

Fertile City Council Minutes September 11, 2023

The Fertile City Council held its regular meeting on Monday, September 11, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Present were Mayor Daniel Wilkens and Council members Mary Kiefert and Amanda Bosman. Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, Deputy City Administrator Stacy Erickson, Public Works Director Kevin Nephew, and Nicole Rivera from the Fertile Journal. Also present were Jon and Joan Larson, Terry Baumgartner, Shelly Broden, Linda Widrig, Aaron and April Swenby, Heather Larson, Anna Duckstad, Carol Swenby, Becky Hall, Doug Nephew, Cheryl Hegg, David and Jeannie Thorson, Mark Sandness, and Cheryl Reitmeier.

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 agenda was approved as presented on a motion by Council member Bosman that was seconded by Council member Kiefert and was carried.

Under the Public Comments, two handouts were given to Council members and meeting attendees by Becky Hall. The first handout was a request from the We Stand With Angie Committee to make the Fair Meadow Advisory Board active again. The second handout was the results of a survey that was taken by Fair Meadow staff. Mayor Wilkens thanked Hall for the information and said that the items would be taken under advisement.

The minutes of the August 14, 2023 regular meeting and the minutes of the August 28, 2023 special meeting were approved as presented on a motion by Council member Bosman that was seconded by Council member Kiefert and was carried.

Administrator Lisa Liden gave the Treasurer's Report. Liden reported that the only out of the ordinary deposit was a \$12,000 grant pass through. In the check listing, Liden noted the check to the Sand Hill River Golf course for \$10,000 for a grant pass through, the check to MN Public Facilities for \$116,170.32 for payment on water bond debt, and the check to Ehlers for \$2,195 for completion of the annual TIF reporting. The balance sheet and profit and loss report were also reviewed.

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

There was nothing to report with the airport.

The next item on the agenda was the City Engineer and Josh Wayt with Moore Engineering joined the meeting by phone to go over possible funding sources for water projects. Wayt gave information on the funding that was available through the Small Cities Development Grant Program (SCDG). He noted that he had also spoken with Mary Jane Schultz with the MN Public Facilities Program and she had stated that both the water main and meter replacement projects would likely be listed in the fundable range of the PFA's Intended Use Plan which would come out in December. Schultz, however, wouldn't be able to commit to full funding until the application was completed and sent in. He noted that there were grant dollars available through PFA also. Wayt went on to explain that the funding through PFA was preferred over the Rural Development funding since the process was much easier with PFA.

Wayt then went on to discuss the SCDG funding noting that there were grant funds up to \$600,000 available for the water main portion of the project. The preliminary application period ended on November 29th and the full application would be due in mid-April. There would be a lot of legwork to put the application together with no guarantee of funding so Moore would charge a fee for doing the applications. Administrator Liden asked how much the fees would be and Wayt noted that the fee would be \$3,000 but that he would check in with Jeff Ebsch to make sure that was the amount.

Public Work Director asked about the timing of the projects and Wayt stated that the start date would be in 2024 in late summer or early fall.

The next item on the agenda was the report for Fair Meadow Nursing Home. City Administrator Liden reported that the interim Administrator had submitted her report to Council. Liden read from the report noting that the month of August began with 38 residents and ended with 41 operating at 97% occupancy. They had also served 165 home delivered meals. Also noted in the report was the one-time appropriation of \$196,515 from the State of Minnesota for seven allowable facility expenses including renovation.

Council member Bosman asked about the facility grant and Liden gave a brief overview explaining that the funds could be used for facility renovations and debt, so payment on the renovation bond would be allowed. With the spending deadline that was in place, there would still be funds left over after the allowable amounts were used for the bond payments. Liden said that Council would have to assess to see what other facility needs there were but Liden did note that some of the flooring still needed to be replaced. Becky Hall, who was present at the meeting, also commented that the roof should be looked at since there were regularly multiple leaks happening whenever it rained.

Liden then briefly went over the balance sheet and profit and loss reports. For the month of August, the nursing home and assisted living showed a combined income of just over \$305,000 with the home showing a \$287,000 profit and the assisted living a profit of just over \$18,000. On the year to date report the nursing home and assisted living showed a combined profit of just over \$588,000 with the nursing home showing a profit of over \$633,000 and the assisted living a loss of almost \$45,000. For the budget to actual Liden stated that the target number was 91.6%. The nursing home revenues were at 95% and the expenses were at 89%. For the assisted living expenses were at 84.7%.

Becky Hall asked to address Council regarding the survey results that she had handed out earlier in the meeting. She requested the Council take a look at the survey results explaining that Sandy had put the survey and a box for them in the nurse's lounge. After a brief review of the survey sheet, Mayor Wilkens said that it looked like it showed questions and comments on the questions after just a brief review. Another audience member stated that there isn't that much information given on the results sheet that Sandy had prepared. There was no information on who made the comments, how many agreed or disagreed with the items, and that the sheet makes no sense.

Administrator Liden explained that the sheet was a summary of the responses and noted that the number of surveys returned was only 21 and that the survey had been given to all staff which would be close to 100. Mayor Wilkens commented that only 21% had even returned the surveys. Discussion was then held on when the survey was handed out and both Administrator Liden and Becky Hall felt it was about three weeks ago. Liden stated that she had not seen the returned surveys but that she knew that Sandy and Karla Ness had reviewed them together and put together the summary sheet. When questioned why Sandy was not at the meeting to go over the survey, Administrator Liden stated that the purpose of the survey was not for public information. The staff survey, as well as surveys completed by residents, were solely meant for internal purposes. Liden explained further that due to some of the negative letters to the editor that had been published, Sandy and Karla Ness had been in touch with the Ombudsman as well as the State in case any questions were ever brought up about resident care.

Nicole Rivera from the Journal then commented that none of the letters in the Journal had made any comments about the care at Fair Meadow. Administrator Liden stated that the one letter that had triggered the whole survey business was the letter written by Jackie Leiting Domm. That letter had come to the attention of Karla Ness at the nursing home and she was quite alarmed about the false statements that were made in the letter and the fact that it could trigger a State survey. Liden reiterated that the purpose of the surveys was never to publicly disseminate the information but to deal with an internal concern. Liden noted, again, that the survey had been given to all 100 plus staff and that only 21 had been returned.

A question was then asked to clarify the profit and loss numbers for the year to date and how they were on target for the year. April Swenby then commented that all the added costs for the administrative change would top \$100,000 with the \$20,000 plus per month for HDG, the \$6,500 for the wage scale, and then \$25,000 plus for

possible unemployment. Becky Hall then questioned who was paying all the extra costs when City staff were working well after 5 p.m. nearly every night when she would see vehicles still at the Community Center. Liden noted that she was salaried and that she was currently not costing any additional money for the added hours of work. Mayor Wilkens then stated that nothing was going to get solved at the moment and that Council would look at the information provided but that the meeting needed to move on. Cheryl Hegg then asked to make a statement. She said that in regard to Liden's statement about working for the same salary, Hegg stated that any employee working for a public institution had to be paid overtime at one and a half times their hourly rate for hours over 40. She stated it was in a statute and that Council should look it up.

The next item up on the agenda was the Public Works report. Public Works Director Kevin Nephew commented that he didn't really have anything to report. Mayor Wilkens then asked about getting gravel for one particular alley that really needed some. Nephew said that he would look into it. Nephew also noted that they were working on doing some tree trimming in the alleys as well. He noted that MnDOT had finished with tree trimming on Highway 32 and that they had done a really good job. Council member Bosman had asked if there was a cost to the City for the trimming that was done and Nephew stated that there was not and that he had requested getting the trimming done since there were so many low hanging branches that could interfere with high profile vehicles such as farm equipment.

Discussion then returned to graveling alleys and Nephew noted that they were assessing the gravel while they were trimming trees in the alleys and once they were done, they would put together a list for the alleys that needed more gravel. Mayor Wilkens asked if they had graveled any alleys yet this year and Nephew stated that they had not done that yet but that they usually did quite a few every year.

The Public Hearing regarding the amendment to the special vehicle ordinance was the next item to be addressed. The regular meeting was closed and the public hearing was then opened. Administrator Liden pointed out that she had also provided a copy of the existing golf cart ordinance so that Council could reference that when reading through the amendment since many sections of the amendment referred to "repeal and replace" in the current ordinance.

Administrator Liden went over the ordinance amendment and noted that the biggest change was in regard to the required age for the operation of a special vehicle. The new language in the amendment was more specific and clearer as to the fact that operators of special vehicles must be over age 16 and have either a driver's license or a note from a doctor showing that the person permitting the vehicle and operating it are capable of operation. There was a question regarding the language about a physician's note to get the permit and Liden explained that the language was included for those who are old enough to and capable of operating a special vehicle could get a permit if a physician could attest to their capability to do so.

Becky Hall then inquired whether the ordinance would be enforced better now. Liden replied that the new language would make it easier for the Sheriff's Office to enforce the ordinance. The old ordinance was not as specific regarding age for operation so it had been difficult to enforce in the past. Becky Hall also stated that she had a state sticker on her vehicle and asked if she still needed to get the City permit. Liden replied that if the vehicle is being driven on City streets that the City permit was still necessary. April Swenby then asked about the enforcement and if the City enforced the ordinance. Liden replied that the Sheriff's Office would enforce it and that residents should call the Sheriff's Office if they had seen and were concerned about underage drivers.

The Public Hearing was then closed and the regular meeting reopened on a motion by Council member Kiefert that was seconded by Council member Bosman and was carried.

A motion was made by Council member Kiefert to approve Ordinance No. 9-1-23 an Ordinance Amending the Special Vehicle Ordinance. The motion was seconded by Council member Bosman and was carried.

The next item on the agenda was the City Administrator report. Liden noted that in addition to the regular monthly reports and filings she does each month, she had completed work on both the City and Nursing Home audits. She had continued work with the engineers and construction company on the Community Center project and worked

with Short Elliott Hendrickson, the airport engineers, on updating information on AirNav.com and also on airport zoning as it was related to a building permit application. She had held conversations with the City Engineers regarding potential water project funding, continued work on data requests, and continued work at Fair Meadow Nursing Home.

Shelly Broden had a question regarding the cemetery, noting that she had asked a few years prior about her family plot but had not heard back from the City. Liden noted that at the time the cemetery was going to be re-surveyed since some of the plots on the old map were no longer usable. The new map had been sent to the City awhile back so they would be able to look at that now and answer her questions.

Under the Learning Center Mayor Wilkens inquired about the next meeting date and Liden said she was not aware of the date for the next meeting. She noted, however, that the Education Director would be doing a new aquatic program funded by a grant. The first of four school groups taking part in the programming would be visiting on Friday.

For the Fire Department Council member Bosman reported that the department had responded to five calls in August. Two were false alarms, one was for a lift, another for a grass fire, and the final one for a structure fire.

There was nothing to report for the City Personnel Committee.

Under new business, the annual approval of the health insurance plans offered to City employees was the next item up for consideration. Administrator Liden reported that there was one current employee covered under the first policy shown and that the family rate had increased 3.6% over this year. There were two single policies for the second insurance plan and that the rate had increased 2.68%. She noted that this approval was done annually for the City to accept those policies to be offered to staff in the upcoming year. Council member Kiefert asked for clarification on the policies and if they were just for the City staff. Mayor Wilkens noted that they were and asked for a motion to approve. A motion was made by Council member Bosman approving the policies offered for 2024 and the motion was seconded by Council member Kiefert.

Becky Hall asked if those policies could be offered to nursing home employees also. Administrator Liden explained that the City employees and nursing home employees are pooled separately for the purpose of health insurance. Years ago the City and Nursing Home had asked about pooling together for purposes of insurance and we were told we couldn't do that since the employees are technically under separate employers even though they are both operated under the City. Liden did note that she is currently working with Sandy at Fair Meadow to get some other insurance quotes from different providers to see if a better plan could be found for Fair Meadow with hopefully lower rates.

Becky Hall then inquired about nursing home employees getting paid for the new Juneteenth holiday. She noted that City employees got paid for it this year but no nursing home employees. Liden explained that the holiday was so new this year that there was very little guidance for employers regarding the holiday. At the time of the holiday the only guidance there was stated that no government business could take place on that day. Since the City is clearly government and the nursing home is providing care to residents and is, therefore, not doing government business, the limited guidance this year didn't state that nursing home employees were covered by the law.

Mayor Wilkens then noted that there was a motion and a second on the table to approve the City health insurance for 2024 and if there was no further comment, that they would vote. The motion was carried.

The preliminary budget for 2024 was the next item up for discussion. Administrator Liden noted that the preliminary budget she prepared was based on historical amounts with some adjustments due to known facts and that it would be worked on further before the final budget meeting in December. The main thing that needed to be done at this time was to set the preliminary levy for 2024. She reminded Council that the final levy could go down from the preliminary level but could not be increased above the preliminary level. The levy in the preliminary budget that was presented was roughly a 3 percent increase over 2023. This was followed by discussion on the levy and whether it would be better to set the preliminary level at a 6% increase and that amount could be lowered for

the final levy if the final budget dictated that. Liden noted that setting the levy at \$247,500 would be roughly a 6% increase.

After further discussion of the budget, a motion was made by Council member Kiefert, seconded by Council member Bosman to approve the preliminary budget as presented with the adjustment to the levy increase of 6%. The motion was carried.

A motion was made by Council member Bosman to approve Resolution #9-2-23 setting the preliminary levy at \$247,500. The motion was seconded by Council member Kiefert and was carried.

Carol Swenby then asked if Mayor Wilkens was voting on the meeting motions since without his vote there technically was not a quorum. Mayor Wilkens stated that unless he votes nay that he is voting in favor of motions. He went on to explain that as Mayor he chairs the meetings and signs official papers on behalf of the City. Other than that, he participates as a voting member on the Council. Unless he is breaking a tie with voting, however, he usually doesn't vocalize his vote. Carol Swenby stated that unless they hear his voice that the meeting doesn't have a quorum.

The only announcement was that Liden was currently working with Eide Bailly to present both the City and Nursing Home audits once the audits were both completed. Liden explained that one thing that was beneficial about having the audit formally presented was that the auditors could present graphs and charts representing some of the audit numbers so that they were more understandable to the public. April Swenby asked if the audits could be published electronically ahead of the meeting so that the public could review the information and have questions ready for when the audits were presented. Administrator Liden said that the City could consider doing that.

Jon Larson asked about the hiring of the new administrator and noted that he had heard that the City had hired HDG for that. Administrator Liden explained that the City had contracted with Health Dimensions to do the Administrator search since they are experienced in doing that and know the places to advertise the position. She explained that HDG would also fully vet any applicants and would bring the City candidates to interview who fit the City's criteria. Larson then questioned the cost of those search services and Liden explained that the cost was 20% of the first year's salary of the candidate eventually hired for the position. Becky Hall asked if Health Dimensions had any luck with their search over the last month. Liden clarified that the contract with HDG had been approved only two weeks prior at a special meeting and that the kick-off meeting for the search had just been held a little over a week ago.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:33 p.m. on a motion by Council member Bosman that was seconded by Council member Kiefert and was carried.



Daniel Wilkens, Mayor



Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator