

Fertile City Council Minutes
Special Meeting
November 7, 2023

The Fertile City Council held a special meeting on Tuesday, November 7, 2023 at 7 p.m. at the Community Center. Present were: Mayor Daniel Wilkens, and Council members Mary Kiefert, Amanda Bosman, and Todd Wise. Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, Deputy Administrator Stacy Erickson, Nicole Rivera with the Fertile Journal and a small group of community members including Carol Swenby, Liz Lisburg, Elmer Radke, Aaron and April Swenby, Joey Leiting, Barb and Myles Jensrud, Heather Larson, Cheryl Reitmeier, Lionel Sandness, David and Jeannie Thorson, Cheryl Hegg, Tom and Renee Rongen, Lynae Sather, Deb Kiel, Karla Ness, Tammie Radermacher, Linda Widrig, Becky Hall, and John Swanson. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss appointments to the Fair Meadow Advisory Board and the disposal of the old nursing home beds.

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by Mayor Wilkens and began with those present reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Under agenda approval Administrator Liden asked if the agenda item regarding the beds could be addressed before the Advisory Board matter. The agenda was approved as amended on a motion by Council member Wise that was seconded by Council member Bosman and carried.

The first item addressed was the disposition of the old nursing home beds. Administrator Liden explained that there were seven old nursing home beds stored in the shop at the nursing home taking up the space where the vehicles would need to be parked for the winter. At an earlier meeting Council had approved donating the beds to two different organizations but those organizations didn't have the space to take the beds at this time. Deputy Administrator Erickson had reached out to several other organizations in a large area around Fertile and nobody currently had the space to take them. There was also no space in either of the City shops to store them so nursing home staff were wondering if they could be brought to Spanky's and scrapped.

Discussion was then held on the liability issues and timing issues for donating the beds to individuals who may need them. It would be wise to have a legal waiver form drawn up to protect the nursing home from any potential future issues with the beds and it could still take considerable time to find homes for them and the shop space would be needed in the very near future. At that time Tom Rongen who was in the audience said that he had the space to store the beds and would be more than happy to do that to avoid the beds having to be scrapped.

A motion was made by Council member Kiefert to store the beds with Tom Rongen until such time they are able to be given away to people who have signed a waiver of liability. The motion was seconded by Council member Bosman and was carried.

The next agenda item was in regard to the Fair Meadow Advisory Board and Mayor Wilkens began by asking Administrator Liden to explain the materials in the packets. Liden gave an overview of the packet explaining that included were the bylaws, the City Code sections on the Advisory Board, meeting minutes at which Council appointments as well as advisory board appointments were made, minutes from the January 8, 2018 meeting where there is reference to an opinion letter issued by the City Attorney spelling out the roles of both Council and the Advisory Board in relation to Fair Meadow operations, and also a copy of the attorney's opinion letter referenced in those minutes. Finally, there were some emails found at Fair Meadow regarding Advisory Board meetings that were copied and pasted into a Word document so they could be presented in chronological order and also an Excel sheet with a listing of the Advisory Board members and when they were appointed.

Carol Swenby then stated she had some questions but wanted to apologize first for questioning whether there was even a quorum at last month's meeting. Her first question was whose responsibility it is to replace Dani and Jenn and whether that would fall under the Advisory Board. The next question was about who will pick Michelle Cote's replacement on the board when her term is done. She also wanted to know if support for the Administrator comes through the Advisory Board and if the Advisory Board answers to either Lisa Liden or the Council. She also wanted to know if the new Administrator would answer to Lisa, the Council or the Advisory Board. Swenby also asked where all the minutes of the Advisory Board meetings are kept and Administrator Liden replied that there were some minutes on the computer at the nursing home and also some at the City office. Swenby stated that they were to be sent to Administrator Liden but Liden couldn't easily verify if they had all been sent to her or not. Swenby stated further that she wanted to see the minutes to see how the board operated prior to 2017 when the roles were changed.

Carol Swenby's next question was in regard to a Facebook post that she had seen listing the open positions at the nursing home and she was wondering why the Business Manager position, Human Resources position, and Administrator position were not included in that post. Next, she asked about when the interim Sandy Larson leaves would it be the Advisory Board that deals with that or would it be Council. Her final question was whether Council would allow the Board to function as it was meant to be in the beginning. Carol Swenby noted that John Swanson was present at the meeting and that he had served on the Advisory Board in earlier years. She asked if he could share information on how the Board operated at that time. Swanson stated that he had served on the Board when Robertson was the Administrator and the Advisory Board pretty much had "the say" in how things were done. Then when there was a change in Administration things switched to more focus on the financial side and things that really weren't discussed much with the Advisory Board. Swanson went on to also ask what authority the Advisory Board would have going forward and if they would just be a sounding board for when there were problems. In the past they were more focused on the day-to-day operations and there would need to be clear communication on who has the authority to do different things.

Mayor Wilkens agreed that things would have to get spelled out more clearly on the role of the Advisory Board. He then referred to the Bylaws and how they don't say anything at all about the goals or purpose of the Board. There was discussion back and forth then on what authority the Board would have and how that would have to be spelled out so it was clear to all parties what they were responsible for. Mayor Wilkens noted that all of that could be worked out but that Council had to have the authority on everything financial since the City was responsible for the finances of the nursing home.

Discussion then returned to another question that Carol Swenby had. She was wondering with the recent departures of the Human Resources and Office Manager who was doing those jobs. The billing for Medicare and Medicaid was very important as was Human Resources and it was way too much work for one person to try do that right now. She also commented that if someone was brought in from Health Dimensions that it was too much money for the taxpayers to pay. She'd been looking into how much was being paid to HDG and that just wasn't good stewardship of taxpayers' money.

Mayor Wilkens then asked if Administrator Liden could lay out how that was being handled and he added that he felt it was typically the Nursing Home Administrator who took care of filling those positions. Administrator Liden began by agreeing that it was the Nursing Home Administrator who was in charge of all the other staff at the nursing home including those two offices that were now vacant. Liden went on to explain that for right now they were assessing those two positions to see how they needed to be filled. She explained that some of the HR duties were being handled by department heads who were now interviewing for vacant positions. Some of the other HR duties were being handled as part of the orientation process at the nursing home. There had always been another staff person who handled the orientation and training process and now the start up paperwork was being handled as part of that process. Liden explained further that with the two vacant positions that there were main job duties but then several other small "pieces" that they took care of and some of those smaller pieces could maybe be handled more efficiently by someone else within the organization.

Liden went on to explain that the billing for the nursing home had been outsourced to another organization, Pope and Conner. In addition to doing the billing for the nursing home, Pope and Conner could also come onsite to the nursing home to offer training for the Business Office position since there was not sufficient training given to person who was willing to learn that role. When asked how much that was costing Liden explained that the hourly rate was \$125 per hour but that they wouldn't know the monthly cost for the service until further work was done with Pope and Conner. Liden stated that for the short term it only made sense to outsource the billing since it had to be done and there was no one else to do it. This was followed by another long discussion on what authority the Advisory Board would have and how the duties and authority of the Board would have to be spelled out clearly going forward.

Mayor Wilkens then asked to move on and try to determine who was actually currently on the Advisory Board and how many vacancies there were. Administrator Liden stated that currently there were the two Council appointees plus Michelle Cote, whose term expires in the current month, and then the three most recent appointees whose terms were expired so it needed to be determined if they were each willing to serve another three-year term. Liden explained that she had reached out to Cynthia Hibbard and she wanted more information on what the Board was responsible for. She was also concerned about not being able to serve since she was out of state for the winter months but would be willing to meet virtually if that was possible. With that being said, there was only one vacant seat until the three who were eligible for reappointment let Council know if they wished to serve. This was followed by further discussion on vacancies and when they needed to be filled. There were also comments questioning how people could agree to serve without knowing what the board is actually responsible for.

Council member Kiefert then asked why the Advisory Board couldn't be returned to what it was before. She stated that she hadn't been on the Council for that long but that she didn't understand why there was a Personnel Committee and a Finance Committee in addition to the Advisory Board. Mayor Wilkens then explained why those committees were established in 2017 and why that added support was necessary. Administrator Liden elaborated on the function of the committees by using the example of wage scale increases. Liden explained that in the past it would be communicated to the Advisory Board that a wage scale increase should be looked at. The advisory board would look at the wage scale and determine, for example, that a 1.5% wage increase across the board was in order. The advisory board would then bring that recommendation to Council and Council would generally approve the increase without even having the wage scale in front of them for discussion or questions. After the implementation of the Personnel and Finance Committees, those committees would have both the old and proposed new wage scales in front of them and would further analyze the financial impacts of the increase. Once the committees had gone over the information, they would make a recommendation to Council to approve or not approve. Further discussion was then held regarding the committees as well as what the advisory board used to do.

Discussion then returned to the appointments that needed to be made to the Advisory Board. It had been determined earlier that there were currently four openings on the Board and Administrator Liden reminded those present that Cynthia Hibbard was still considering serving another three-year term and Dennis Hanson had agreed to serve as well so there were currently only two open positions to be determined. Barb Jensrud then spoke up and stated that she would decline serving another three-year term since she felt there were people more qualified willing to serve. After another round of questions, comments, and discussion, Council member Wise spoke up and said that he would like to see a list of people interested in serving and Mayor Wilkens said that those people and qualifications could be reviewed at the next regular meeting and appointments made at that time.

Council member Bosman then stated that Dr. Hanson could be approved right now, and also Carol Swenby if she was willing to serve another three-year term. Swenby then indicated that she didn't know if she wanted to serve because she had trust issues with Council. Council member Kiefert encouraged her to give it a try anyway and that her trust issues could maybe be helped by the further insight she would receive as a member

of the board. In further discussion, Council member Kiefert also noted that someone had told her that maybe a couple of Fair Meadow staff should be included on the Advisory Committee. Ideally it would be one management position and one floor staff or hourly staff so that the committee could gain even better insight into operations. Carol Swenby eventually agreed to serve on the Advisory Board.

A motion was made by Council member Bosman to appoint Carol Swenby and Dennis Hanson to the Fair Meadow Advisory Board. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Wise and was carried.

Council member Kiefert asked John Swanson if he would be willing to help the new Advisory Board and answer any questions they may have regarding how the Board operated. Administrator Liden noted that it would also be helpful if John would be willing to attend at least the first meeting of the Board to get things started and provide guidance on the meeting process. Council member Bosman then asked whether it was possible for a Board member to serve more than two consecutive three-year terms. Council member Wise stated that it would be covered in the Bylaws.

Discussion then turned to how to get the terms staggered better so that there weren't so many board members ending their terms at the same time. John Swanson suggested that some of the new appointments could be for one- or two-year terms to get the offices staggered once again. Possible consideration could then be made for those serving reduced terms at the beginning to have the option of a third term. Discussion was also held when it was changed to having two Council representatives on the Advisory Board. Former Mayor Nephew stated that while he was Mayor there was only one Council appointee serving on the Board. Further discussion was held on who had already submitted letters of interest for serving on the Board. Council member Wise said that people who were still interested should email the City office so a list of names could be put together for Monday's meeting.

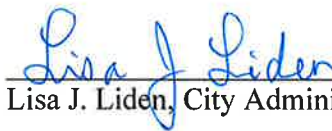
Under announcements, it was announced that the City Office would be closed Friday for Veteran's Day and also on Thanksgiving and the day after Thanksgiving.

April Swenby then asked a question regarding something that she had noted in the meeting packets regarding a meeting in January of 2018 for evaluations. Council member Wise stated that the matter was not on the agenda and was not up for discussion.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m. on a motion by Council member Wise.



Daniel Wilkens, Mayor



Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator