

## **Fertile City Council Minutes December 11, 2023**

The Fertile City Council held its regular meeting on Monday, December 11, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Present were Mayor Daniel Wilkens and Council members Mary Kiefert, Matthew Massman, and Amanda Bosman. Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, Deputy City Administrator Stacy Erickson, Public Works Director Kevin Nephew, Preston Douville with KRJB, and Nicole Rivera from the Fertile Journal. Several community members were also present.

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 Administrator Lisa Liden asked to add an item under Fair Meadow Nursing Home regarding funds for Christmas bonuses or for a staff Christmas party. A motion was made by Council member Massmann to approve the agenda as amended. The motion was seconded by Council member Bosman and was carried.

Under public comments audience member Mark Sandness asked to address Council and stated that he some questions to ask. Mayor Wilkens noted that the public comment period was for comments and not questions and answers. The first question was in regard to evaluations of City employees and if they are done every year and who does them. Next, he asked about the list of questions that had been submitted in July and November as data practices requests. He was wondering if they would be getting those answers pretty soon or not. Sandness went on to say that for him this was no longer about Angie but was about the City in general. He wondered why there was still no permanent administrator hired for the nursing home since that would cost less money than having an interim in the position. He was worried that those added costs would trickle down to the taxpayers. He also questioned the cost involved in having the City Administrator, Lisa Liden, working at the nursing home in addition to the city office. He stated that he wanted to know when the nursing home was going to be stable again so that everything could move on. Mayor Wilkens thanked Sandness for his comments.

The next item on the agenda was the approval of the minutes from the November 13, 2023 meeting. The minutes were approved as presented on a motion by Council member Kiefert that was seconded by Council member Massmann and carried.

Administrator Lisa Liden gave the Treasurer's Report. The only out of the ordinary deposit for the month of November was a check for \$40,000 from the fire department and Liden noted that the annual payment for the new truck was due in December so the \$40,000 was for that. In the check listing, Liden noted the check to Environmental Equipment for the new street sweeper, the check to Eide Bailly for the audit, a check to K & S Construction for the final payment on the nature center shop addition, and the check to Moore Engineering for survey work and for their work on the Small Cities Development grant pre-application. Also noted were the checks to Pemberton Law for legal services and the check to Christiansen Construction for a progress payment on the community center project. The balance sheet and profit and loss report were also reviewed.

The Treasurer's Report was approved on a motion by Council member Massmann that was seconded by Council member Bosman and was carried.

Under department reports, there was nothing to report for either the airport or the City engineers.

Next, the Fair Meadow report was given by City Administrator Lisa Liden. Liden went over the balance sheet which showed a checking account balance of \$484,477.14. The profit and loss for the month of November showed a combined profit of just over \$70,000 with the nursing home showing a profit of over \$52,000 and the assisted living a profit of just under \$18,000. For the year to date the combined profit was over \$290,000 with the nursing home showing a profit of just over \$291,000 and the assisted living a small loss of \$330. There were no questions on the check listing for the month of November.

Council member Massmann asked if Liden had any information to share on the administrator search that was underway. Liden explained that the City gets a report every Friday from Health Dimensions and it's a spreadsheet that lists all the people that they have reached out to and whether or not anyone had contacted them back showing interest in the position. Liden went on to explain that there had been some interest from a couple of people who had contacted Health Dimensions for a couple of conversations about the position. Those individuals then contacted HDG and withdrawn their interest in the position. There were a couple of things that were causing issues with filling the position, with the first one being the rural location of Fair Meadow. While there are some administrators interested in a rural setting, most are generally interested in working in a metropolitan area. The second issue was in regard to the media coverage early on with the change in administration at Fair Meadow and then the continued social media commentary about Fair Meadow. Council member Massmann then asked for clarification on whether those two concerns had been reported to HDG by potential candidates and Administrator Liden confirmed that those comments had been made to the recruiters for HDG.

An audience member then inquired about the open office positions and whether those were advertised. Liden explained that the job description for the position was being worked on and that an ad would be going out soon. Council member Massmann then asked Liden if she had been compensated for the additional work she had been doing at Fair Meadow. Liden replied that she had not. An audience member asked if Liden had been paid by Fair Meadow and Liden replied that she had not. The same audience member then asked if Liden had been compensated by Health Dimensions to which Liden again replied that she had not.

Next, discussion was held on setting an amount or budget for Fair Meadow for their Christmas bonuses or Christmas party. Liden explained that years ago Fair Meadow staff were given a ham or turkey for a bonus. Three or four years ago that practice was stopped and instead staff gathered for a Christmas party usually held at the Smokehouse. Attendance at the party was hit or miss and regardless of when it was held, staff who were working would be unable to attend. The interim administrator, Kalie Crayton, was working on plans for Christmas with staff and ultimately staff would decide what they wanted. One item that was discussed was giving staff scrip money so they could decide if they wanted to go out and eat or get their own ham or turkey. For planning purposes, however, they would need a budgeted amount that could be spent. Lisa had worked with Kalie and had determined that the budget would need to be between \$2,500 to \$3,000 to have enough funds for all the staff.

Council member Massmann made a motion to approve a budget of \$3,000 for Fair Meadow's staff Christmas. The motion was seconded by Council member Bosman and was carried.

Mayor Wilkens then asked if there was anything to report on the Advisory Board. Board member Carol Swenby stated that she and Cheryl Reitmeier had met with Kalie at the nursing home the previous Monday and that Kalie said that she would be getting an email out regarding setting up a meeting for the advisory board. Swenby then asked why the interim administrators had not been giving the monthly report at the Council meeting. Administrator Liden stated that it had been decided that it wouldn't be good to ask the interims to report to Council given the current atmosphere at the meetings. Liden noted also that having an interim attend Council meetings is beyond the scope of the contract that the City has with HDG and the interims.

Under department reports, Public Works Director Kevin Nephew was next to give his report. Nephew stated that he didn't have anything to report so he was wondering if anyone had questions for him. Council member Massmann asked about the new street sweeper and how that was working. Nephew said that it was working great and that the suction hose worked really well and that they had already used it to clear water from the area when they repaired a leaking water main.

The City Administrator's report was next on the agenda. No written report had been submitted but she reported that she had continued working with the engineers on the community center project and had spent a lot of time working at the nursing home. Deputy Administrator Stacy Erickson noted also that Liden had been working on liquor and tobacco licenses.

Under the Learning Center Liden reported that trails had been mowed and overhanging branches trimmed in anticipation of ski season.

For the Fire Department Council member Bosman reported that they had responded to six calls. There were two calls to check for carbon monoxide, three medical assist calls, and one fire call. The December election of officers had been held and Jeff Haaven was elected as Fire Chief, John Revier as First Captain, and Shane Fredericks as Third Captain. Mayor Wilkens noted that the Chief would be part of the City's Emergency Management Committee and that a meeting should be scheduled early in 2024 since the committee hadn't met in a while.

Under the City Personnel Committee Administrator Liden noted that a joint meeting with both the City and Fair Meadow Personnel Committees and Council would need to be held to discuss the new Earned Safe and Sick Time policies that would need to be adopted before the new year. Liden explained that it was a new State law that would take effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Liden gave a brief overview of the changes that would take place with the new law.

The first item to be addressed under new business was the final adoption of the budget for 2024. Liden began by explaining that the preliminary budget was approved in September with a 6% levy increase. Since the approval of the preliminary budget Liden had increased the budget for street work by \$20,000 to accommodate some possible additional paving work in 2024. She noted that there was a slight increase in the employee benefit cost since September since the cost of the single dental plan had increased slightly. The bottom line of the budget now showed a profit of just over \$7,585.00.

Council member Kiefert made a motion to approve the final budget for 2024 and the motion was seconded by Council Massmann and was carried.

The next agenda item to be addressed was Resolution #12-1-23 for approval of the 2024 Levy. A motion was made by Council member Kiefert to approve the final tax levy for 2024 on Resolution #12-1-23. The motion was seconded by Council member Massmann and was carried.

Winter staffing at the Learning Center was the next item on the agenda to be addressed. Administrator Liden explained that for the past two years the City has paid for staff at the Learning Center for up to 12 hours per weekend for ski rentals. In past years the staffing had been done by volunteers, but for the last two years there were no volunteers so the City had covered the cost. Liden asked for Council to approve continuing the practice going forward so it wouldn't have to be voted on every year. Liden also said that if volunteers became available, they would be utilized rather than paid staff. Council member Massmann asked what the cost of that has been for the past two years and Liden replied that for last year it was \$1,413.50 for the season, and the year prior it had cost \$1,065.75. Meeting attendees then interjected with their opinions and options for staffing both the rink and Learning Center using high school volunteers.

A motion was made by Council member Massmann to approve paying for winter staffing at the Learning Center moving forward each year. The motion was seconded by Council member Kiefert and was carried.

The annual Water Infrastructure Reserve Fund deposit was the next item on the agenda. Liden explained this was a deposit that needed to be made every year as a requirement of the funding that the City had received from MN Public Facilities for the recent water projects. The deposit amount was based on 50 cents per thousand gallons of water that was pumped each year. Since the December amount was not known yet, once that amount was determined, the deposit would be made in early January and recorded for year end. The amount was generally in the \$14,000 range.

A motion was made by Council member Kiefert to approve the deposit into the Water Infrastructure Reserve Fund once the amount was determined. The motion was seconded by Council member Bosman and was carried.

Resolution #12-2-23 for designating the polling place for 2024 was the next item to be addressed so Administrator Liden explained that State statute required cities to designate their polling place for the following year each December. A motion was made by Council member Massmann to approve Resolution #12-2-23 designating the Community Center as Fertile's polling place. The motion was seconded by Council member Kiefert and was carried.

The final item to address on the agenda was the tobacco licenses for 2024. Liden noted that there were currently four establishments in Fertile with tobacco licenses and they were Main Street Station & Deli, Aaron's Grocery, Northdale Oil, and The Other Place. A motion was made by Council member Bosman to approve issuing tobacco licenses for those four establishments. The motion was seconded by Council member Kiefert and was carried.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:11 p.m. on a motion by Council member Massmann, seconded by Council member Kiefert.



Daniel Wilkens, Mayor



Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator