

Fertile City Council Minutes

March 11, 2024

The Fertile City Council held its regular meeting on Monday, March 11, 2024 at 7:00 pm at the Community Center. Present were Mayor Daniel Wilkens and Council members Matthew Massmann and Amanda Bosman. Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, Deputy City Administrator Stacy Erickson, Public Works Director Kevin Nephew, Public Works assistant Chris Zimmel, representatives from Moore Engineering, Joe Lancello with KRJB, Connie Hamernik from the Fertile Journal, and several members of the community.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Wilkens at 7:00 p.m. and began with those present reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

The agenda was amended to move the new business item of food shelf transition questions to immediately after the public hearing. The agenda as amended was approved on a motion by Council member Massmann, seconded by Council member Bosman and carried.

Council member Massmann then motioned to close the meeting and open the Public Hearing on the Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) water project funding, seconded by Council member Bosman, motion carried. Mayor Wilkens then opened the Public Hearing at 7:02 p.m. and Josiah Rostad and Jon Pauna of Moore Engineering took the floor.

Josiah Rostad introduced himself and explained the various entities and agencies associated with the Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) grant funding, including Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD). He went on to describe the steps in the process of applying for the grant and explained that the City of Fertile with the help of Moore Engineering had filed an initial application that was approved and that holding the hearing was part of the process to moving forward to submit a final application.

Rostad shared a PowerPoint presentation outlining the trouble spots that the City hoped to address with the funds and explained why each area needed improvement. He discussed the issues on Blaine Street SE that have required multiple repairs and explained that the line is undersized. He then showed on the map where each of the three areas of town have pipe that has dead ends and will be “looped” for better water quality and to improve the flow in those areas. There was a bit more discussion of Albert Avenue because it is a larger project than Blaine. The line on Albert Ave. has a history of freezing in the winter and regular reports of low pressure. He explained that the line was seriously under sized at only 2” and was not appropriate for the capacity needed for the structures along that street.

He continued the report by sharing the financial details including the overall cost of an estimated \$1.5 million, the grant abilities, the City financial responsibilities in the project and how each was broken down.

Finally, he shared the expected responsibilities that would be divided between the City and Moore Engineering. He noted there could be some potential studies that may be included in the process in regard to historical and environmental impacts, but since all work would be done within the road right of way, they would be less likely than in the case of new or expanded construction. He highlighted that the project had been included in the Project Priority List for the State of Minnesota.

Before opening the floor to public comments, he advised that the final application was due in April 2024 with determination being made in approximately August of 2024, and construction likely to start in May of 2025. The intended completion would be fall of 2025. With his thorough explanation of the details, no public comments were presented.

Mayor Wilkens and the council thanked Rostad and Jon Pauna for the presentation. Council member Massmann motioned to close the public hearing and re-open the regular meeting, seconded by Council member Bosman. Motion carried.

There were no public comments made during the public comment portion of the meeting.

The next item addressed was the matter of the food shelf transition. The food shelf transition questions memo was read by Mayor Wilkens. The memo gave the history of the food shelf and explained that the volunteers were seeking to start operating independently under their own 501c3 status that was in the works. The group, represented by Reid Jensrud and Pam Reese, was seeking assurance that the food shelf could continue to operate in the Community Center and that the support of the City office staff and equipment would be able to continue. There were questions on liability insurance and who would be responsible for those matters.

City Administrator Liden shared what she had learned before the meeting from discussions with the City Attorney and insurance providers. She had been advised that the food shelf would need its own insurance but was going to look into the matter further. After discussion of the matter it was agreed that a contract would be drawn up with the help of the City Attorney with hopes of it being presented at the next council meeting. Jensrud shared that the new food shelf board intended to get their own post office box and phone set up. Mayor Wilkens and Council member Massmann expressed their support for continuing things as is, with no rent or utility costs, and urged Liden to make it happen. Jensrud asked that there be a clause that would allow the food shelf to move before the end of the contract if the opportunity presented itself. The council expressed their willingness to accommodate the request and deferred to the Attorney to write it up. Mayor Wilkens asked for the board roster, Jensrud and Reese shared. Mayor Wilkens thanked them for their time.

The minutes of the February 12, 2024 meeting were approved as presented on a motion by Council member Bosman that was seconded by Council member Massmann and was carried.

Administrator Lisa Liden gave the Treasurer's Report. Liden noted the only out of the ordinary receipt for the month of February was a check for \$30,000 from the fire department for the truck fund. Out of the ordinary disbursements included a check to MN Public Facilities Authority for the interest payment on water project debt, checks to Fair Meadow Nursing Home as agreed at the previous council meeting, and a check to Mutchler Bartram Architects for work on the Learning Center building addition project. The balance sheet and profit and loss reports were also reviewed.

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

Under department reports, there was nothing to report for the airport.

The City Engineer report was covered during the public hearing.

The Fair Meadow Nursing Home report was given with the balance sheet information being shared. City Administrator Lisa Liden shared that the balance sheet numbers appeared larger than they were because there were designated grant funds in that account and payroll would be processed the next day, reducing the actual available balance significantly. The profit and loss for February 2024 was shared and the year-to-date information was shared as well. The check listing for the month of February was read and Mayor Wilkens asked if there were any questions. A community member asked whether HDG had been paid and whether interest had been charged on the invoices. Council member Massmann shared where to find the information in the report.

The Public Works report was given by Kevin Nephew, Public Works Director and Chris Zimmel, Public works assistant. Nephew shared that Zimmel had done the leg work on looking at the proposals for the lift station and water plant alarm systems. The meeting packet included a proposal from Integrated Process Solutions, Inc. Supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems were described as a panel that would be installed and it would be able to communicate in real time through cellular communication to the public works employees. Council member Massmann asked if it would be possible to access the information from cell phones, and Zimmel clarified that it would be possible from computer, phone, tablet, whatever device they had available. He shared that Garden Valley reported that the copper lines would be taken out as soon as possible and the City would lose communication access when that happens.

Zimmel explained that there would be an annual service fee for the system and the exact pricing package needed clarification. The cost of the system was approximately \$18,000 in the estimate. The lead time for ordering and installation was approximately 4 weeks. Zimmel shared the list of area communities that use the system that was being considered and that he had found one other system used in this area. He shared that there were limited options available to choose from that provide what was needed. Liden asked how long the quote would last before the prices could change. Council member Massmann asked if Zimmel could visit one of the other communities to observe the system in action. Council member Bosman asked if the other known system in the area was worth considering, Zimmel reported that he had reached out to them but had not received any response. Nephew highlighted that IPS is located in Fosston, so having local support was valuable. Zimmel added that this company was the one that installed the system in place at the water treatment plant and the system already in place at the plant is outdated and obsolete, but they can still get parts for it if needed. Mayor Wilkens asked for a motion. Council members Bosman and Massmann offered that they would like to learn more and have a few more questions answered before acting and they would like to re-visit the issue at the next meeting.

Nephew then shared that with the copper removal, street lights would still be an issue. The timing system that turns them on and off was set up to operate by communicating through the copper lines. The system was set up to respond to one timer that was placed at the water treatment plant. Council Member Massmann expressed the frustration that whatever path chosen, the work would likely be torn out when Highway 32 is redone in an anticipated range of 4 or so years. Zimmel shared that he had been researching options and had spoken with Jay at Garden Valley and Brian Downs and received input from each of them. The rewiring and using fiber optics with Garden Valley would be out of pocket for the City at an estimated cost of "thousands". According to Downs, putting a sensor on each light to turn it on or off would be "tens of thousands". Nephew explained that the Christmas lights were a challenge with the system used previously and they could eliminate the timer, but those lights would be on all night instead of being turned off at 10pm. Council member Massmann encouraged Nephew and Zimmel to keep researching so that the best solution could be found. There was a brief discussion of the option to take ownership of the copper wire and be solely responsible for the maintenance and repair of the light communication system.

A community member asked about road maintenance and pointed out that the road in Peterson Addition needed more attention. Nephew discussed the issue with him and explained how the road was constructed and possible solutions. Nephew shared that drainage was likely needed. Then it was asked if there could be street lights out there. Nephew deferred to council for the policy for new subdivisions. It was explained that some are owned by the City and some are owned by Ottertail and a monthly fee is paid for their usage. There was a brief discussion of how many would be needed and where. Lastly, there were concerns presented about an unfinished home in the neighborhood and the lack of progress

on it. Administrator Liden shared the expectation regarding the time frame for building permits and said that the City could look at the matter further.

Mayor Wilkens asked for the City Administrator Report. City Administrator Liden highlighted that there were a few annual reports for PERA, MN Public Facilities annual compliance certifications, annual indebtedness report with Polk County. Both Liden and Erickson completed additional training for the Presidential National Primary Election and assisted with the election on March 5th. Work continued on the Community Center building project, providing information to Cornerstone, working with Pemberton Law Office, and the administrator search process. There were questions from the audience about Cornerstone visiting the nursing home and it was asked if there was any progress with any deals with Cornerstone. Liden said there was no update to report. Further questions were asked about staffing and the administrator search. Liden answered that the search was ongoing and that there had been no applicants for the office position.

Under the Agassiz Environmental Learning Center, the report was deferred to the old business portion of the meeting.

The Fire Department reported 3 calls. Two were accidents and one false alarm.

City Personnel Committee was deferred to new business. It was asked by a community member who was on that committee, Liden and Council Member Bosman answered.

Under Old Business, Mayor Wilkens asked for an update on the Learning Center building addition project. City Administrator Liden shared the background on the project and noted that it was started with being awarded a grant for \$144,000 from Polk County from ARPA funds. She explained that there had been a lengthy process to get a design that the AELC Board approved and that the architects had finally been able to meet the requests presented. Liden asked for the Council to approve the plan and allow the architectural firm to move forward with specs and bids. She showed the estimate and that the rough calculations gave a potential cost of approximately \$188,500 and that the AELC board was exploring some other funding opportunities if they were needed. Mayor Wilkens and Liden shared that the timeline was getting tight as the project had to be done and the funds spent by the end of 2024.

Council member Massmann motioned to approve the floor plan design and Council member Bosman seconded. Motion carried. Liden then pointed out that there was a motion needed to move forward with plans, specs, and bidding. Council member Bosman made the motion to move forward and Council member Massmann seconded that motion. Motion carried.

Next under old business, Administrator Liden shared a Community Center update that there was no estimated timeline and that the original date of completion had passed. It was unknown where the delays truly were happening. Some parts had arrived at the Community Center, but it was unknown if the heating/ cooling units had arrived at the contractor. There was a no cost change order that adjusted the date to March 15th, and it appeared that would pass without completion. It was already in the contract extension that the building would be provided temporary climate control as needed at the expense of the contractor if the work was not completed by the deadline.

Under new business, the personnel committee had met and discussed the placement on the wage scale for Public Works assistant Chris Zimmel as he had acquired all necessary licensure for his position. The committee recommended that there be consultation with an organization such as Baker Tilly to formalize the procedure for placements in the future for other employees with respect to each step of licensure and to create a standard of steps. Administrator Liden shared the placement of grades and steps that was recommended on the current scale. Council member Massmann commended Zimmel on

his work to get those licenses done and shared that some cities struggle to get their employees through the process in a timely manner. Mayor Wilkens and Council member Bosman concurred.

Council member Massmann made the motion to approve the recommendations of the personnel committee and move Zimmer to the appropriate placement on the current wage scale. Council member Bosman seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Administrator Liden added that the personnel committee suggested making the placement retroactive to the date of receipt of the final licensure, which was January 11th, 2024. Council member Massmann made the motion to approve that suggestion and Council member Bosman seconded. Motion carried.

The personnel committee had also addressed the Earned Safe and Sick Time that was recently required by the State of Minnesota. Liden gave background on how the current policy was adopted by Council with the intent that the personnel committee would be able to review the plan as compared to the prior City policies. Under the basic ESST requirements, the policy was adopted for employees to earn a minimum of 48 hours per year with a maximum accrual amount of 80 hours per year. The prior City policy allowed employees to earn up to one day per month, for a total of 96 hours per year with no maximum accrual amount.

After reviewing the comparisons, the personnel committee recommended that the prior policy should be restored so that accumulation could be up to 96 hours per year with 48 of them usable as ESST. Council member Massmann shared that he would like to see sick time go away and move to a Paid Time Off (PTO) plan. Council member Bosman shared that it was also discussed at the personnel committee and that the ESST program is still so new and murky that all the details and information were not helpful in sorting out the best way to move forward. An audience member interjected with a question relating to nursing home matters. Council member Massmann redirected the attention to the matter being addressed and made a motion to approve the recommendation of the personnel committee in regard to ESST. Council member Bosman seconded. Motion carried.

After an audience member asked about the new professional boundaries policy that the Nursing Home Administrator had put in place, a brief discussion was held on the matter. Administrator Liden told Council that she would email them a copy of the new policy for their review.

Council member Massmann moved to adjourn. Council member Bosman seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:03pm.



Daniel Wilkens, Mayor



Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator