

Fertile City Council Minutes August 10, 2020

The Fertile City Council held its regular meeting on Monday, August 10, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Present were: Mayor Daniel Wilkens, and Council members Linda Widrig, Matthew Massmann, Stanton Wang, and Todd Wise. Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, and Public Works Director Kevin Nephew. Present by telephone were Fair Meadow Nursing Home Administrator Angie Leiting and City Engineer Alex Ranz. Also present in chambers was Twylla Altepeter from the Fertile Journal.

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 the agenda approval Council member Wang asked to have the City cell phone plan added to the agenda. Mayor Wilkens asked to add campground signage under old business, a letter to JR Dale under old business, and under the Airport he asked to add a new hangar at the airport. The agenda as amended was approved on a motion by Council member Massmann that was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

There were no public comments.

The minutes of the July 13, 2020 meeting were approved as presented on a motion by Council member Widrig that was seconded by Council member Massmann and carried.

City Administrator Lisa Liden gave the Treasurers Report. Liden went over the out of the ordinary deposits and checks for the month of July. The monthly financials were also briefly reviewed as well as the budget to actual reports.

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

Alex Ranz gave the City Engineer report by telephone since he was unable to attend in person. He reported that the 2019 water project was about 100% wrapped up with only three or four small punch list items to be addressed. Ranz reported that he had checked on the seeding at the RV campground and the grass looked well established. He noted that the contractor had been watering the campground daily.

Discussion was held on the sidewalk by the gym doors at the school. Ranz noted that the sidewalk had not been troweled properly so there was excessive pitting that showed up in the spring. Ulteig was holding Sellin's retainage on the project until it was determined what the subcontractor would do to rectify the situation. It was discussed whether the entire sidewalk would need to be replaced or if there were just certain sections that needed to be replaced. Ranz stated that ultimately it would be up to the City to decide whether the entire sidewalk should be replaced.

Ranz briefly reviewed pay application #11 for \$126,295.04 which was owed to Sellin for the final wrap up of the campground work and the paving on Jefferson Ave. After a brief discussion, a motion was made by Council member Widrig to approve payment on application #11. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

This was followed by a discussion on the sewer clean outs at the campground. Council member Wise noted that they stick out too high above the ground and were located where they would frequently get run over by campers pulling into the campground slots. Ranz stated that the clean outs could be cut down to just below ground with special caps that would prevent damage if they are driven over. Mayor Wilkens then commented that he was very disappointed with the final layout of the campground. The RV slots weren't at enough of an angle to allow for easy pull through parking.

Ranz ended his report by going over the project financing for the 2019 water project and the 2020 water and campground projects. He noted that there was still just under \$33,000 in project funds available and there was about \$45,000 due to Sellin on their retainage.

Further discussion was held on the options for the defective concrete by the school. A motion was made by Council member Widrig to have the defective sidewalk replaced. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

Mayor Wilkens then phoned Angie Leiting so she could give the Fair Meadow report. Leiting reported that the month of July began with 40 residents and ended with 39, operating at 93.24% of capacity. There were 315 home delivered meals served. Leiting reported that there were currently two empty beds at the home but there were two admissions scheduled for the following week.

Leiting then went over the financial statements for July. She noted that the cash balance on the balance sheet still looked good. For the month of July, the home and assisted living showed a combined loss of over \$44,000 with each one showing a loss of around \$22,000. The year to date profit and loss showed a combined profit of about \$522,000 with the nursing home at a profit of just under \$668,000 and the assisted living showing a loss of about \$145,000. On the budget to actual reports Leiting noted that while the expenses were up over 7% above budget that revenues were up 9.5% due to the COVID funding they had received.

Under the monthly COVID report Leiting noted that they still hadn't had any cases at the home and that they would be looking at the next stage towards reopening. She noted also that that \$20 hazard pay and increased call pay were still in effect.

Kevin Nephew, Public Works Director, gave his report to Council and began by discussing the equipment storage area behind the shop on Garfield. Rather than continuing to mow and weed whack around the equipment Nephew would like to gravel the north side of the shop. Nephew asked about the propane tank on the north side of the shop and how to get rid of it. Mayor Wilkens said that it could be added to the items that were going to be auctioned off.

Nephew reported that there was a runway light that was knocked down and he had thought the City had some replacement lights and parts from the lighting project last year. When he couldn't find them, he had contacted Neo Electric to see if they had left some replacement parts or if the City would have to order them. Since replacement lights weren't included in the lighting project, Neo had sent a price quote for \$6,133.76 for various parts to have on hand for repairs.

After discussion of the quote, a motion was made by Council member Widrig to approve the purchase of the replacement runway lighting parts as quoted by NEO Electric. The motion was seconded by Council member Massmann and was carried.

Nephew reported that the riprap work had been completed at the Nature Center bridge and road and that it looked good and should help avoid road damage and further bank erosion during future flood events. Nephew said he would be mowing at the Industrial Park and spraying for weeds. He also reported on some new play items that had been added to the nature play space in JD Mason Park.

Discussion was held on the cell phones that City employees have. The current phones are quite old and are all Android. Chris Zimmel, the new Public Works employee had asked about either getting a different phone or using his personal phone for City business since his phone was an iPhone that he was more familiar with. Mayor Wilkens noted that he shouldn't use a personal phone for his City phone since that could lead to issues at some point if information were needed from his phone.

After discussion of the matter, it was determined that the City should upgrade the current cell phones and that if employees preferred, they could get an iPhone rather than an Android.

Administrator Liden gave her monthly report to Council. She reported that she was continuing her work with Eide Bailly on the annual audit. She noted that it was taking much longer this year due mostly due to having to do it remotely and, in part, due to reporting requirements for the water project. She reported also that she had gone on a drive around town with Mayor Wilkens and had made up a list of properties that needed to be notified about long grass, weeds, dead trees, or junk vehicles. Liden had sent out 41 letters to residents addressing those issues. Liden had also met with a Grand Forks Herald reporter for an upcoming story on Fertile and had finished her election training.

For the Learning Center, Mayor Dan Wilkens reported that the Board would be meeting on Wednesday to discuss trails issues. He also noted that a storage container had been purchased for storage of haunted trails items and that it was put in between the Nature Center shop and the Conservation Club trailer.

For the Fire Department, Council member Wang reported that the department had responded to two calls in July. One was for a medical assist and the other was for an ATV accident. He reported that the department had also gotten new pagers and that they would be taking part in a house fire training later in the month.

Airport matters were the next item up on the agenda. Mayor Wilkens reported that there was a person interested in building a new hangar at the airport and he stated that the current contract with Short Elliott Hendrickson for airport planning was to be completed so the City would know the best location for the new hangar. As this planning is going to be done later, Wilkens is working with Dan Triller to move the Walter's hangar project forward. Wilkens also reported that he was still waiting for Brian Nephew to provide a list of Flying Club members since the planning process should involve the Flying Club as stakeholders in future airport growth.

Dan Triller, Airport Engineer, had submitted a written report outlining the status of current airport projects including zoning, runway reconstruction, and land acquisition. The report was reviewed and a discussion was held on the land acquisitions and one party who was waiting to sign their purchase agreement due to concerns about tax ramifications of selling the property.

The first item discussed under Old Business was the status of the City Office being closed to the public as well as the community center being closed for public rentals. After discussion of the matter it was decided to continue with the closures.

The next item up for discussion under Old Business was choosing a name for the new RV campground. Administrator Liden presented a list of potential names that had been submitted by staff and the public. The list was quickly narrowed down to two names, Fairview and Cottonwood. A couple on Council expressed some concern about naming the campground Cottonwood since the big cottonwood tree could die or be struck by lightning and they preferred Fairview since the campground is located on the corner of the fairgrounds.

After a spirited discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Wise to name the campground Cottonwood. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and the motion was carried with Council members Wise, Wang, and Widrig voting yes and Mayor Wilkens and Council member Massmann voting no.

Also, under campground matters, a discussion was held on signage and getting something set up for making payment on site to accommodate people wishing to register outside of City Office hours. Mayor Wilkens stated that signage would be needed for the name of the campground, the rates, and the rules. Administrator Liden said that she would work on getting the signage made up as well as ordering a payment drop box and something to keep registration forms out of the elements.

The final item to address under Old Business was the removal of the JR Dale building. JR Dale had contacted Mayor Wilkens to see if the clean up of the property was complete to City standards. He also would like a letter from the City stating as much. After discussion of the removal of the building and the clean up of the property, a motion was made by Council member Widrig to send JR Dale a letter stating that the clean up was complete and the City satisfied. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

Under New Business, the first agenda item was the reinstatement of late fees and water turn offs. Administrator Liden reminded Council that late fees and shut offs were suspended in March when the emergency declaration due to the Covid pandemic was made. She explained that most residents were paying their water bills in a timely manner but that there were a few that were seriously behind on their bill. When past due letters are sent out, reminding customers about late fee charges and potential shut off was a good incentive to get them to pay their bill. Reinstating those charges would hopefully lead to collection on some of the past due accounts.

After discussion of the matter, a motion was made by Council member Wise to reinstate late fees and water shutoffs. The motion was seconded by Council member Wang and was carried.

The start date of insurance benefits for new employees was the next item up on the agenda. Administrator Liden explained that under the current Personnel Policy new employees are not eligible for health insurance for the first 60 days of employment. Chris Zimmer had inquired about an earlier eligibility date and with the current situation with the COVID pandemic, Administrator Liden felt that the matter should be discussed. After a discussion of the matter, it was decided to leave the current policy in place.

The final agenda item to be addressed was offering business incentives to downtown businesses. Liden explained that the City offers free water and sewer for two years for businesses that build in the Industrial Park. There was one vacant building in downtown that Red River Bank was trying to sell on behalf of the owner and the bank had inquired about offering an incentive to assist with getting the property sold and occupied.

The matter was discussed and it was determined to not offer any incentives to downtown businesses since the incentive in the Industrial Park was needed since businesses locating there were starting from the ground up with substantial construction costs.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m. on a motion by Council member Massmann that was seconded by Council member Wang.

Daniel Wilkens, Mayor

Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator