

Public Safety Committee (PSC) Meeting Transcript – 10/14/2024

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It is Monday, October 14th, 2024 at 2:00. It's actually 201 the Austin city. We're meeting in Austin city hall and the boards and commissions room, which is located at 301 west second street in Austin, Texas. And we have a quorum of the committee present. We have an agenda that includes public communication, but I don't believe anybody has signed up for general public communication. Is that correct? >> We do have one, sir. >> Did you sign? Okay, good. I apologize, I had old information. I apologize for that. Then what we're going to do is move to the approval of the minutes, and then we'll take up item number three, and then we'll take up item number two. For those that are paying attention, we'll open with general public communication. And please, you're welcome. How many minutes do I have? Three minutes.

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minutes. >> Can you hear me? Yes. Okay. Hi, I'm Sonya burns, and I'm just going to jump into it. This is actually a task that I hope this committee will address. So because you're a public safety, we have a huge gap. So for many people we are waiting for an arrestable offense. We do nothing until that point in time. So these are people who are too acute to engage meaningfully in voluntary services, but not acute enough for hospital because they're considered to be at baseline. And I really want you all to pay attention to the word baseline. And also feel free to ask me questions afterwards. So these people have nothing. And now I am going to wait for an arrestable offense. You hear about royal blue grocery all the time. These are people who are incompetent to stand trial and unlikely to restore. And that population has nothing under regulatory. I need a secure option. The other piece of this is that when you look at your forensic wait list versus your civil wait list, we should all be very upset and we should be

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be very upset and we should be very upset with health and human services going to senate Finan and saying the civil wait list is not a big deal, because statewide it's about 100 people. When our forensic wait list people in the jails now is at about 1400, we do not account for the number of people that time out before they transfer, which is a big number. Fort Worth saw 85 people overnight sitting in a jail and then released to what? That is a huge issue and I never get a case where someone is sitting in jail awaiting competency restoration, who did not meet criteria for a civil commitment. So I need this committee to start looking at that. Why is the entity that many of us are funding? You've done the mental health, mental health diversion pilot that is voluntary only. I know we're talking about a diversion facility that will include involuntary, hopefully, but these people have to be addressed. We should not be waiting for someone to sit in a cage or die in the streets, because we refuse to offer the help. So they can get the right care at the right place at the

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care at the right place at the right time. And you were so instrumental in helping us get a state hospital, which we want to use effectively. And if we do not address this, all it will do is be the back end of a carceral system. And it's also going to fill up with not guilty by reason of insanity. And I want you to pay attention to this because Washington state is now building with our same architects, a 350 bed forensic only state hospital, which means I have to commit a crime to access the public mental health system. We will not come back from that. We have decisions we can make right now so that we do not look like la San Francisco, New York City. And I'm a resource to you all. >> Thank you for being here. There not anybody. There's no one else signed up on general public communications. So we'll take up item number one, which is approval of the minutes of the public safety committee meeting. Previous public safety committee meeting. Is there a motion? Motion is made by council member Kelly, seconded by council member villa. Any discussion on the minutes? Without objection, the minutes

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Without objection, the minutes are approved. We'll now go to item number three, which is a discussion and possible action regarding the acquisition of facilities known as one and two. Barton skyway. And I'll. Ask kymberley Olivares to begin the presentation. What we'll do is we'll have the presentation. And after that we will have public comment with regard to this specific agenda item. >> Good afternoon. I'm Kim Ilevayas, deputy cfo for the city. Thank you for having me here to speak about this this acquisition proposal. It's not working. Okay. So to give you a little bit of background, first, if you this this acquisition

is meant to address long needed, long needed facilities for our public safety headquarters departments. The current headquarters facilities have long exceeded their useful life and they continue to deteriorate.

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and they continue to deteriorate. Also, public access is minimal at best at each of them. So when we look back over history, the public safety departments have each been requesting new headquarters individually for, well over a decade, if not more time and so we have myself and my tea our strategic strategic facilities governance team. We have been looking at options to address that need. One option that we had discussed previously publicly was the Rutherford lane campus of potentially repurposing that to meet a public safety headquarters campus, among other things. But as we move forward, there's a new opportunity that's presented itself. But before I jump into the details about that, I do want to highlight some of the conditions that you do see in the buildings that our departments currently occupy. Here you have technocentre this building was is home to AFD headquarters, but also houses some ems and APD functions. It was built in 1960, so it's over

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was built in 1960, so it's over 60. It's 64 years old at this point. It has just under 104,000ft !S of space, but it has significant foundation problems. It continues to shift the walls, crack the windows, crack and the ceilings. We have to open up because of issues with hvac and a variety of other major system issues. You also have. There we go. The Rebekah baines Johnson building, which serves as ems headquarters and does house some other facilities. City operations. This building is just over 71,000ft !S and was built in 1970. It was actually a nursing home originally and then converted into offices. It's very, very constrained. Site has very insufficient parking. Multiple systems, if not all of them have exceeded their useful life. You can see in just some of these photos the behind the scenes aspects of this building are very are challenged to say

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are very are challenged to say the least. Some interior renovations have been done, but the core systems of the building still need to be addressed. You also have the Austin police department headquarters downtown. This was built in 1970, just over 104,000ft !S. It is incredibly overcrowded. They have shoehorned desks and other other functional workspaces in every square inch. They possibly can in that building. But again, it is. This building is literally falling apart. That bottom left photo is in the parking garage. And I mean, it's literally it's rusting from within. So as we look at new options, we have been able to negotiate a purchase and sales agreement with the owner of the properties located at 1501 and 1601 south mopac, located in district eight. The entire

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district eight. The entire transaction includes two four story class a office buildings that were built in 99 and 2000. And while the actual age is 24 and 25 years each, the functional age is more like 10 to 15 years because of the degree of maintenance that has occurred over time. So approximately 390,000ft !S of usable space. So that's excluding kind of the back end mechanical components. It's well over 400,000ft !S when you include those spaces just under 14 acres of land, three miles to city hall. It also includes two five level parking structures and surface parking, so plenty of space for all of our public safety departments to physically occupy the buildings. As for now and into the future, for their growth, we have done previous programing work when we were looking at Rutherford lane campus to determine how much space the departments would need, and in a joint campus, the

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need, and in a joint campus, the need for now, plus the next 20 years was estimated to be about 400,000ft !S. So this property really meets the bill. Finding properties like this that can meet all of those various requirements is incredibly hard, especially if you're looking at a location that is near or in downtown. It also has some very nice amenities for the employees to utilize. Just outdoor seating areas, lounge spaces, a fitness center, volleyball court but it also has transit access so this is very accessible for not only those in a vehicle, but also those utilizing capmetro, whether that's employees or the public coming to the building. So here's a few photos. So the buildings with the green roofs are the ones we're acquiring. So each building is two wings. So while it looks like four separate buildings, that's actually two buildings with with

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actually two buildings with with the two wings each plus the parking garages behind it. And then here's just a handful of other photos to give you an idea. It is a really beautiful space. Gorgeous trees throughout, incredibly welcoming space for those working there or visiting. We because it is used currently, as is a rentable office space. There are multiple common areas that make it very accessible. So as we look towards the future and how we convert this space to meet public safety needs, we're also able to incorporate really great public spaces. So we can welcome the community to our public safety departments, as opposed to now where it's impossible or or near impossible to access just a couple more photos. Some of those public areas, some of the fitness center. So benefits and opportunities for this property, this provides a new headquarters for all of the

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headquarters for all of the departments, all in one transaction. It will greatly improve the working conditions for both sworn and non sworn personnel. Just taking a look back at those photos earlier in the presentation, it's very clear to see that those buildings should not be occupied. We it will meet both current and future growth needs. And it also provides easy access to downtown improved public access and also creates much improved opportunities for collaboration amongst the departments from a day to day perspective, as well as when there's during more special events or emergency type events. It also allows us to look at repurposing or the monetization of other properties. More specifically with techno center and APD headquarters. Those are properties that could achieve a variety of different community benefits, but also perhaps create ongoing revenue streams for the for the city. It also retains use of Rutherford lane campus for other city needs. We had originally been looking at redeveloping the Rutherford Lang

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redeveloping the Rutherford Lang campus, which is over 30 acres now. We can look at other city needs or other community needs, and then finally it avoids the cost of continued investment in the existing buildings that have again, like I noted earlier, long exceeded their useful life. So the finances of this, the purchase price is 107.6 million. That's equivalent to \$275 a square foot for comparison purposes, the cost to build a new a new building like this would be in the range of 234 or more million dollars. We're typically seeing new builds to be around \$600 a square foot. So in addition to the purchase price, we also want to include funding to do our design and programing and some initial renovation needs. So this has been this building has been used as a rentable office space. So we do need to make adjustments and to for public public safety operational needs, but also just general city needs security,

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general city needs security, things like that. We want to make sure that when we come back to council for the cost of those changes, that we are coming back to you with a really solid number and timeline. But we do know that there are some needs to be need to be addressed now, and don't need to wait until later based on the property condition assessment that was conducted during the due diligence period. So we've we're including also a few \$3 million to handle those things. Some things like some roof work. The lighting and around the buildings and similar. We also need to do some tenant coordination. There are still folks occupying the building and we want to be great partners with them to work towards solutions on on their lease agreements and what options there might be for their their eventual exit. So on October 24th, there will be three items for council to consider. First, a budget amendment for 120.5 million, which is the combination of the purchase

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combination of the purchase price, the design, programming and initial renovation needs a reimbursement resolution that allows us to maintain our tax exempt status on that eventual debt issuance. And then last but not least, the actual real estate transaction. So with that, I'll open it up to any questions and discussion questions. Yeah, I am concerned about purchasing a new property and seeing the condition that our prior properties that were owned by the city came to be in. >> And so I'm wondering what lessons were learned and what proactive steps are we taking now that we are looking at this from a holistic approach so that we're not having to do this again? And I don't know, 50 years. Right. >> There's a few things. So first we our building services department led by Daryl Alexander is he and his team are doing a lot of work in terms of assessing all of the buildings that they manage across the city in terms of current condition and what the deferred maintenance costs are for us to be much more strategic about addressing all those issues

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addressing all those issues going forward. But also, council does include a certain amount of funding in each budget each year for that. Didn't that started in the last oh gosh, six, seven years? I want to say to specifically address these the needs that we have at these different facilities to address the deferred maintenance. And the second thing is our strategic facilities governance team, we meet every week, if not more than once a week, talking about all the various projects and plans we need to be making to make sure that we're really looking at our overall facility needs for the for the city in a very coordinated and strategic manner. So that we can address as many needs as possible with fewer transactions or fewer actions in general. And then finally, I would say we're not trying to square peg round hole so much anymore. A former nursing home was not meant to be an office building. Right. So as we move forward with other acquisitions or renovations, whatever the case may be, we

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whatever the case may be, we want to make sure that we're not trying to just make it work. We want to do it right in the first place. And this space is definitely not a square peg, round hole situation. So we're really looking forward to what this can do for all these departments going forward. >> Thank you. Were there any other locations that were considered prior to coming to this particular location? >> We like I know we looked at the Rutherford lane campus as an option, but finding a facilities of this size, this scale and the various components of it is very is challenging, especially when we need to find something that is close to downtown. So there just aren't many options like this, this, this property came to us courtesy

of our real estate advisor. As an external partner was able to bring this option to us because it wasn't technically on the market at the time, something we wouldn't have

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time, something we wouldn't have known about otherwise, so that our real estate advisor is fantastic in helping us keep a constant eye on the market to address not only a need like this, but needs across the organization and this. This demonstrates one of the many values of having them as a partner. >> Were there any other current city owned properties outside of Rutherford that would be able to meet this need? No. Okay. No. >> Like if we looked at any other current properties, it honestly we'd be looking at a complete tear down and rebuild which is far more expensive and like when we were looking at the Rutherford lane campus option, which we already own, that land we were estimating a couple of years back, it would easily be 250 to 300 million. I just right out the gate. >> Okay. Thank you. And colleagues, I just want you to know that I have other questions related to potential vulnerabilities at this location. I was going to ask, but I was I didn't want to make it public, but I did request an executive

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but I did request an executive session for the council meeting. >> But okay, well, we'll have to get a ruling on whether or not we can do an executive session on that. >> So it's related to like, well, we'll I'll have to ask that question since it's the first I'm hearing about it. >> So do you have questions. Just a couple. Sure. >> The rba campus is the headquarters for ems. That's rba that is right there by lady bird lake. Is that that rba campus. Okay. Got it. And what was the square footage that the building that ems is currently in. >> It is just over 71,000ft IS. It also it houses not just only ems but also Austin public health. So we still need to address conditions in that building. Even with ems, we're potentially relocating. >> Okay. And the fire, the technical center. What's the address for the tech center? >> That is 4801 4201. It was close. 4201 Ed Bluestein it's

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close. 4201 Ed Bluestein it's basically it's along 183 just south of mlk. >> Got it, got it. And is that a city owned facility as well? It is. And any sense right now? Again, I know we're in very kind of preliminary phases of this, but any sense right now about what would happen to those two city owned facilities? >> Not yet, but I think that's one of the exciting parts, is with this acquisition, it creates those opportunities that we wouldn't have had. So this is this acquisition really serves as a tipping point for us to do some other really exciting things to meet community benefits and sort. So I suspect that will be in a parallel path of working towards the renovation and move of the folks into this. The new facility, as well as starting conversations about what what can be on those other properties and how full is the current

building that we're buying in terms of the tenant occupancy rate that it's about 45%. Okay. So and we're already starting conversations and how

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starting conversations and how much I mean, just current capacity in terms of the, you know, APD, ems and the fire department, what would our requirements be in terms of how you know, how much of that would we need to be using and how much of that could we rent? So we. So based on the prior programming work, but amongst all the departments, the total amount of space that would be required to address current needs as well as the next 20 years, it came in at about 400,000ft² in terms of renting space out. We in order to purchase the building, we're utilizing certificates of obligation. Those cannot be used for economic development purposes. If we were to rent the building out, that would be considered economic development. So they they're just not doable at the same spot. >> And but the current leases would then just have to run and expire. >> We'll, we'll work with each of those tenants. To some of them, their leases expire here in the next six months. Some have already are trying to

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have already are trying to sublet. So they want out. But but we're just going to we'll work through that process with each of the tenants to make sure that we're being consistent with all the folks and, and, but we're able to do all of that design programming work. This new facility while doing that at the same time. So we're not losing time. >> And what would be the time frame for the city to start moving offices in there? >> Well, we expect that design programming phase to take about six months once we get the consultant on board to do so. And so I don't want to speculate on timeline for finish out until we've been able to go through that process at least six months. But we definitely we want to move as quickly as possible. But it'll it'll take us six months just to have the full picture of what needs to change in the building. And there are certain floors that are already completely empty. So it's not like we can't start on work in various areas if we can, we can work it in. >> Great. Thank you very much. Thank you. >> Thank you. Do you have

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>> Thank you. Do you have anybody else who's going to make part of be part of your presentation? I do not got a lot of brass in the room. I just yes. All right. Why don't we go to public comment on item number three and I'll ask you to call out the names, please. Yes, sir. >> First speaker bill bunch on deck, Roy Whaley. >> Mr. Bunch, Mr. Whaley, if you'd both come up and take a seat, we've got plenty of microphones. Please. >> Again, bill bunch, executive director for save our springs alliance, here to urge you to vote no on this. It shouldn't even be on the table. There's no city council before this one. In 40

years, who would ever even considered locating a large number of city employees out on the recharge zone of the Barton

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the recharge zone of the Barton springs Edwards aquifer and on the Barton creek watershed? And you shouldn't do it here. This is offensive. This the presentation you have didn't even mention that. It's on the Barton springs Edwards aquifer recharge zone. This rush job. It has a terrible odor. It smells like a fast one. It smells like an inside deal. What you heard just now is really they only looked at one other alternative that didn't work. There's no request for proposal to look at options. They're talking about it being three miles from city hall. Like that's a good thing. How many million square feet of empty office space are within a matter of a few blocks of this building that are sprinkled around the city, that are accessible to the employees, that are actually going to work in this facility? The starting

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in this facility? The starting point should have been, where is the map of where those employees live? Who would work at this facility from these three departments and you can readily, with gis to see the center. The center of gravity for where those people live. And I bet you five bucks they're not southwest in the Barton springs watershed or in the our drinking water supply watersheds that mayor Watson did the right thing and said not to do the mayor Watson, you know, this is wrong. You stopped motorola from building out on the recharge zone on a giant office complex at 45 and 18, 26, not because of the footprint of the building. We already have that one here, but because now the people who work there need to live close by and they're going to go build homes or buy homes in the Barton

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or buy homes in the Barton springs watershed, or they have to suffer the horrendous commute if they live on the I-35 corridor or they live east of I-35. This makes no sense. This is a landlocked piece of property. The Barton creek greenbelt. The only way in and out is mopac. It's the worst possible access and you're going to load up not one, but all three of our first responders and public safety people in one place. That has one way in and out. Are you are you kidding me? And then the presentation again is comparing to new build with millions of square feet of empty office that is not the comparison. Thank you. You can pick up buildings for nothing right now, Mr. Whaley, Pierre Nguyen on deck. >> Howdy y'all. My name is Roy

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>> Howdy y'all. My name is Roy Whaley. I'm the conservation chair for the Austin regional group of the Sierra club. And this is an environmental issue to us. I am not here to speak against the police or the upcoming contract or the ems or the fire department. I have a nephew and a great nephew that are firefighters, so it's in no way directed there. It is the location and as bill just said, the example that it sets and to look from a fiscal responsibility standpoint, we have spent millions and millions to the point of hundreds of millions of dollars to protect Barton creek, Barton springs and the surrounding areas. We need to look beyond this one location. I agree, he's already said so much. That is correct that I agree with. As far as the

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that I agree with. As far as the access egress there. And while there is a lot to say about central locations and administration, there's also a lot to say about spreading it out. Fortunately, I've not had to visit the facility that we have now against my will. Anytime I've been there. It's because I chose to go there to ask some questions and resolve some issues for someone else. So it's not about the police, but it is about this location and I just can't really launch into more than what bill has just said. Mr. Bunch has just said. It just it flies in the face of what Austin has been and the positions that we've taken and that there are other options. That's the great thing. There are always other options. And we

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are always other options. And we haven't talked about or I haven't heard the amount of money we're going to spend to rehab these buildings to fit these buildings for their needs and how that's going to play into our budget. I would hope that we'd put more budget money into environmental protection than locating another critically needed function of the city in a bad location. So thank you very much for your time. >> Thank you, Mr. Wiley. >> Cathy Mitchell on deck. >> Hi. Good morning or good afternoon, mayor and council members. Thanks for having us here today. And thanks for listening to us. So I've heard some of the concerns in terms of the, you know, the facility, the acquisition. One of the things is I realized that there's some benefits to this Wright is it may allow for easier

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may allow for easier coordination among different agencies, but one of the concerns I have as a homeland security professional and someone that has held top secret and secret security clearances, is the concern of putting brass in all in one place. I think, you know, I can, you know, spell it out, but I think there's some indications that we really need to consider when we're talking about having an acquisition

where we have all our public safety, our executive, public safety professionals in one place. I do see the benefits of it. But I think we should really think clearly about what implications and if we're ready, if there are any concerns in terms of vulnerabilities, if we're ready to, you know, deal with any continuity of operations, challenges that may occur from having a space like that in the future. And I just ask you, you know, consider those things before making a decision of that sort. Thank you. Thank you, miss Mitchell.

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you. Thank you, miss Mitchell. >> Doug Greco on deck. >> Cathy Mitchell, this came up real fast, so I guess I'm registered mostly to have an opportunity to ask some questions. The slideshow is beautiful, the buildings look lovely, but they are not like any police department headquarters that I have ever seen. From a security perspective, I think there is, you know, there's the homeland security comment that you just made, and there's also kind of a different way of addressing meetings with the public in a secure space that strikes me as maybe leading us to some very significant renovations on these buildings. When we get down to the actual brass tacks, I would be delighted to go to a police department that looks like one of those buildings. Don't get me

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of those buildings. Don't get me wrong, but I suspect that you're going to be faced with a pretty big price tag, and the fact that the Specking of that isn't part of the discussion. Now while you purchase the land, and there's sort of this big to be determined piece is really my concern. You have heard that, you know, money has been short for deferred maintenance on the buildings we have now. I am not recommending that we keep the police in the headquarters that they have now, and we need to move them out of there. That building needs everything done for it to it. But I do think that we're in a moment where we're thinking a lot about how much things cost and what buckets of money are available to pay for different kinds of things. And once we get the land and it's been initially purchased and we've used the initial cbs that you're currently approving, what are we talking about for the future to make this actually happen?

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make this actually happen? There's so many unanswered questions. I just really hope that you get more answers before you have to vote on it. Thank you. >> Thank you, Mr. Greco. >> Low I'm Doug Greco. Full disclosure I'm a candidate for mayor in Austin. Again, I signed up, I've been signed up for and against. I want to raise a concern. And the concern is transparency at the same company, brandywine, who is we're potentially going to purchase \$107 million property, made a recent donation to the mayor's

political action committee in late September, and it was disclosed on Monday and on Friday of the same week this deal was announced, questions are raised when the mayor announces a secretly negotiated \$107.8 million city of Austin

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\$107.8 million city of Austin purchase of real estate from brandywine realty trust, the same company that recently donated \$10,000 to the mayor's political action committee. Now, this may or may not be a good financial deal for the city. I share the concerns of this facility being over the recharge zone, but the mayor's failure to disclose this relationship fits a pattern of behind the scenes, unilateral decision making and lack of concern for public trust. Our public safety departments deserve the best facilities, but our city deserves a mayor who feels accountable to taxpayers and avoids even the appearance of impropriety or a pay for play deal. My concern is that this should have been disclosed. Mayor, when you announced this deal publicly, I understand how PACS work, and I understand that candidates don't run PACS, but that was disclosed Monday

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that was disclosed Monday publicly, and this company is stands to gain, which I have read reports. They're not doing well in terms of cash flow. So I hope this isn't bailing out a company either. We need the best facilities, but I think that should have been disclosed. And I think you should have recused yourself from the process. Thank you. >> Thank you. >> For the record, as he indicates, if he if he does understand how PACS operate, that's a that's an independent pac that I did not know about that contribution until he just said that because I don't go look at what their numbers are because there's no coordination between my campaign and a pac. I'll verify what he said and make decisions in that regard at a later point. But I was unaware of that until he just announced that disclosed Monday. So I don't pay attention to what is going on with the independent PACS, and I have not looked at any of that. You tend to pay more attention to that than I do.

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do. >> So that concludes our speakers. >> Okay. Thank you very much. We will go now to item number two. Item number two is to discuss and make recommendations regarding judicial appointments to the city of Austin municipal court. Before we take up that item, we will meet in an executive session pursuant to the Texas government code on personnel item about providing a recommendation to council to appoint up to two associate judges and up to three substitute judges that we will we will reset recess this meeting to go. Not actually, it's not a recess. We'll go into executive session on item number

two. Is there any objection? Without objection, we will go into a closed executive session on this item number two. The city of Austin municipal

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The city of Austin municipal court. And that's the item we'll take up. The chair will accept a motion. We're here to appoint one or to make a recommendation to the city council that it appoint one associate judge. And three substitute judge candidates. The chair will entertain a motion with regard to the associate judge position. >> Mayor, I would recommend Brian Guerra for the associate judge position. >> The motion has been made by the council member that we not we recommend to the full city council the name of Brian Guerra to be appointed as the associate judge. Is there a second? It's seconded by council member Kelly. Is there discussion on the item? >> The only thing I would like to say is just thank you to the panel. It's a really good panel. Good point. And they have done a good work. I know there's a lot of applicants. And anyway, just appreciate you all very much.

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appreciate you all very much. >> A really good point. Thank you for doing that. And we all agree without objection, Brian Guerra will be recommended by the public safety committee to the full council for appointment as an associate judge. The next aspect of that are three substitute judge candidates. The names are Susana marangolo, Randy Ortega, rey Ann. Along the chair will entertain a motion for a recommendation to the full council. >> And again, I would move to appoint the three names that the mayor just mentioned as the substitute judges. >> Is there a second? Seconded by council member Kelly. The motion is that the public safety committee recommend to the full council the appointment of Susana marangolo Randy Ortega rey Ann along as substitute judges for the Austin municipal court. Is there any discussion? Without objection, those three names will be submitted to the entire council of as a recommend as recommendations for a final

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as recommendations for a final appointment. I also want to say thank you to our presiding judge at the municipal court, judge Stedman. Thank you very much. I mean, your level of involvement in these sorts of details is always well, well received and noticed. So thank you for doing that. And thank you to our human resources department for the work that went into it. It's this is a good work. Members there being no further business to come before the public safety committee of the Austin city council at this meeting. Without objection, we are adjourned at 3:06 P.M. Thank you all very much. Thanks, everybody.