

Fertile City Council Minutes Special Meeting February 6, 2017

The Fertile City Council held a special meeting on Monday, February 6, 2017 at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Present were: Mayor Daniel Wilkens and Council members Linda Widrig, Reid Jensrud, Stanton Wang, and Todd Wise. Also present was City Administrator Lisa Liden and Twylla Altepeter.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm by Mayor Dan Wilkens, who began by explaining that the purpose of the meeting was to go over the list of priorities for 2017. He explained that the items on the list had been submitted to him by Council members and residents of Fertile. He continued by explaining that some of the issues could probably be dispensed of quickly since they just involved clarification on policy and that other items would be addressed later on as planning for 10 to 20 years from now. He then began going through the list.

The first item which involved oversight of the nursing home just needed a little further clarification since that item had been discussed at a special meeting in January. Administrator Liden asked whether or not the expanded financial reporting should begin for the February 13th Council meeting and all agreed that it should. As for item c, which was to bring in an outside consultant for improvement on operations, Mayor Wilkens said that item could be put on hold pending review of the expanded information on staffing and payroll costs. Mayor Wilkens then clarified the new item that had been added to the list which was get certification for veterans' beds at the nursing home. Administrator Liden reported that the matter had been discussed a few years prior and that Fair Meadow was not able to get certified for that since there was a limit on how many homes in the County could take in veterans under the VA program. Mayor Wilkens stated that he would check with the Polk County Veterans Services officer for more information.

The next item on the list was law enforcement. Mayor Wilkens gave a brief history of law enforcement services in Fertile which started with a City Police Department that was eventually disbanded when costs became prohibitive. Then the City went with a contract with the Polk County Sheriff's Office to provide one deputy dedicated to the City for 40 hours per week. With training, paperwork, and getting called out of the City to handle other matters, the actual "patrol time" was significantly less than 40 hours per week. Also, the new deputies were frequently assigned to Fertile and only stayed for a couple of years until they were promoted up in the department. The cost of that contract also had increased substantially, so it was discontinued.

This was followed by a discussion on what issues residents were experiencing that required a law enforcement presence. Most of the issues were traffic related, mainly speeding, loud exhausts and exhibition driving. There had also been a couple of break-ins in the past few years, but issues of that nature were rare. Mayor Wilkens said that the Sheriff's Office still served the City and that if residents had problems or concerns, that they should contact the Sheriff's Office. Administrator Liden also commented that they have been quite responsive in the past when she had contacted them about a few traffic issues.

This was followed by a discussion on the possibility of looking into surveillance cameras that could be mounted in certain areas of town. Mayor Wilkens explained that some of the businesses in town already had cameras and that the City could look at working with the business community to get better coverage on the entrances into town. The discussion then focused on how clear the images would be from cameras, how much they could cost as well as what evidentiary value would be achieved by having them.

Unkempt properties in the City was the next item up for discussion. Mayor Wilkens first inquired about the City's responsibility in regard to dead trees on the boulevards. Administrator Liden explained that those trees were the responsibility of the owner of those properties and that letters were sent out each summer to property

owners with elm trees that were dead or dying. Council member Jensrud stated that elm trees should be looked at in July since healthy elms could look diseased in August if it was a dry year. Council member Wise then suggested that the City should hire an arborist to look at elm trees in town since there was a potential conflict of interest with Kevin Nephew making the determination on which trees were diseased.

The current situation with the JR Dale building was then discussed since his one building had only been partially removed the previous summer and the other building was in deteriorating condition and should be removed as soon as possible this summer. Administrator Liden explained that she and Kevin Nephew would be getting in touch with JR to have him finish the demolition this summer.

Other cluttered properties in town were then briefly discussed. Liden explained that property owners were sent letters to clean up these properties and they were given a deadline to do so. In most instances, owners complied within the allotted timeframe. Council member Wise then commented that the City of Mahanomen Council has problem properties declared a public nuisance in order to get compliance on clean up. It was decided that the City Code would be reviewed regarding nuisance properties and to follow the current ordinances as they applied.

The next item up for discussion was the Agassiz Environmental Learning Center. Mayor Wilkens explained that most of the items there would be handled by the AELC Board, but that one item the City should take care of was getting signage at entry points to let visitors know the rules of the trails. Another item Mayor Wilkens discussed was the possibility of working with the DNR on their grant-in-aid program for the ski trails. They currently weren't adding any more miles of trails under that program, but that it would be good to get in an application or express an interest so that if more miles were allowed, Fertile would be on the list.

The fifth item on the list, city administration, was the next item up for discussion. Administrator Liden gave each member of Council a copy of her job description, a copy of the Code section regarding the duties of the Administrator, and also information from the League of MN Cities on Administrator duties. It was decided that those items would be reviewed and addressed at a later time if need be. Liden also stated that the monthly reporting on staff time off and overtime would be included in her monthly Administrator's report.

Administrator Liden then addressed item d regarding cleaning of the community center. She explained that the position opened up when Lindi Mosher moved out of state. The position was advertised in the paper and it was temporarily filled with Mosher's substitute cleaning person. That person then decided that they no longer wanted the position and gave a one week notice that she was done. At that time Liden expressed an interest in doing the cleaning for the agreed upon hourly rate and discussed the matter with several on Council. None of them had objected, so Liden began taking care of the cleaning.

The next item up for discussion was water issues and the continued problem with discolored water. Council member Jensrud inquired about the hydrant flushing which helps with the discolored water. Liden explained that maintenance staff had flushed the hydrants three times the previous summer. She also explained that the discoloration issue was also worse in areas of town with high water use, such as in the area of Culligan and even JTs in the spring when the car wash got heavy use. This was followed by a discussion on whether or not maintenance is flushing all of the hydrants. Poor water pressure was also discussed.

Mayor Wilkens then brought up whether or not the City should install a water softener in the treatment plant. A softener was part of the original plan for the plant but that it had not been installed. The building, however, was built to accommodate a softener being added in the future, so Wilkens would like to explore that option. Administrator Liden had been in contact with the City Engineer regarding the matter, and they would be getting cost information for the softener.

A plan for eventual replacement of water mains was then briefly discussed. Council member Jensrud stated that he felt the City should look at a plan on replacing a couple of blocks of main each year and should look at

which ones should be replaced first, based on age and also how big or small the mains were since that greatly affects water pressure in certain areas.

The final item discussed under water was the current City policy on delinquent accounts. Administrator Liden explained that letters are sent out to residents when their water bill is 30, 60 and 90 days past due. At 90 days they are sent a shut off notice, and unless they are under an agreed upon payment plan to take care of the past due account, accounts must be paid in full in order to avoid shut off. Mayor Wilkens recommended writing up a formal policy if it's not currently in the City Code and then publishing the policy on the City website.

Maintenance and upkeep of City streets was the next item addressed. It was agreed that the City should work on establishing a 20 or 30 year plan on street repair and that the schedule should coincide with any work done on water mains. Administrator Liden reported that Kevin Nephew was planning on crack-sealing several streets this summer and that maintenance staff would do the work rather than hiring it out.

Snow plowing was then up for discussion. It was determined that a couple of Council members would work with Administrator Liden and Kevin Nephew to develop a formal snow removal policy. Liden also reported that the sand dog had been installed in the bed of the camo truck and the streets had been sanded late last week. Council member Jensrud reported that he had spoken with Polk County and that the City could purchase sand from the County location in town for \$20 per ton. After discussion it was determined that street sanding and snow pile removal should also be included in the snow removal policy.

The next item to be discussed under "streets" was the problem with horse manure that is left by the Amish when their horse and buggies come through town. It was decided that Mayor Wilkens would speak with one of the Amish in town to explain the issue and to ask them to clean up after their horses.

The responsibility for replacing sidewalks, especially in the downtown area, was the next item up for discussion. Administrator Liden explained that currently the upkeep of sidewalks was the responsibility of the property owners. Also discussed was problems with vegetation impeding on the sidewalks. There are several areas where hedges need to be trimmed back and overhanging branches need to be cut.

The final item under streets was a discussion on maintenance of the West Mill Road. Even though the road is a township road, the City took care of snow removal in the winter and grading in the summer. Mayor Wilkens commented that the road is in pretty poor shape and gets very full of washboards in the summer months. He asked Administrator Liden to look into whether there was a written agreement between the City and Garfield Township regarding maintenance of the road. He also stated that a meeting should be scheduled at some point with the township to discuss the matter.

The Industrial Park was then briefly discussed. Mayor Wilkens gave a brief history on the industrial park, what the early plan had been for development, and that the Council years ago had deviated from that plan when lots on the north side along highway 12 were sold and used for fuel tanks. Administrator Liden explained that the west lots now had water and sewer and were leveled off. Lots on the east side of the park would not be developed any further until the lots on the west side were sold.

A discussion was then held on plans for the splash park, skating rink and warming house being put in JD Mason Park. It was determined that a site layout plan should be done so that all three activities could be accommodated in a logical manner within the park.

Community center upgrades was the next item on the priority list. Administrator Liden reported that the building needed to be re-sided in the near future and that a couple of people had also commented on getting fans installed in the auditorium to help move the air when there are large groups using the space. It was determined to look into both the siding and fans in the spring. The sound system in Council chambers was also briefly discussed.

An RV dump station was the next item up for discussion. Several on Council commented that the matter had been discussed for several years and that this summer it had to be taken care of. This was followed by a discussion on possible location as well as whether or not the dump station had to be manned.

Leaf burning was then discussed. Mayor Wilkens commented that he would like to see leaf burning banned within City limits now that the City had a dump station for yard debris and branches. He explained that he has breathing issues that are exacerbated by leaf burning and that several other residents have also complained about it. Administrator Liden expressed some concern for those residents who would be unable to haul their own leaves to the dump station if leaf burning were no longer allowed. It was decided to discuss the matter further after researching how other cities in the area handle the matter.

City engineer services were then discussed. Mayor Wilkens gave a brief history of working with different engineer firms that have done work for the Sandhill Watershed. He expressed some dissatisfaction with the current city engineer mostly in regard to how costly they seem to be on even simple projects. Administrator Liden explained that the City had done an engineer Request for Proposals (RFP) in 2009 or so and that the City could look at doing that again. It was decided to call for an engineer RFP at the next regular Council meeting.

The City website was the next item on the priority list. Mayor Wilkens explained that the current website had been developed in 2010 or so and that it was maybe time to look at making some upgrades to accommodate more information. One of the items that he would like to see on the website would be the complete history of Council minutes in a searchable format. Also discussed was getting the current minutes on the website within a week or two of the meeting date. The minutes, however, would have to be marked as draft until they are formally approved by Council at the next meeting. Council member Jensrud then inquired about the current cost for website updates and whether the updates could be done by City staff. Liden explained that updates are currently billed by the hour with a \$30 minimum for each time and that the updates couldn't be done by City staff. Jensrud expressed some concern about the cost of updates over the course of the year with draft minutes being submitted and then the final minutes being submitted. Mayor Wilkens reported that April Swenby has been working on a website update for the City and that she would like to make a presentation and proposal to Council in March.

The Airport was the final item to address on the priority list. Mayor Wilkens reported that he still needed to confirm with a couple of people on whether they would be willing to serve on the airport commission. He also reported that MNDOT would be coming to meet with the City in mid-March and that he would like for the Commission to attend the meeting as well.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned on a motion made by Council member Wise and seconded by Council member Jensrud.

Daniel Wilkens, Mayor

Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator