

## **Fertile City Council Minutes September 14, 2020**

The Fertile City Council held its regular meeting on Monday, September 14, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Present were: Mayor Daniel Wilkens, and Council members Linda Widrig, Matthew Massmann, Stanton Wang, and Todd Wise. Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, and Public Works Director Kevin Nephew. Present by telephone was Fair Meadow Nursing Home Administrator Angie Leiting. Also present in chambers was City Engineer Alex Ranz, Twylla Altepeter from the Fertile Journal, Travis Johnson, and Dale Mackowick.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Wilkens at 6:30 p.m. and began with those present reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Under agenda approval Mayor Wilkens asked to add road grading and yard repair for Patty Broden under public works, airport construction under the airport report, the letter to JR Dale under old business, and Dale Mackowick's painting under New Business. The agenda as amended was approved on a motion by Council member Massmann that was seconded by Council member Widrig and was carried.

Under public comments Travis Johnson asked to speak with Council. Johnson stated that he was running for election against Jerry Jacobson for Polk County Commissioner. He gave information on his background including his time served in the Army and the National Guard. When he retired, he moved to Minnesota since his wife was from the Crookston area. He currently farms and he decided to run for County Commissioner when he was denied a setback variance on a County building permit. He was upset that none of the commissioners or County staff could explain how or when the 150-foot setback requirement was made. Since he was dissatisfied with the lack of information from the County, he decided that he should run for Commissioner. Johnson noted that the City of Fertile was the biggest town in District 1 so he was interested in learning more about Fertile and what Fertile's needs are. Mayor Wilkens thanked Johnson for coming to introduce himself.

Council member Massmann then asked if Dale Mackowick could be moved to the next item on the agenda so that Mackowick wouldn't have to sit through the whole meeting. Dale Mackowick addressed Council and explained that he had a large painting that he would like to donate to the City if a location could be found to hang it. He had painted the picture 50 years ago and it had hung at the Longbranch bar for a time and then at his bar, Sportsmen's, and then at his restaurant, Mac's Café. Since the café had closed, the painting had been hanging in the Industrial Building on the fairgrounds. Dale didn't like the fact that the painting was subject to heat and cold in the industrial building and people had been tacking up pictures on it. Mackowick asked if the City would be interested in having the painting and perhaps hanging it in the auditorium. Mayor Wilkens told Mackowick that it was a beautiful painting and Council would look at options for getting it hung in the Community Center

Approval of the minutes was the next item up on the agenda. Mayor Wilkens noted that he would like to make a correction to the second sentence in paragraph eight on page one since the sidewalk issue was not necessarily due to aggregate coming to the surface. He recommended changing it to read that there was excessive pitting on the new sidewalk due to frost. Wilkens also wanted to add the word "easy" before the pull through parking in the last sentence on page one. Then on page three, paragraph five he wanted to add another sentence regarding the planning that was to be done for the airport.

The minutes as amended were approved on a motion made by Council member Wang that was seconded by Council member Massmann and was carried.

City Administrator Lisa Liden gave the Treasurer's Report. Liden went over the out of the ordinary deposits and checks for the month of August. The monthly financials were also briefly reviewed as well as the budget to actual reports.

The Treasurer's Report and Bills were approved on a motion by Council member Widrig that was seconded by Council member Wang and carried.

Under department reports, Alex Ranz gave the City Engineer report. Ranz began by going over the history of the planning for the RV campground and the changes that were necessary at the very end to accommodate the square footage requirement imposed by the State of Minnesota. With the change in lot sizes, the angles of the parking slots had to change to allow for ten camping spots. He reported that he had tested pulling through all the sites with his own camper and pickup and that he was able to pull through and park with no backing up required. Ranz then went over the changes that had been made to the sewer hookups at the campground. They were lowered so that they were now below ground level and reinforced above and alongside so that they wouldn't get damaged if driven over.

Ranz presented pay application #12 in the amount of \$2,568.51 for approval. A motion was made by Council member Wang to approve payment on the application. The motion was seconded by Council member Widrig and was carried.

Disbursement request #9 in the amount of \$26,666.49 for MN Public Facilities was presented for approval. A motion was made by Council member Wise to approve submitting disbursement request #9. The motion was seconded by Council member Widrig and was carried.

Ranz proceeded to report on the project funds and noted that there was about \$110,000 left at MNPFA of the 2019 water project funds. Half of that should be left after the retainage was paid at the end of the project. For the 2019 project he also reported that Sellin was in town working on the final punch list items and that the work at Brad and Tammie Campbell's had been fixed to their satisfaction. This was followed by discussion on the options for the pitted sidewalk alongside the school. Ranz was waiting to hear from the contractor on the matter and that a decision would likely need to be made in the spring.

Kevin Nephew, Public Works Supervisor, was next to give his report to Council. Nephew began by asking about all the cars that are parked on Washington Ave. NW just past the NP Drive intersection. Administrator Liden explained that most of the cars belonged to Aino Krogstad's son who was now living with her. She noted that some of the cars belonged to Jeff Adams and Jim Peltier. It was decided to send a letter to the car owners to remind them about the 24 hour parking rule and to ask that they find elsewhere to park them during the winter.

Discussion was held on the airport project being pushed back another two weeks to September 28<sup>th</sup> and concerns about the quality of the asphalt if it got too cold before the project was completed. Discussion was also held on the online auction of the items that the City wanted to dispose of. The auction would be held from September 22<sup>nd</sup> through the 28<sup>th</sup> and was being handled by Resource Auction. Mayor Wilkens noted that he had gotten the advertising cost for the auction cut to \$1,800 rather than the \$2,500 that the auction company had included in the contract.

Nephew reported that the street lights on the south end are up and working and that Downs would be checking into why the lights at the Fertile flower site were not working. Discussion was also held on the condition of Old Mill Road after it was rebuilt earlier this summer. For the benefit of Council member Massmann Mayor Wilkens explained the history of the maintenance agreement on Old Mill Road as well as 105<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW and what was formerly known as Lover's Lane. Wilkens explained that the City was responsible for maintaining a portion of Old Mill Road as well as 105<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW as the result of an agreement with Garfield Township that was made when the City annexed some township properties into the City.

Council member Widrig asked if the maintenance department could take care of the tall weeds next to the former Heart and Soul building. Administrator Liden explained that the maintenance department didn't usually take care of weeds on private property since then it would be expected by everyone. Liden said that she had contacted Jake Aakre at Red River State Bank since they were working on selling the property for the out of town owners. Widrig then asked about getting the streets swept in the downtown area since business owners had complained about the dirt in the air when it was windy. Kevin Nephew said that they would be coming in early in the morning sometime during the week to take care of that. Mayor Wilkens asked about the boulevard in front of Patty Broden's where it had been torn up for the curb and gutter work. Nephew said that they were currently working on it and that it would soon be ready for seeding.

City Administrator Lisa Liden gave her report to Council and began by reporting that the audit was finally done. In addition to the final audit work Liden had worked with the primary election, participated in meetings with the EDA, Fair Meadow Finance Committee, and the airport pre-construction meeting. Liden had also been working with Riverview setting up tours of the Altru space and providing information to them since they were possibly interested in leasing the space. Liden had also prepared the budget for 2021.

Mayor Wilkens then phoned Angie Leiting so she could give the Fair Meadow report. Leiting reported that the month of August began with 39 residents and ended with 41, operating at 95.39% of capacity. There were 321 home delivered meals served. Leiting gave an update on the Covid testing at the nursing home. The testing that was done on August 31<sup>st</sup> had one positive result and that it was a staff person, thankfully not a resident. That staff person had isolated at home for the recommended period after the test. Two additional staff who had close contact with the positive staff had also isolated. On September 8<sup>th</sup> there were no positive tests and they were due to test again the following day. Leiting noted that if there were no positive results that they would move to monthly testing. She cautioned, however, that if the County positivity rate went over 5% that the staff would have to go to weekly testing. Leiting then briefly reviewed the Covid funding that the nursing home had received so far and noted that they would be getting a \$12,500 grant from Polk County.

Leiting then went over the financial statements for August. She noted that the cash balance on the balance sheet still looked good. For the month of July, the home and assisted living showed a combined income of almost \$56,000 with the nursing home showing a profit of over \$66,000 and the assisted living a loss of almost \$11,000. The year to date profit and loss showed a combined profit of about \$578,000 with the nursing home at a profit of over \$723,000 and the assisted living showing a loss of just over \$145,000. In reviewing the budget to actual report Leiting noted on the expense side that the expenses should be at 92% but due to the added Covid costs they were at 97%.

As for action items for Council to decide on Leiting reported that the Finance Committee had met and were recommending a 12% rent increase at the assisted living. The new rates would put Fair Meadow's rates below the rates at the Villa but a little higher than Country Place. There were currently two empty apartments but they were spoken for and would soon be moved into.

Council member Massmann made a motion to approve a 12% increase in rent at the assisted living. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried. Leiting noted that the higher rates would take effect November 1<sup>st</sup>.

The next item up for consideration was to offer an incentive for employees to voluntarily participate in the Covid testing. For the first round, participation was at 80%. Leiting noted that the Dept. of Health had ruled that nursing home employers could not punish employees who refuse to test and that it was hoped that offering an incentive to test would increase participation. The Finance Committee recommended offering \$20 in scrip money to all employees who take part in the testing in the hopes that more employees will test.

A motion was made by Council member Wang to approve giving \$20 in Community Club scrip money to employees who take part in the Covid testing. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried with Council member Massmann abstaining.

The budget for 2020/2021 was then reviewed by Council for approval. Leiting explained that the original budget had accounted for some extra staff costs due to Covid but that she hadn't included all the added Covid personnel costs. The Finance Committee recommended budgeting for the worst-case scenario and to include all anticipated Covid costs in the budget since it was unknown how long the pandemic would go on. The budget that was being presented for approval included all anticipated Covid costs and an increase in health insurance costs. Leiting did note that their workmen's comp cost had gone down for the year.

After further discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council Massmann to approve the 2020/2021 budget for Fair Meadow Nursing Home. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

Another matter to address for Fair Meadow was the replacement of the patio door out to the gazebo area. The door did not seal well at all and rain had leaked in during recent downpours. Leiting had gotten a quote for \$8,300 to replace the door and would like approval to do so.

A motion was made by Council member Massmann to approve the replacement of the patio door. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried.

The final item to address was a new Covid screener position at the home. The position would be part-time. A motion was made by Council member Massmann to approve hiring for the new position. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

For the Agassiz Environmental Learning Center, Mayor Wilkens had little to report. He did note that a couple of small groups, the knitters and the stampers, had been using the building for their get togethers. The AELC Board would be discussing whether they should be charged for their use of the building. Right now, they were just making a small donation every week.

Under the Fire Department, Council member Wang reported that the department had responded to three calls during August. One was for a medical assist and the other two were a truck accident and a motorcycle accident. He reported that the house burning training had gone well and that the ranger had been sold.

Under the Airport, discussion was held on the land acquisitions for the future lengthening of the runway. Administrator Liden reported that offers had been made and accepted for two of the three properties and that Council should formally approve the purchases. A motion was made by council member Wang to approve the property purchases from Clarice Lisburg and Howard Haugen. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried.

Mayor Wilkens then asked for approval for another appointment to the Airport Commission. Paul Votava, who flies out of the Fargo Jet Center and is quite involved in aviation was interested in serving and Mayor Wilkens felt he would be a good addition. A motion was made by council member Massmann to approve Wilkens nomination of Paul Votava to the Airport Commission. The motion was seconded by council member Wang and was carried.

The next item under the airport was the haying lease that was currently held by David Lehmann. Administrator Liden explained that the lease was up for renewal the following spring and that Lehmann had inquired about going through the bidding process this fall. The land would need to be worked up and reseeded and Lehmann would like to know as soon as possible if he were going to get the lease again so he could do the work on the land this fall rather than waiting until spring. A motion was made by Council member Wise to advertise for bids to be reviewed at the October meeting to determine the new lease holder in the spring. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

Under old business, discussion was held on the current office and facilities closures due to the Covid pandemic. Council member Widrig stated that she would like to see the City Office opened to the public. Administrator

Liden explained that the bulk of the foot traffic in the office was people paying on their water bills and that having the door closed with a payment box on the door for water payments to be dropped off helped to eliminate unnecessary contact with the public. Liden noted that she had tracked the number of payments left in the drop box and for the month of August, 152 payments had been left in the box, so that meant that 152 personal contacts had been avoided. She noted also that anyone who needed to get in the office was let in. There had been quite a few people that needed to either discuss City matters or have things notarized or copies made, and those people had been let into the office.

Discussion was then held on how long the Covid situation could persist and how the city needed to operate in the current situation. After further discussion, a motion was made by Council member Massmann to take the necessary steps such as installing barriers and plexiglass on the front desk so that the office could open to the public again in October. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried.

The next item under old business was the Covid funding that the City had received from the State of Minnesota. When the matter had been discussed in July, it had been determined that the bulk of the funding should go to Fair Meadow Nursing Home so Administrator Liden asked for a formal motion to do that. Council member Widrig said that she had heard of some other cities offering small business grants and that she would like for Council to consider that option also rather than giving all the money to the nursing home. Administrator Liden explained that small business grants had also been discussed briefly in July and that she had investigated that further as well. Liden stated that she felt it would be difficult to administer a grant program fairly given the fact that all businesses were not affected equally by the pandemic. Many businesses in town had stayed open since they were deemed essential while other businesses such as Encore and the hair salons had to be closed for quite some time. Mayor Wilkens commented that it would be hard to determine which businesses would be eligible and how much money they should each get when they all were affected so differently.

After further discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Wise to give any CARES Act funding that remained after the City's minimal costs were paid to Fair Meadow Nursing Home. The motion was seconded by Council member Widrig and was carried.

The first item under new businesses was the Altru Clinic lease. Administrator Liden explained that Altru had asked whether the City would be willing to make some concessions on the payment of the remaining term of the lease. Under the current lease, Altru had to terminate the lease with 90 days' notice at the first of the year. That meant that they would have to pay on the lease until March 31, 2021 even though they were vacating the property the end of October. Liden reported that Riverview Health had toured the space and they were possibly interested in leasing the space to offer other service such as physical and occupational therapy.

After discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Massmann to only offer a concession on the lease with Altru if another party rents the space before March 31, 2021. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried.

The next item under new business was a golf cart ordinance. Administrator Liden explained that a new resident to Fertile had called to inquire about whether Fertile had a golf cart ordinance. This resident was concerned after having a close call nearly hitting a golf cart that had run a stop sign. The resident had also noted that Fertile seemed to have heavy golf cart traffic and that he was concerned about the number of young kids he would see driving them.

Administrator Liden stated that she had looked at the State Statutes and other cities' ordinances on golf carts and that she felt Council should explore adopting such an ordinance. The matter had been discussed briefly several years earlier, but at that time most of the golf cart traffic was people driving from their home to the golf course. Now, however, there were many more golf carts being driven around town for errands and such, so it would be a good time to further discuss the matter.

After discussion, it was decided that Administrator Liden would write up an ordinance based on what other cities were doing and present it for approval at a later meeting. With winter soon approaching, there was time to get something written up and passed before spring.

Cemetery repairs was the next item to address under new business. Valley Cemetery Maintenance Service was currently working on the Concordia section of the south cemetery and they had noted that the City section of the cemetery, Pleasant Hill, had many stones that needed work. There were foot stones that were overgrown with grass and sunken into the ground. There were stones that were quite crooked due to erosion of the bases and there were also some that had tipped off their bases. They had done a walk through of Pleasant Hill, and based on their observations, they had submitted a quote of \$11,000 to lift, clean, and straighten over 130 monuments. The bulk of them were foot stones, but there were also many headstones that needed new bases or to be lifted.

Administrator Liden noted that the City had a bank account for the cemetery and that the account had a balance of a little over \$5,000 that could cover some of the work. She noted also that Concordia was only getting some of their monuments worked on, so it could be an option to do just some of them now and the rest later. Council member Wise stated that he would like to see all of them done at once since the cemetery was an important piece of Fertile's history and that it didn't look good to have the cemetery looking run down. Mayor Wilkens noted also that with portions of the cemetery belonging to Concordia and the City of Fertile, that it was hard for visitors to determine where one section ended and the other began. He would like to see signage made up to indicate which portion of the cemetery was Pleasant Hill.

After further discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Widrig to approve the quote for all the work on the stones to be done at the cemetery. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried with Mayor Wilkens abstaining. A second motion was made by Council member Widrig to get signage made up for the cemetery. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

Employee health insurance for 2021 was the next item up on the agenda. Administrator Liden stated that she had gotten the price quote from the Northwest Service Cooperative and the cost of the employee policies had not been increased at all from the 2020 rates.

A motion was made by Council member Wang, seconded by Council member Wise to approve the health insurance rates and benefits for 2021. The motion was carried.

The preliminary budget for 2021 was the next item up on the agenda. Administrator Liden reminded Council that the budget was only preliminary and that all that needed to be done at this time was to set the proposed tax levy for 2021. The levy amount shown in the budget represented a 2% increase over last year to account for increasing costs in many expense categories. Liden noted also that the levy amount could be decreased when the final budget was approved in December but it could not be increased.

After a brief discussion, a motion was made by Council member Wise to approve Resolution #9-1-20 City Clerk's Certificate of Proposed Tax Levy. The motion was seconded by Council member Widrig and was carried.

Discussion then returned to the Dale Mackowick painting that he wanted to hang in the Community Center. A motion was made by Council member Wise to accept the painting and to look at where it would work best to hang it. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 on a motion by Council member Widrig.

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Daniel Wilkens, Mayor

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Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator