

Fertile City Council Minutes

June 11, 2018

The Fertile City Council held its regular meeting on Monday, June 11, 2018 at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Present were: Mayor Daniel Wilkens, and Council members Linda Widrig, Todd Wise, Reid Jensrud, and Stanton Wang. Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, Jeff Adams, Keith and Myra Kaste, Dana Knutson, Dan and Kindi Hasbrouck, Nick Kronschnabel, DJ Tadych, Brandon Tadych, Chris Tadych, Stacy and Savannah Erickson, Travis Stene, Barent Thronson, and Twylla Altepeter from the Fertile Journal. Other visitors were Alex Ranz from Ulteig Engineers, and Kurt and Heidi Larson, Donna and Keith Christianson, Brian and Pam Floan, Marvin Johnson, Dan and Debbie Baldwin, and Barb Stewart.

Additions to the agenda were Nature Center trails, the JR Dale building under old business, and speeding and stray dogs under new business. The amended agenda was approved on a motion by Council member Jensrud that was seconded by Council member Wise and carried.

The consent agenda was the next item on the agenda. The consent agenda consisted of permits for the Polk County Fair parade, 5K, and 3.2 liquor license and also the appointment and pay amount for 2018 election judges. The consent agenda was approved on a motion by Council member Jensrud that was seconded by Council member Widrig and was carried.

The minutes of the May 14, 2018 meeting were approved as presented on a motion by Council member Jensrud that was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

City Administrator Lisa Liden then gave a brief overview of the financial statements and also the bills paid in May. The Treasurer's Report and Bills were approved on a motion by Council member Widrig that was seconded by Council member Wise and carried.

Under department reports, Alex Ranz from Ulteig Engineers reported that he had given the finalized set of plans for the water/sewer project to Kevin Nephew for his review. Ranz then went on to explain that the project was now ready to bid and that the permits had been granted by the Department of Health. They were still working on easements and there had been an issue with the section on NP Avenue from Washington to Albert Ave. NE since the original plans called for going alongside the street and that property was still owned by the railroad. Rather than work with the railroad on the easement, they had determined it would be easier to go along the street right of way for that section. Ranz reported that the bonding bill had passed and the City's project had been part of the bill but that it would take some time to get through the project list and funding amounts to know what was available for Fertile. As for the project timing, Ulteig would leave the phasing of the project up to the contractor that gets the bid and it would be up to them whether they do the project in two phases starting this fall or just one phase next summer.

The next item up for discussion was the Safe Routes to School grant program. Ranz reported that there would be a meeting the following Monday with the school and City staff as well as Rich Sanders from the County. With the timing of the SRTS grants, it wasn't likely that the timing for the sidewalks would coincide with the water and sewer project north of the school. The grant application would be due this fall and the City would find out during the winter whether the application was approved. Kevin Nephew then asked if the school sidewalk would be included in the application. Ranz replied that right now it was pulled off the plans for the water project but that it would be added on later if the SRTS timing didn't work out.

Discussion then returned to the water project and the total costs and financing. Ranz said that the project estimate was currently 2.2 million and that \$900,000 would be covered by grants. If the actual costs came in at the estimated amount, the annual payment on the debt for the project would be \$46,000. That annual amount would equal an approximate \$10 per month on residents' water bills.

In the absence of Fair Meadow Administrator Angie Leiting, the Fair Meadow report was read by City Administrator Lisa Liden. The home began the month of May with 41 residents and ended with 39, operating at 91.24% of capacity. The home had also served 352 home delivered meals.

The profit and loss for the month of May showed a \$10,880.96 profit for the home and \$9,070.56 for the assisted living. The year to date profit and loss showed a \$93,030 loss for the home and a profit of \$93,879 for the assisted living. Liden reminded Council that depreciation of over \$190,000 was calculated in to the operating loss for the home so it wasn't a "cash" loss.

Under Public Works, the first item under consideration was the hiring of a part-time summer helper for mowing. Lisa Liden reported that there were only two applicants for the position and that she recommended Public Works Superintendent Kevin Nephew be given approval to hire the candidate of his choosing. A motion was then made by Council member Jensrud that Kevin Nephew could make the decision on who to hire for the summer position. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried.

Discussion then turned to the inventory list that Kevin Nephew had completed of all items in the two shops. Mayor Wilkens suggested that two Council members go over the list and through the two shops to compile a list of the items that could go up for sale at auction. Council members Wise and Jensrud volunteered to make up the list of items for auction.

Council member Jensrud reported as a side note that the City would soon have a new, used plow truck sometime in the next three months.

The regular meeting was then recessed and the Public Hearing on Ordinance #2018-1 was opened. Administrator Liden explained that Council was considering the ordinance so that all water bills for rental property in the City would be required to be in the property owners' names. She explained further that while rental properties only accounted for about 12% of the water bills that they represented about 25% of the delinquent accounts. It was felt that too much City staff time was used in getting letters out to tenants and that it would perhaps be better if the landlords were responsible for the water bills from the beginning.

Dan and Deb Baldwin then addressed Council and explained that they owned three rental properties in town and that they felt they were responsible landlords and didn't wish for the policy to change. They stated that they kept in touch with their tenants and made sure that their water bills were kept up to date. Marvin Johnson who owns one rental property in the City explained that he currently lives out of town and that it would be a real inconvenience for the bill to come to him since he doesn't have ready access to the meter to submit the reading every month. Liden explained that it could still be the tenant responsibility to read the meter and submit it either directly to the City or to the landlord.

Barb Stewart stated that she owns one rental property in Fertile and several in Crookston and that Crookston charges a "hefty" deposit on rental accounts and that she was also against changing the policy. Brian Floan, another rental property owner stated that he also was against the new policy. For their properties that are under HUD, the rent is fixed so they would not be able to raise the rent to cover their additional costs if they were to be responsible for the water bill.

Donna Christianson suggested that the City change the shut off policy to 60 days rather than letting delinquent accounts go to 90 days. Council member Wang then asked what the current deposit was for water accounts and Liden stated that it was \$50 for all accounts whether they were rental properties or owner occupied. Heidi Larson then stated that she was also against changing the policy and would rather see a 60 day limit with possibly a higher deposit on rental properties. Myra Kaste also stated that she felt the City needed to be more aggressive and turn off the water before the bills got too large.

The Public Hearing was then closed and the regular meeting was reconvened.

After further discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Jensrud to raise the deposit on rental properties to \$100, to send a shut off letter at 60 days with 10 days to make payment in full or have water service turned off. Once the water is turned off, if it isn't paid in full within 20 days the bill would be charged to the property owner/landlord. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

The Administrators report was then reviewed briefly by Administrator Liden. She stated that the water meter audit was going well and that many pictures were either being emailed in or residents were showing the pictures in person to verify the readings. Liden reported also that she had been quite busy researching options and purchasing items needed to finish and furnish the new building at the park.

The Learning Center was the next item up under department reports. Council member Wang stated first of all that he would like to see the Education Director at the Learning Center give a report to Council each month. Mayor Wilkens then reported on the final two Wednesday meetings that were being held to seek public input on the master plan. The final meeting on Wednesday June 13th would be on health and wellness. He also commented that a date needed to be set as soon as possible for a Nature Center Board meeting.

Council member Jensrud then asked to discuss trails at the Learning Center. He wished to discuss options for ATV's having access to at least one trail and that he would like to see the original agreements with the State that supposedly state that ATV's are not allowed. This was followed by a long discussion on ATV use at the Learning Center including discussion on the economic benefits of ATV's versus nature hikers. It was stated that ATV riders would be more likely to purchase gas and food while they're in town while your typical nature hiker is in and out without stopping anywhere in town. Several audience members also expressed that they would like to have some trails available for ATV use.

Council member Wang stated that he would like to take a group out to find a trail area that could be used for ATV's and Kevin Nephew stated that they could certainly designate a trail or area for ATV use. Dan Hasbrouck then asked why ATV's would be only allowed a small area when they could use the perimeter trail that snowmobiles use in the winter.

After further discussion of the matter, Council member Jensrud made the motion to find the original paperwork with the State for the AELC property by the August meeting. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried. Council member Widrig volunteered to help dig through the boxes of old records to find the agreement.

Council member Wang reported that the Fire Department had been out on five calls during the month of May and that two of the calls were for medical assists and three were for grass fires. He reported also that they were busy outfitting the new truck.

Kevin Nephew then asked if the fire department had opened any hydrants lately. Council member Jensrud responded that they were training two new members and that they had hooked up to two different hydrants as part of the training. Nephew stated that he would prefer that they hook up to the hydrant by the water tower and that if they use other hydrants that they try to stay away from hydrants on dead end lines.

Under the Airport, Administrator Liden reported that the updated zoning process would soon be underway. As part of that process, all other governmental units in the airport zoning areas would be contacted to participate in the process.

There was nothing to report under Personnel.

Under old business, the matter of the JR Dale building on Second Street was then discussed. Administrator Liden explained that she had discussed the matter with the City Attorney and she went on to explain the process that the City needed to follow to get the building taken down and the lot cleaned up.

After a brief discussion of the matter, Council member Jensrud made the motion to move forward on the legal process for getting the building removed. The motion was seconded by Council member Widrig and was carried.

The next item up on the agenda was feral cats. Jeff Adams who lives on Washington Ave. NW had asked to address Council regarding the large colony of feral cats in his neighborhood. Adams explained that his neighbor to the east feeds feral cats so there are several that live in the area. He stated that he was sick of them being in his fenced in back yard and defecating in his yard and flower beds. He reported further that a week earlier one of these cats had become trapped in his back yard and was foaming at the mouth which has him concerned that the cat may be rabid.

A discussion was then held regarding feral cats on the northwest part of town. Administrator Liden and Stacy Erickson who was present explained that they had live trapped several of the cats three years earlier and had them spayed or neutered. Some of the cats had been returned to the area they were trapped in and others had been given to farmers in the area who were interested in having barn cats. Adams then questioned why the cats were released in the same neighborhood. Erickson, who is on the Board of Directors for Pet Fixers explained that spay/neuter and release in the same location was the humane solution that was supported by the Humane Society and SPCA. Erickson also explained that there are at least three other parties on the west end of town who feed the feral cats so Adam's neighbor was not the only one doing so.

Administrator Liden then advised Adams to turn the hose on the cats whenever they get in his yard since most cats really hate getting wet. She said they would learn fairly fast to stay out of his yard. Council member Jensrud then recommended getting a motion sensor sprinkler that would be activated when the cats get in his backyard.

Adams then asked why the City had not made any further efforts on the spay and neuter program for the last two years. Stacy Erickson explained that Pet Fixers had lost the veterinary service that they used for the remote clinics so they had to reorganize and fundraise to get their own mobile unit. She explained further that Pet Fixers now had a unit and was set up again for traveling clinics and that one was scheduled in Fertile for the first weekend in August. Stacy stated that the clinic costs \$1,500 and that the Community Club had already pledged \$500 towards the cost. She then asked if the City of Fertile would be willing to donate for the clinic as well.

After further discussion on the spay/neuter clinic, a motion was made by Council member Wang for the City to pay the remaining \$1,000 that was needed for the clinic. The motion was seconded by Council member Jensrud and was carried.

The next item up on the agenda was an offer from Danny Strem to purchase four lots in the Industrial Park. Strem had submitted a site drawing showing the sizes of the two buildings that he would be putting on the lots and approximately where the buildings would be placed. This was followed by a discussion on the size of the lots and whether or not it was necessary for Strem to purchase four lots when the buildings he was proposing would only need two lots. There was some concern expressed that Strem could use the lots for more bulk tanks which was a concern given the development in the Industrial Park going to the south. Council member Jensrud asked whether or not the City could stipulate that no more tanks would be allowed on those lots and Administrator Liden stated that the City could make that stipulation part of the purchase/development agreement that Strem would have to sign.

After further discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Wise to table the matter until Strem could provide more information at the July meeting. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried with Council member Widrig voting no on the motion.

Approval of Industrial Park benchmarks was the next item up on the agenda. Administrator Liden reminded Council that the end cost of the Industrial Park lots could be reduced by the purchasers meeting certain benchmarks having to do with the value of structures built on the lots as well as employment numbers. She explained further that the installment pricing had been passed by Council in 2014 pending the EDA's recommendations on the benchmarks. The EDA had approved the benchmarks to submit for final Council approval in August of 2014, but until the recent activity in the Industrial Park, Administrator Liden had not realized that they had not yet been submitted to Council for approval.

Council member Wang then made the motion to approve the benchmarks as they are spelled out in the memo to Council on page 57 of the meeting packet. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried. (The memo to Council is included as Exhibit A with these minutes.)

The next new business item that was addressed was the problem of speeding on both Main Ave. East and Main Ave. West. A citizen had submitted a letter by email outlining her concerns with cars moving so fast through a residential area, especially when there are daycares on both Main Ave. East and Main Ave. West. Council member Wang explained that it's often the same people who live on the east end of Fertile who speed by on their way to and from work in addition to other trips these residents make through the day and night. Speeding was also an issue on McKinley Street and Third Street, both of which intersect Main Ave. Discussion centered on the fact that Main Ave. is a well traveled street to both the east and west ends of town and that there were no yield signs or stop signs along the way to slow traffic down. Most on Council also expressed their opinion that yield signs are not as effective as stop signs in slowing traffic down.

After discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Widrig to put up stop signs to make a four way stop on the corner of McKinley and East Main as well as the corner of Third Street and West Main. The motion was seconded by Council member Jensrud and was carried.

The final matter to be addressed was dogs in town that are chronically running at large. The same citizen who had submitted a letter with their concerns about speeding cars had also complained about a neighbor's dog that was always running at large. Administrator Liden explained that the dog's owner had been sent letters at least three times and that she had also gone to the owner's home the last time she had received a complaint that the dog was running around. The owner had stated that the dog was accidentally let out by her children and that she was unable to catch the dog once it was loose. Liden had recommended either getting a fence put up or putting in an invisible fence/shock collar combination to keep the dog on their property. Liden reported that the owner had stated that none of those suggestions would work.

Upon discussion of the matter, including other instances in which this had been a chronic problem, it was recommended that Administrator Liden issue Administrative tickets to pet owners who are not responsive to letters about their pets running at large.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned on a motion by Council member Wang.

Daniel Wilkens, Mayor

Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator