We're not

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the weekend. We're not completely out of the weather event, but, there's it's been a really, it's been it's been good to watch people do great professional work with that. I'll, take us to our agenda. We have a very short agenda. What I want to do is first, the pre selected agenda items, we had two, two sets of items, but they're all related to the same that were pulled by council member Ryan alter, item number 14, which relates to financial services. And that involves a contract with Mckinsey consulting. And then 27, 28 and 29, with our homeless strategic office and those relate to ilcs. It's all bundled in the same, matter. And I'll recognize council member Ryan alter. >> Thank you very much. I get to see this side of you now. Yes, yes. >> You're fortunate that's my better side. >> Oh, good. Good well, yeah, I had pulled these really? Just to

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had pulled these really? Just to you know, I think this is an incredibly important, scope of work that we're doing. So I want to thank you. And the manager for getting this group together, because it really is important that we ensure that we're not either overlapping or somehow now, not not wasting a precious, precious resource when we know that, especially as it relates to homelessness, there are never enough dollars to go around. And so I think this is going to be a really valuable look. Mok by by Mckinsey to figure out how we can best and most effectively and efficiently, serve this population. I, I have, just kind of one thought as we finalize this process and that is, you know, we have done some previous work in reviewing, especially the city's contracting with the poppy report a couple of years ago. And so I think that's a great opportunity for us to build on previous work, just so that we're not starting at ground zero as it relates to the work that's being done, because

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work that's being done, because it is a quick turnaround. And so let's, build on on that pass. Good work. And also, you know, I think it's great opportunity whether it fits here or not. But to the conversation you've been having a lot about, you know, what is everybody role in delivering health care not just as it relates to homelessness but you know these are health care institutions. And so how can we ensure that everyone's providing the right services within their mission? And so this could be a good opportunity to do that. So I just want to kind of put that out there. And thank you all for your your hard work and leadership on this tough, tough issue. >> Appreciate your, saying that. And yes, on both of the major items you just talked about. One is that of course, is part of what the goal is, is to make sure we work better as the some of the component parts and with coordination and the second thing is actually what you mentioned first, and that is in every instance, these governmental entities that were, will be working with, they have done some things in that area.

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done some things in that area. And that's one of the things in talking with Mckinsey that they'll take into account as we go forward. So thank you for bringing that up. Yes council member Fuentes and council member, I'm going to use you since you were the first one to raise your hand to point out, we now have it's going to probably take us a while to get used to it, but we now have new technology that if you punch the button and I'm not, I'm looking at mine. But it will show your hand is raised and, there's no way for anybody to know this now, it'll tell me. It'll tell me who's next in queue. And that way, hopefully I'll be more efficient in recognizing folks. We'll play with that for a little while. Obviously. And have to learn how it works. But, since you raised your hand first, I'll. I'll recognize you. Yes >> Thank you. I love we're moving into the digital age. We. Yes. Have to formally raise our hand to be recognized. Thank you, thank you, councilmember Ryan alter, for your comments. And the mayor for leading the

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And the mayor for leading the healthy partners initiative. One thing colleagues that I do want to highlight, since this is a contract that we as a council are approving or considering in a few days, per our council meeting. And given the, the stakeholders involved and the sentiment from the dais of us wanting to have a really good firm understanding of our ecosystem, of how we're addressing homelessness in this city, recognizing that the city of Austin is one partner or one entity that has a role in providing a holistic ecosystem of care, I want to suggest that for council consideration, that updates with this partnership and through this review, that the contractor will be conducting that it be made part of our Austin public health committee meeting proceedings. I know, mayor, you and I had discussed bringing in the public health committee and having them involved with the healthy partners initiative. I want to echo my support for that effort, and given that this has a direct tie in in relation to homelessness, which falls under our public health committee, I would like for updates and for,

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would like for updates and for, and for conversation to continue within that platform. That's really good. >> Yes. And we have talked about that, and I think that's a great idea. Yeah. All right. Anything else on these items? Council member Allison alter, I see your hand raised. >> Good morning. Can you hear me? Okay. >> Yes. >> Great. I just wanted to say that I appreciate that this approach is really also bringing in our partners. One of the challenges we've long known with the homelessness, response space is that the city has taken on, an a huge portion of those efforts. When those responsibilities can be shared throughout our community, they are shared. But the level at which they're shared differs from other cities that are successfully. Addressing these issues. And so I appreciate the opportunity for us to look collectively with our partners. And the signal that sends about the type of collaboration we can have moving forward. Thank you. >> Great. Thank you. Good

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>> Great. Thank you. Good comments. Anything else? Councilmember vela? >> Thank you, mayor. And again, I just want to echo the comments that I think this is an important and a necessary step. Just to, thoughts was that I know we have done similar, kind of reviews again, I don't I'm not certain of the scope and the and the kind of effort, but I just wanted to make sure that this current review, builds on those efforts and kind of takes those, prior, reviews into account. I know there was, one, I think in 2018 and then another one in about 2020 or 21. And again, I think it's completely appropriate that we look at this because we have increased the spending. So much because this is one of the most high profile areas that, you know, we should take a comprehensive look at this every few years and see where we are. And

what we're doing. And the only other question that I had was really, you know, I'm very glad that, you know, central health, I think is a new kind of player in the game in terms of homeless services. Not really, but but

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services. Not really, but but they hopefully are really going to be stepping up to help us deal with this. But I was thinking of some of the, the, the community first comes to mind. I wasn't sure of the scope would also include these other partners. And again, to be honest, I'm not sure if we actually directly fund if we have a contract with community first. But they are a major player in homelessness. I was just thinking those other organizations that are maybe not necessarily we receive money from the city, but would they also be included potentially this this initially is with the four governmental entities. >> And it the way it originally arose was out of you'll recall when integral care had an issue where there was a budget issue, at that point in time, I helped bring together some folks to, to address that, both financially and otherwise. And the promise was then made that we would try to figure out how to best collaborate together. And work

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collaborate together. And work together and have a joint, operation in terms of reviewing our contracts. So it's this is now this step is a limit to those four governmental entities . However, to your point, if there is a contract between that, a governmental entity and some other entity that's providing services, then that will be part of the of the review and would that include also contracts? >> For example, the Travis county or that that central health and integral care have with third party providers as well? >> Yes. Yeah. >> I mean, I think when we get into this review, we certainly will do what literature has been done before so that we don't we don't kind of reinvent the wheel. One of the things and it's been articulated already this morning by members of council, is that this is about defining lanes. What's the lane for the city? What's the lane for the county? What's the lane for central health? We have an

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for central health? We have an orchestra that's been tuning its instruments for about five years, and we don't have a conductor. And I think part of it is to get a conductor to harmonize all the different things that are happening in this space to ensure, as councilmember alder has said, Ryan alter has said, is that when we spend these resources to ensure these resources are getting the most effective use of those public dollars to end homelessness and to make it brief and rare, and I think that's our intent, and it's really to understand the governance. What's the governance role for this? Because the governance structure as it exists today is not as robust as it needs to be. And I think that all this stuff will be

evaluated by McKinsey, and we'll come back with that roadmap. And as council member Fuentes has said, we certainly will come back and brief the public health committee at the at the periodic time so that we understand, questions that we may have from that committee in terms of making sure the direction is correct. We're really excited about this. And I think it's about getting everybody involved in working on this. >> And I appreciate that, very much. And I'm glad because in reviewing some of the prior ones, it was not it was more

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ones, it was not it was more focused on city of Austin, Travis county is doing a lot, central health is going to be, you know, really doing a lot. So I'm glad that we're expanding the scope of the review and including our important partners. Thank you. >> Thank you. And I'm looking at my new fancy machine. There's nobody else on this item. Thank you all very much for that discussion. And I look, I'm with the city manager. I look forward to, this going forward. Going forward and us getting good data and information and recommendations, members that will take us next to the council discussion on with regard to council appointments to intergovernmental entities, entities and council committee members. Tips from my perspective. But that's why we're here. So that we make sure we have everybody's perspective. From my perspective, we've we've probably done this, through the message board and the last posting that I put up on the message board, I think it completes us through everybody's

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completes us through everybody's eyes. Everybody's comments. So. Everybody has that. You have a red line version. Ann, you have a clean version. And the last red line version just so I'll make it clear what it showed was that the Austin energy utility oversight committee would have council member vela as the vice chair. The public health committee would have council member qadri as a member and the public safety committee would have a sole vice chair, and that would be council member Kelly. So I'm open for discussion. We will vote on this, of course, on Thursday, but we wanted to have it posted for today's work session in case we needed to work out anything else. Councilmember Allison alter. Good morning. >> The last version that I remember seeing had only three of us for the Austin water oversight committee, so I just wanted to invite if there's another colleague who would like

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another colleague who would like to join on us on that committee. So we have a little more flexibility with quorum. And have for that. That would be great. And then the second thing that I wanted to flag that I think we need to address to the extent that we are relying more and more on our committees, for our briefings and other things I want to point out that we do not currently have a space for our climate

response, our sustainability, our parks, our watershed. To be able to bring briefings and issues to our attention for policy work. And I think given the priority that I know that everyone on this dais has for those that we either need to be creating space in our work sessions for those briefings, or we need to think about which committee can take that work on. I know it was floated at one point, maybe expanding the Austin water limit. I do think that I know for me, I would like to see us spending more time on some of those climate issues. We had when we

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climate issues. We had when we adopted the climate equity plan set forth that we would be getting, quarterly updates on the implementation of the plan as a full council. That has not been happening. You know, in a public setting, in a transparent way. As we had originally planned, because of the shifts that we've made. And so I think we need to, think about, you know, whether we need to have a different committee set up or if we're going to, create some space during our regular work sessions for those climate related issues. >> Great. Thank you. Good comments. Council member Ellis. >> Thank you. Mayor, I just wanted to point out I am still willing to serve on clean air force rather than have that position be vacant. I'm also happy to share the expertise, but just want to make sure we actually have an appointment on clean air force. So I'm happy to keep that one. >> Very good. Members, any comments on that? Thank you for that. Councilmember mayor pro

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that. Councilmember mayor pro tem pool. >> Thanks, mayor. I just wanted to let the dais know. Let my colleagues know that the city manager and I have talked a lot about the resilience issue and sustainability and the overall impact of the environment on our community. And, and the fact that that we don't have a specific, committee related to that yet. And I am persuaded and convinced that, in fact, all of our work revolves around the sustainability of our community and that it's helpful to have the briefings and the information come to the dais as a whole. And, and that it has, in fact, been what we've been doing over the last few years. If we could please ramp up the expectation that we would and meet the expectation that we would be getting those quarterly briefings, I think that would aid us tremendously. I have had some conversations with the staff with regard to that. I

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staff with regard to that. I know there were some changes that were being made to the presentations and the way staff was communicating with the council on resilience issues. Hopefully that has all been kind of smoothed out and figured out so that we can proceed in 2024 with the expected and predictable briefings and updates. >> Great. Thank you. Mayor pro tem, any other comments with regard to this

item? We will add council member Ellis to the clean air force and then let's give some thought to, the comments and recommendations of council member Alison alter with regard to the issues that she raised. We will have this as an agenda item on Thursday. And, we will vote on it at that point in time. Do you have something? I'm being told we may not have an

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being told we may not have an actual vote. It may be that we just that under our rules we reach agreement and then I submit it as mayor to the clerk. And then and those are in place. So so I'm going to wait until Thursday before we do anything official with that. Thank you for that clarification. You're right. And so I, I did make the first mistake of the year. So let's mark it and move forward. So, what I'll do is, but I'll wait till Thursday in case anybody has anything else that you want to add to the message board. Now that we've had this discussion, and you may think, think of something you hadn't thought of, of, members that concludes everything that's. On the agenda for this, regularly scheduled work session of the Austin city council. So without objection, we are adjourned. Oh, I'm sorry, council member Ryan alter. I just want to make one quick. >> Thank you both to you and the manager for your hard work over the past couple days. As it relates to the cold weather, the freezing. You know, we have

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freezing. You know, we have really I think, put together a robust response and have a lot of, you know, as we talk about homelessness this morning, a lot of individuals have been able to be able to get shelter and stay out of the elements. So I know you've been long hours, working long hours. And I just want to thank you all for that work. >> Thank you. And I'll say on behalf of, we all ought to be very proud of the way our staff and the professional staff has, addressed this and was prepared for it and ready with regard to, the reference to, our neighbors that are living homeless, we've had a record number of people in our shelters and, it's, it's been very, very cold. And people needed, warming shelters and great work has been done in that regard. It under the circumstances, it'll never be perfect. And there will always be things that we wish went differently. But, there. When you have a record number of

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you have a record number of people in those shelters, you see the need and you also see the good work that's been done by staff. So thank you for bringing that up, manager. >> Yeah, I just want to alert. I mean, the mayor knows this because we've been kind of working hand in hand for the last few days. But just so you know, we established, the fourth, fourth overnight shelter last night because of the record number of people that were being signed up at one Texas center. But to echo the mayor's comments, the staff for these shelters had typically been park staff and what we instituted is a each department

contributing some members of staff to come in. So they had to come in on a holiday to help register these individuals as well. Over the weekend. And, you know, they did a great job. And, I know we'll say more about the great work that Ken and his staff have done, but, it's been really remarkable what they've done. And we were just lucky that we didn't get ice, because ice would have put definitely pressure tested. This new system. But I think the contribution from all the staff was really working very well together. And we really appreciate the work that it really was.

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really was. >> Councilmember Velasquez, I just want to echo the sentiments of, my colleague, council member alter, the communication has been phenomenal. >> It was my, it was my first 30 days on the dais last year when we had this issue. And, I it it's just night and day. So thank you all for all your hard work and especially our, our city staff. >> Thank you sir. Anything else? Well, then, without objection, we are adjourned. It is 9:21 A.M. Tuesday, January 16th. Thanks, everybody.