

WORK SESSION – August 5, 2008

Mayor R. E. Bruchey, II called this Work Session of the Mayor and City Council to order at 4:08 p.m., Tuesday, August 5, 2008, in the Council Chamber at City Hall. Present with the Mayor were Councilmembers M. E. Brubaker, K. S. Cromer, L. C. Metzner, P. M. Nigh and A. Parson-McBean; City Administrator Bruce Zimmerman, and D. K. Spickler, City Clerk.

City of Hagerstown Take Home Vehicle Policy

A Take Home Vehicle Policy was developed by a staff committee that has existed for a number of years for the purpose of reviewing and updating organizational policies.

Bruce Zimmerman, City Administrator, joins the Committee in recommending this policy to the Mayor and Council. He believes it clearly identifies limitations on the use of take home vehicles and specifies the criteria for the assignment of such vehicles. It sets forth clear requirements for documentation, including a mileage and call out log, addresses the City's compliance with IRS regulations, and requires reimbursement based on take home driving distance. The policy will reduce the number of vehicles which will be driven home. It appropriately allows Department Managers to make decisions regarding the use of take home vehicles in support of their operations. It is consistent with two Police Department policies previously presented to the Mayor and Council.

The take home vehicles are used throughout the day in City operations. As of June 5, 2008, there were 48 vehicles. Several vehicles would be removed from the take home list with the implementation of this policy. The Police Captain's vehicle would be eliminated. The Police Department is asking to be allowed to re-evaluate this removal after three months. Three of the four vehicles would be eliminated in Public Works, for 8 months of the year. There would be four take home vehicles during the remaining four months. There would be no recommended reduction within the Fire Department take home vehicle list.

Councilmember Brubaker asked why the length of time for implementation of the policy would be one year. Mr. Zimmerman indicated this would allow employees to acquire a vehicle. Councilmember Brubaker asked for a definition of "routinely respond". This would be a determination of what the Department Manager determines makes sense for the department.

The policy calls for the mileage and call out log to be submitted to the Department Manager each month. Each department will submit a list of vehicles to the Human Resources Department by October of each year. A copy of the policy will be provided to each employee who has a take home vehicle.

Councilmember Cromer asked if the Council would get a list of which take home vehicles are being eliminated. Mr. Zimmerman indicated this would be provided. He

pointed out that part of the elimination of vehicles will mean more than one person will be using the vehicle when they are on call. The list from June 5 could be updated.

Councilmember Cromer asked for an explanation of why some employees need to “routinely respond”. She wants to question why some of these employees need a take home vehicle.

Michael Spiker, Director of Utilities, stated a reduction in the response time could result in an overflow of 10,000 gallons or more. He stated two employees will be on call instead of the three on the June 5, 2008 list. Collection employees are on call because they are responsible for operating the pumping stations. Two vehicles will be eliminated through attrition.

Councilmember Metzner asked if implementing this policy will cause citizens to have to wait longer for a response during an outage. Mr. Spiker indicated it may have an effect on the response time. In the past, the on-call person had the City vehicle with them and they would respond from where they were. If they had to return to their home to retrieve the City vehicle, it could increase the response time.

Councilmember Metzner stated a compromise would be for the employee to pay for the personal use at 20 cents per mile. Councilmember Parson-McBean stated her concern is with the liability exposure for personal use.

Councilmember Nigh asked if supervisors immediately respond to power outage calls. Mr. Spiker indicated supervisors are notified of major outages.

Councilmember Cromer stated if everyone had the list of vehicles, they could contact the Department Managers individually with questions. Mr. Zimmerman stated the list of vehicles has been provided to the Mayor and Council.

Councilmember Cromer asked why the Fire Department would not be eliminating any take home vehicles. She asked how often the public educator responds to a fire. Chief Gary Hawbaker stated the public educator is the person who helps people find lodging after a fire and provide support for them. It is important that he be at the scene.

Per the proposed policy, the police administrative captain would no longer have a take home vehicle. Chief Smith recommends the Captain retain the take home vehicle because he is a uniformed officer and responds to calls.

Councilmember Parson-McBean stated it would be better to draft a policy after the information from the mileage logs is reviewed.

Councilmember Metzner is concerned that staff has the impression they’ve been charged with eliminating every possible take home vehicle in order to save money. He does not put money above service. He thinks the savings will not be as high as expected.

Councilmember Parson-McBean indicated she is asking for justification that the take home vehicle is necessary.

Councilmember Cromer asked why the investigative services commander has a take home vehicle. Chief Smith stated he is on call for major incidents and is a member of the SWAT team.

Councilmember Cromer asked if all the officers in the Street Crimes Unit are on the SWAT team. Chief Smith indicated they are, except for the new person that started today. He stated not all the members of the SWAT team have take home vehicles. She asked why the violent crimes attorney has a take home vehicle. Chief Smith stated the attorney responds to questions during odd hours and is available.

Al Martin, Finance Director, stated the annual insurance cost, per vehicle, is approximately \$ 500.00. The premium for a take home vehicle is no different than any other City vehicle. If an accident occurs in a City vehicle during a permitted use, the liability is the City's. If the accident occurs during a non-permitted use, the insurance company would investigate the incident. Councilmember Parson-McBean expressed her concern that the taxpayers are taking on the liability for vehicles being taken out of the City and the County. Councilmember Cromer is concerned that an accident involving a take home vehicle would be a liability for the City.

The potential fuel cost savings by eliminating several take home vehicles would be approximately \$ 11,000. The estimated cost for all commuting miles is \$ 39,000. Personal use of take home vehicles is not allowed, except in minimal instances.

Councilmember Metzner believes Staff is thinking the Mayor and Council want them to eliminate take home vehicles. He wants Staff to keep the log and then have the Mayor and Council review it in six months. During the six months, he stated the Department Managers should continue to use take home vehicles as they deem necessary for the operations and to continue what has been done during the last 20 to 30 years. He is concerned that the cost for Council and Staff time on this issue exceeds what will be saved in two years. Councilmember Parson-McBean suggested reviewing the mileage logs in three months.

Donna Messina, Director of Human Resources, fully supports the proposed take home vehicle policy. She stated there are employees who check areas around the City many times and discover problems and fix them before they become an emergency. She indicated the mileage log would be started immediately.

Mayor Bruchey stated he does not have an issue with an employee with a take home vehicle making a quick stop at a pharmacy to pick up a prescription on the way home, if the pharmacy is on the way.

Councilmember Cromer stated a City vehicle should not be used to move furniture.

Councilmember Nigh stated Federal government guidelines indicate it is okay to stop at a store, if the store is in a straight line from the beginning point to the destination. She wants accountability for the take home vehicles.

Mr. Zimmerman indicated the personnel policy discusses the personal use of City vehicles. As incidents are reported to him, the procedures in place are followed for instances of abuse.

Councilmember Metzner believes the policy for marked cruisers provided for police officers who are City residents should stay as it is. He also stated the policy that is currently in effect should remain in effect until the mileage logs are reviewed in three months.

Ms. Messina pointed out that reviewing the information in six months will include the winter months, during which other take home vehicles are used. Councilmember Parson-McBean stated the three month information will help to solidify the policy.

Councilmember Nigh is concerned about accountability at the gas pumps. Councilmember Brubaker stated efficiencies should be implemented now and the policy should be finalized later.

Mayor Bruchey asked if the Council agrees that an employee who has a take home vehicle because they are on call is permitted to stop at a store, i. e. grocery store, pharmacy, if they have to take the vehicle with them.

Councilmember Parson-McBean asked if there is compensation for being on call. Mr. Zimmerman stated there is, under the union contracts, and for certain special events.

Councilmember Parson-McBean stated part of this discussion appears to be a discussion about misuse. Mayor Bruchey stated an executive session would be listed on the agenda for the August 12, 2008 meeting.

It was the consensus of the Mayor and Council to start mileage logs immediately and review the information in three months. Mayor Bruchey asked if it was the consensus of the Council to eliminate the six take home vehicles from the utility departments. Councilmember Brubaker stated the most important thing is that each employee will be documenting the mileage. The information should be reviewed by position, not individual. Councilmember Metzner stated the Utilities Manager should do what is in the best interest of the departments.

Eric Deike, Public Works Manager, stated there is a system in place with the gas pumps to monitor daily usage. He can provide this information to the Mayor and Council. Councilmember Nigh has received complaints that some employees have more than one card.

City Administrator's Comments

*Bruce Zimmerman, City Administrator*, reminded everyone that National Night Out begins at 6:00 p.m. today.

Mayor and City Council Comments

*Councilmember P. M. Nigh* had no additional comments.

*Councilmember L. C. Metzner* had no additional comments.

*Councilmember K. S. Cromer* had no additional comments.

*Councilmember M. E. Brubaker* had no additional comments.

*Councilmember A. Parson-McBean* extended condolences to the families of Cleo Broadus and Trevor Wilson. She met with Peter Franchot, State Comptroller, to discuss ways to help senior citizens.

*Mayor R. E. Bruchey, II* had no additional comments.

There being no further business to come before the Mayor and City Council, on a motion duly made, seconded and passed, the meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna K. Spickler, City Clerk

Approved: August 26, 2008