

Birmingham City Commission
Long Range Planning Minutes
January 25, 2025
8:30 a.m.
Municipal Building, 151 Martin
Vimeo Link: <https://vimeo.com/1046648340>

I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Therese Longe, Mayor, opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. ROLL CALL

City Clerk Bingham called the roll.

Present: Mayor Longe
MPT Baller
Commissioner Emerine
Commissioner Haig
Commissioner Host
Commissioner Long
Commissioner Schafer

Absent: None

Staff: City Manager Ecker; Birmingham Shopping District Director Bassett, City Clerk Bingham, Information Technology Manager Brunk, City Engineer Coatta, Assistant City Manager Clemence, Library Director Craft, Planning Director Dupuis, Assistant City Manager Fairbairn, Parking Systems Manager Ford, Building Maintenance Superintendent Galik, Communications Director Gamboa, Finance Director Gerber, Police Chief Grewe, Building Official Johnson, Museum Director Pielack, Fire Chief Wells, Human Resources Manager Woods, Department of Public Services Director Zielinski, Building Official Designee Zielke

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

IV. DISCUSSION ITEMS

CM Ecker provided introductory remarks.

A. Finance

- a. Five-Year Financial Forecast 2025 to 2029

FD Gerber introduced the items. Philip Femminineo from Plante Moran and FD Gerber presented Item A(a). FD Gerber answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The City transitioned from a property tax based system for water and sewer funding to a rate-based system in order to have enough money for the water and sewer fund and for general operating funds.
- No further property tax based funding for the water and sewer system should occur after the end of FY 2024-2025.
- These rate increases should begin to level out. The rates also include fees to other entities the City does not control.
- Updating the City's infrastructure remains a priority.
- While the City has been pressing forward on road improvements, many residents believe even more focus on road improvements would be of benefit. Re-allocating further funds towards road improvements should be considered.
- Matt Wojnowski suggests that if Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs was repurposed for municipal functions, public works would be one of the first priorities of municipal services. The City's prioritization of infrastructure improvements aligns with Wojnowski's analysis. It is important for the City to focus on its needs first, as opposed to its wants.

B. Public Services

- a. Park Improvement Plan
b. Municipal Fleet Management Plan
c. Asset Management Plan

DPSD Zielinski presented the items. DPSD Zielinski and CM Ecker answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- More than three-quarters of the park facilities are anticipated to be updated by 2028.
- Every park should have some access and amenities available for people with disabilities.
- DPS is aiming to reduce the percentage of the City's fleet categorized as 'Needs priority replacement'.
- There are some instances where a proactive approach to replacing older vehicles with new vehicles will save the City the costs of inflation and future price increases.
- Having a fleet in moderate-to-good condition should be another one of the largest priorities for municipal services.
- Repairing and replacing the 'Needs priority replacement' vehicles will likely require a significant investment in a short period of time, and so having a fleet plan and prediction of costs will be useful.
- It would be useful to explore leasing and borrowing options for certain vehicles between OAKWAY members, which could offset or reduce costs for more specialized vehicles.
- The graph showing the conditions of the fleet was extremely useful. It summarized a very in-depth process and also makes the information clear for the Commission.
- While there may be a cost benefit to replacing all of the commercial garage doors at once, there was also a benefit to being able to spread those costs over multiple fiscal years.
- This presentation reflected the proactive effort and analysis undertaken by the DPS team.
- The cost of increased road repair staff and the cost of road deterioration should be weighed against each other.

C. Engineering

- a. Unimproved Road Construction Prioritization
- b. Capital Improvement Program
- c. Changes in Stormwater Management

CE Coatta and CM Ecker presented the items. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- Some of the four-inch water mains have narrowed with time. The capacity of a four-inch water main is actually four times less than the flow and pressure of an eight-inch water main, not two times less. This is why it is essential to replace four-inch water mains from a public safety perspective.
- The City should consider revising its plan to assume cape seal would be the preferred surface for all upcoming road upgrades.
- While planning road improvements based on cape seal would change the road surface and some of the costs, it would not change the staffing requirements or water and sewer updates that would be necessary.
- The upcoming workshop on this topic will be valuable.
- It is planned that the area west of Quarton Lake will not have its roads improved until the sewer linings need to be replaced. It may be appropriate to expedite some of these repairs.
- The sewer liners are anticipated to last at least 50 years from installation.
- It would be appropriate for the City to advise new home builds where relevant to install sewer connections in the front yards in order to reduce the homeowner's future sewer update costs.
- People purchasing houses in Birmingham are not necessarily informed about upcoming road repairs. The City should do a better job of educating residents about upcoming infrastructure projects that may impact them.
- When residents advocate for cape seal, they should be provided information by the City in order to adequately weigh all aspects.
- About a third of the money the City spends per year is on infrastructure, and the City should increase its marketing of its achievements to residents.
- Dialoguing with residents two to three years in advance about upcoming projects on their streets could also be beneficial.
- The City should further study how costs are split between the City and residents on special assessment projects.
- A component of the water and sewer rates residents pay include costs for upgrades.
- There was a systemic underinvestment in infrastructure in the City for quite some time.
- The user experience of parking on an improved road tends to be preferable compared to an unimproved one.
- The City's stormwater infrastructure planning should take into account the potential impact of widening some streets, thus increasing the amount of impervious surfaces.

- Staff must ensure that the City's stormwater management, sustainability efforts, and zoning ordinance are all brought into alignment.
- 40 foot lots could face challenges with pipe locations. Smaller lots also face challenges with permissible generator locations and underground electric lines, and some of the stormwater management practices could increase opportunities for locational conflict.
- Smaller basins or cisterns on residential lots might clog from leaves or other debris and require resident maintenance.
- The City should consider implementing a graduated system for lot perviousness, where smaller lots may be closer to 30% and larger lots could have increased requirements.

D. Planning

- a. Planning Trends
- b. Sustainability

PD Dupuis presented the items and answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The legality and possible uses of a congestion fee should be further studied.
- Other cities raise funds for various uses by implementing entertainment taxes on their hotels or via similar mechanisms.

E. Birmingham Shopping District

- a. Business Development

BSDD Bassett presented the item and answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- Having BSD comment on relevant special land use permit application discussions at the Planning Board and Commission level could be beneficial for increasing the diversity of the business tenant mix.
- Developers could also be made aware of the BSD's preferences for tenant types for projects within the district.
- It might also be beneficial to receive BSD input on bonus height provisions.
- Every memorandum submitted by staff for Commission agendas addresses financial, sustainability, and other impacts. BSD impact could be another added category.
- The comparison to two similar communities helped identify opportunities for improvement.
- It would be helpful to hear from Ms. Bassett in the future about how the Commission could better support the BSD's efforts.

F. Fire Department

- a. Fleet Replacement Plan

FC Wells presented the item and answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The Fire Department maintains appropriate staffing levels on holidays and weekends.
- There were 500 instances in the past year where there were concurrent calls requiring an ambulance.
- Investments in water upgrades will continue to help Fire Department operations.
- The addition of some larger-scale residential developments in the City do not pose an issue for Fire Department operations.
- Anyone interested should take the opportunity to participate in the Fire Ops 101 program.

G. Police Department

- a. Department Initiatives
- b. City Hall Security

PC Grewe presented the items. PC Grewe and CM Ecker answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The efforts to increase the Police Department's security were much appreciated.
- The Police Department's staffing levels are down from routine levels.
- It would be better for the Police Department to be occasionally overstaffed than chronically understaffed.
- Forced overtime can have an impact on morale.

- Policing is one of the most important City services. This should be a priority for investment, and it should be addressed in a cost-effective and immediate fashion.
- The proposed improvements to the police station were temporary solutions. The Commission should commit to funding a new police station.
- While the previously proposed location of a police station behind City Hall was not unanimously favored, the remaining conditions still need to be addressed.
- Once the Police Department is in a new space, then City Hall could proceed with a renovation.
- Residents would likely prefer to see investment in public works and public safety before all other possible investments. The City needs to prioritize funding these foundational services, as well as increasing the publicity regarding service delivery.
- There may be an opportunity for a repurposing of space in the garage behind City Hall that could benefit the Police Department. That space is presently used for storage, which is not the most effective use of space within the center of the City.
- PC Grewe should return to the Commission with a request for increased staffing, even if it would result in an overlap. DPS should consider the same, if it would be beneficial.
- If the Police Department and DPS return with increased staffing requests, the Commission would also have to determine where that funding would be pulled from.

H. Parking

- a. Transition from SP+ to an in-house operation
- b. APS Forecast

PSM Ford presented the items and staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The City's Parking Department may be delivering the same or higher-quality services than SP+ for less cost. It would be useful to have clearer data on that.
- Mr. Ford should begin considering the possibility of congestion fees.
- The efforts to maintain staff efficiency within the Parking Department were well-received.
- The data is projecting a decrease in net revenue until about FY 2028. Increasing parking fees should be considered in order to at least allow net revenue to remain steady. Given his facility with data, APC Chair Kevin Kozlowski may be able to make some recommendations about how to approach potential changes.
- Many of the discussed changes have improved the functioning and operations of the City's parking system from a business perspective.
- The recently-revised APC will likely contribute to increased revenue growth in the parking system, and should continue to be meaningfully engaged in that process.
- It may be more appropriate to approach the parking system as a business more than a service. The City is fortunate to have the parking system. Few comparable, local municipalities have a similar business that can sustain itself and also support other City goals.
- It would be helpful to know the legal definition of the parking system, to better understand where parking funds can be reinvested.
- The City should anticipate that much of the parking fund may eventually need to be used to build a new parking deck.

I. IT

- a. Hardware/Software Replacement
- b. Current AI Usage & Expansion
- c. Two Factor Authentication & Network Equipment

ITM Brunk presented the items and answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- Creating a technology advisory committee could be appropriate.

J. Clerk's Office

- a. Digitizing Applications and Processes
- b. Annual Fee Schedule
- c. Sustainability

CC Bingham presented the items and answered informational questions for the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- Many of the Commission agenda packets contain so much data they may not load on an iPad.
- The Hypothesis app may be a good way to allow Commissioners to annotate their digital agenda packets.

- Finding a way for Commissioners to be able to annotate the digital agenda packets would help ease the transition from hard copies to digital.
- It could be beneficial to increase the accessibility and searchability of public documents on the City's website.

K. Building Department

a. City Facility Initiatives

BO Johnson, BOD Zielke, BMS Galik presented the item.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The proposed approach to evaluating facilities was practical and appropriate.
- BO Johnson deserved thanks for his service to the City over the years.

L. Library

- Phase 3 Addition & Renovation
- Access Services Expansion
- New @ Baldwin
- Building and Sustainability Improvements

LD Craft presented the items and answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- It might be possible to use solar panels and battery storage instead of a generator. Those projects should be evaluated in conjunction.
- Electric vehicles can also be used to power buildings, which may be an option worth exploring.
- The renovations were well done.
- LD Craft and former LD Koschik were commended for working with the City to renovate the Library on an appropriate budget.
- LD Craft could likely provide the SCC with some insight as to community needs.
- Study rooms tend to be very popular at the Library, which could be something for the SCC to consider integrating into the project.

M. Museum

- Phase 3 & 4 of the Landscape Master Plan
- America's 250th Programs and Planning

MD Pielack presented the items. MD Pielack and CM Ecker answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The America's 250th Celebration would be an opportunity to bring the community together in a number of different ways.

N. Human Resources

- Retention and Recruitment

HRM Woods presented the item. HRM Woods and CM Ecker answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The examples were illustrative, and it would be helpful if next year's presentation provided more examples of programs and included data on the programs' successes.
- It may be valuable to find ways to encourage some of the City's employees to live in Birmingham, including potentially through financial incentives.
- If employees cannot be incentivized to live in Birmingham, staff time could be set aside for employees to familiarize themselves with the experiences, amenities, and culture particular to the City.
- Focusing on employee culture within the City is valuable.

O. Manager's Office

- Communications Overview – New & Coming Soon
- City Sponsored Events
- 2024-2025 Grants

CD Gamboa presented Item O(a), ACM Fairbairn presented Items O(b) and Item O(c).

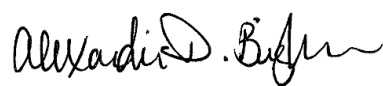
Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- It would be beneficial if every household in the City had at least one subscription to the City’s e-newsletter.
- City notices should be reviewed by CD Gamboa for clarity and usefulness to residents.
- Some City events focus on drawing out-of-town visitors and some are focused on hyperlocal events focusing on residents. It will be useful to keep those different types of events in mind as long-running events continue and new events are introduced.
- Increasing the number of events in the City would be worthwhile, and introducing new events does not necessarily mean that other events should not occur.
- Increasing the number of In the Park Concert Series would be welcome.
- Some other event options could include jazz series, community events where certain streets are temporarily closed to vehicular traffic, Le Diner En Blanc, other concerts, or fashion shows. Events like these should be fostered, and when they are successful, they should be supported in reoccurring.
- Philanthropy events have a normal lifecycle, so replacing some events with other events in the future is to be expected.
- Birmingham could explore events similar to the COTS Soup City event that was held on January 23, 2025 in Detroit.
- Having lights across Merrill and a few other streets would also be welcome.
- Many events in the City offer a good value for the money. The City should also focus on promoting events that have a good return on investment for City businesses.
- It would be helpful to understand the differences between fixed costs for different services and the cost increases necessary to provide those services during particular events.
- Promoters could offer a wider variety of events via ticketing sales that would also allow the promoter to make a profit.

The Mayor thanked staff, CC Bingham for coordination and food, and the Commission.

V. ADJOURN

Mayor Longe adjourned the meeting at 3:00 p.m.



Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk



Laura Eichenhorn, City Transcriptionist