

Fertile City Council Minutes February 8, 2021

The Fertile City Council held its regular meeting on Monday, February 8, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Present were: Mayor Daniel Wilkens, and Council members Stanton Wang, and Todd Wise. Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, Public Works Director Kevin Nephew, Airport Engineers Dan Triller and Jacque Zirbes, Brian Nephew, and Twylla Altepeter from the Fertile Journal.

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

The meeting was then paused to allow Council member Wang to join the meeting by phone for a quorum to be present. Wang joined the meeting by phone at 6:45 p.m.

The agenda was approved as presented on a motion by Council member Wise that was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

The minutes of the January 11, 2021 minutes were approved as presented on a motion by Council member Wang that was seconded by Council member Wise 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 January noting that revenues were at a more normal level. Liden made note of the amount received for the fire department pension as well as the check that was written on behalf of the Relief Association for that same amount. Noted also were the larger than usual checks to the Department of Human Services for the ECPN program, as well as checks to Bond Trust Services and Northland Trust Services. Liden explained that the ECPN amount was higher than usual since there was a past due invoice that had not been received or paid. The other checks were for debt payments. The monthly financials were briefly reviewed as well as the budget to actual reports.

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

The first items to be addressed on the agenda were regarding the airport. Jacque Zirbes from Short Elliott Hendrickson (SEH) gave background information on the planning study that was up for Council approval. Zirbes explained that airport stakeholders had met on three different occasions to give input on updating the layout plan for the airport. As part of the planning process a 20-year Capital Improvement Plan had also been developed. Zirbes then went over the updated layout plan and gave an overview of the 20-year plan noting that the plan included several projects in the first five years. After five years, most of the projects would involve pavement maintenance.

After discussion of the updated plan, a motion was made by Council member Wise to approve the plan. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

Airport Engineer Dan Triller gave his report to Council. He gave a brief overview of his monthly report and noted that if MnDOT gave their approval, he would like to start work on the design of the apron and taxiway reconstruction and expansion before the paperwork was finalized at MnDOT.

This was followed by a brief discussion on the Local Road Improvement Program application that had been prepared to secure funding from MnDOT to pave Christian Street and a portion of Old Mill Road. The State grant would cover all costs except engineering costs. Discussion centered around the unanticipated high engineering costs of the project and whether it would be prudent to move forward given those costs. Mayor Wilkens also inquired as to why the City would pay the engineer costs for the Old Mill Road part of the project since that was a Garfield Township road. City Administrator Liden explained that when the paving of Old Mill Road was first discussed that it was decided that the City would pay all the engineer costs for that road.

Mayor Wilkens phoned Fair Meadow Nursing Home Angie Leiting to give the nursing home report. Leiting reported that they began the month of January with 41 residents and ended with 39, operating at 94.23% capacity. There were 146 home delivered meals served.

For the Covid report, Leiting stated that they were mostly done with vaccinations at the nursing home and assisted living. About 98% of the residents had been vaccinated and about 50% of staff. There would be one more day of vaccinations to get some of the staff their second required shot. She reported also that they were now testing monthly and that residents were only tested if they had symptoms. The home was now open to visitors as well with one visitor at a time allowed in with the visits taking place in the front lounge area.

Leiting reviewed the Covid funding report and explained that most of the funding that had been received had been spent. Fair Meadow was also not eligible for the second round of the Payroll Protection Program loans since they had not had a 25% reduction in income. It was noted that there were currently three empty apartments in the assisted living.

Fair Meadow's profit and loss report for January showed a loss of \$10,260 with the nursing home showing a loss of \$15,400 and the assisted living an income of \$5,200. The year-to-date profit and loss showed a combined income of \$349,700. On the budget to actual report it was noted that the expenses for both the nursing home and the assisted living were at about 37% and the budget target was 33%.

Leiting then asked for Council approval to purchase a new bladder scanner for the nursing home. A new scanner would cost around \$10,000 and the Fair Meadow Foundation would be donating \$5,000 towards the purchase. Since the nursing home share of the cost could possibly be over \$5,000 Leiting wanted Council approval for the purchase.

After a brief discussion of the matter a motion was made by Council member Wise to approve the purchase of the bladder scanner. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

Leiting ended her report by noting that Fair Meadow was now offering their own TMA class. Currently there were five CNA's taking the class. By offering their own class it would be much easier to get staff certified in a more timely manner.

Kevin Nephew, Public Works Supervisor, was next to give his report to Council. He began by asking about the grants that had been discussed at the January meeting for grooming equipment for the Learning Center and the other grant for paving trails. Mayor Wilkens said that Wayne Goeken was currently working on finalizing the equipment grant application but that the Learning Center Board had not been able to come to a decision on the grant that could be used to pave trails. Mayor Wilkens then went over one paving option that Craig Engelstad had come up with. Engelstad had suggested paving a trail that started on the west end of town that went through the Duckstad Woods and then down to the river. Given the short amount of time to apply for the grant, however, it was determined to table the matter and perhaps explore options for next year. Kevin Nephew asked if replacing the bridge would also be an option under that grant program. Administrator Liden commented that bridge replacement had been discussed but the cost of the bridge would likely be higher than the grant amount of the current program.

Nephew reported that he would be meeting with City Engineer Alex Ranz to work on the Capital Improvement Plan for the City. The plan would include water, sewer, and streets and any future developments that the City might be interested in pursuing. Nephew noted that the current City maps would also need updating.

This was followed by a discussion on the potential purchase of a payload. Mayor Wilkens noted that he would like to go look at the one in Larimore that would be available in a few months. Wilkens said that he would like to take a trip to Larimore one day along with Kevin Nephew and Jeremiah Gudvangen to look at the payload.

Nephew ended his report by noting that the ice machine was up and running and that it had been used at the rink four times so far. Chris Zimmer had decided to get it going one day and he taught himself how to operate it.

Council member Wang commented that he had been at the rink one day and another parent had said that the ice looked great and that whoever had gone over it with the ice machine had done an excellent job.

City Administrator Lisa Liden gave a brief review of the Administrator's Report. Liden noted that she had filed all the quarterly payroll reports in addition to the annual reports such as the summary budget report, W-2's, and 1099's. Liden had also coordinated staffing and preparations for opening the warming house at the skating rink.

For the Learning Center, Resolution #2-2-21 was presented for approval. The resolution was to attest to Council support for the Federal Recreational Trail Program Equipment Grant. Wayne Goeken was filling out the application and gathering all the necessary information to apply for the grant for the purchase of a new snowmobile and other grooming equipment to groom the cross-country ski trails. The grant would cover 75% of the equipment cost with a 25% match required of the City.

After a brief discussion, a motion was made by Council member Wise to approve Resolution #2-2-21 Pursuit of a Federal Recreation Trail Program 2021 Equipment Grant. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

Council member Wang gave the Fire Department Report. Wang reported that they had responded to two medical calls. The department was also looking at upgrading the trucks with better lighting. Twelve department members were also participating in the firefighter one training.

Under the Personnel Committee it was reported that they would be meeting as soon as the wage study was completed by Baker Tilly.

The first item addressed under Old Business was the open Council seat due to the resignation of Linda Widrig. Brian Nephew was present at the meeting and asked to address Council. Nephew stated that he had answered the advertisement in the Journal when Reid Jensrud's seat was vacated and had expressed interest in filling that vacancy. He stated that he felt he was more than qualified to serve on Council and that he was still interested in serving. He stated further that he had asked for Administrator Liden to pass that on to Council and that he didn't understand why he wasn't being appointed for the open seat. He stated that he had called Mayor Wilkens many times and Wilkens had not answered his calls. He said that he had also called Council members Wang and he had not answered. He added that he had called Council member Wise and that Wise had hung up on him. Nephew ended by stating that he had gotten almost half of the votes in the last election and that it wasn't fair to the City to not have full representation on the Council.

Council member Wise stated that he had hung up on Nephew when he started to swear at him. Nephew initially denied swearing at Wise but eventually said that he had only sworn to get his attention. Mayor Wilkens explained that he had read Brian Nephew's letter of interest that he had submitted when Reid Jensrud's seat was vacant. At that time, the rest of Council indicated that they were not interested in Nephew filling the seat and that they were looking at someone new for the position. Wilkens said there was no point nominating Nephew when no one would vote in favor of the appointment. Wilkens explained further that he had brought the matter up to Council again with the same result when they had addressed the vacancy due to Widrig's resignation.

There was no action taken on Brian Nephew's request to fill the vacant Council seat.

The other item to address under Old Business was amending the Zoning Code to allow for the construction of an accessory structure more than one year in advance of the construction of the principal residence on a residential lot. Administrator Liden explained that the Code amendment was no longer needed to address the request that Mark Sandness had made. However, after discussing the matter with the Mayor it was determined to move forward with amending the Code in case the request came up again. Liden noted that the hearing would likely be held in March or April after the City attorney was done drafting the amendment.

The first item to be addressed under New Business was the open Billing Clerk position. Administrator Liden explained that Terry Baumgartner had turned in her resignation and would be done at the end of the month. Liden

stated that there had already been one applicant for the position when they learned of the opening by word of mouth. The applicant was qualified for the position and Liden felt she would do quite well. Due to the time constraints presented by Baumgartner being done at the end of the month, to allow for training time Liden would like to hire for the position without advertising. Liden noted that neither the City Code nor the Personnel Policy required that open positions be advertised. Mayor Wilkens noted that the Personnel Policy states that it is up to the City Administrator to determine the hiring process for open positions and that Council just approves the person hired. Council member Wise stated that he would like to see the position advertised before hiring.

After further discussion of the matter including the necessary training for the Billing Clerk position and the qualifications of the person who had already applied for the position, a motion was made by Council member Wang to hire Stacy Erickson for the Billing Clerk position. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried.

The matter of starting pay for the position was the next item up for discussion. Administrator Liden noted that the new wage scale that was being developed by Baker Tilly was not yet available but that she would recommend a starting wage of \$15 to \$16 per hour. Liden also stated that the most comparable position at the nursing home was the receptionist position and that starting pay for that was \$16.92 per hour.

After discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Wang to set the starting pay at \$15 per hour with a raise to \$16 per hour after six months of satisfactory performance. The motion was seconded by Council member Wise and was carried.

The final item on the agenda was the donation of Mayor Wilkens salary for 2019 and 2020. Administrator Liden stated that with the regular meetings and special meetings that the Mayor's salary for the two years would have been \$3,840. In early 2019 the Mayor's salary for 2017 and 2018 had been donated for the purchase of the ice machine and skate sharpener at the rink.

For the current donation, the rink could use some more skates and in a typical year the City buys about \$1,000 worth of new skates and hockey sticks. Liden recommended donating \$1,000 of the salary for the rink and the remaining \$2,840 to the Community Club. The Community Club is very active in promoting the City of Fertile and due to Covid, they had not sent out their usual membership request letters in 2020. Several of the Club's fundraising events could not be held either, so the Club was running low on funds to continue their community campaigns and the \$2,840 would help greatly with those efforts.

After further discussion of the matter a motion was made by Council member Wise to donate \$1,000 of the Mayor's salary to the rink for skates and the remaining \$2,840 to the Community Club. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried with Mayor Wilkens abstaining.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:20 on a motion by Council member Wang.

Daniel Wilkens, Mayor

Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator