

City Council Minutes March 3, 2025

The Fergus Falls City Council held a regular meeting on Monday March 3, 2025, at 5:30 pm in the City Council Chambers. Pastor Doug Dent gave the invocation, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Acting Mayor Laura Job called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm. Council members in attendance were Job, Kvamme, Leighton, Kremer, Mortenson, Rachels and Kilde. Fish and Mayor Hicks were absent.

Open Forum

Public Arts Commission Chair Kim Embretson commented on the rotating artwork that will be displayed in the City Council Chambers. The artwork was commissioned during the “A River Is” project and the pieces are part of a permanent collection housed at the Fergus Falls Public Library.

Kate, no last name provided, expressed her concerns over the council’s inaction to approve the Library Art Policy because it mentions the words diversity and inclusion. She was upset with the council’s indecision and interference with the Library Board’s work on policies and believes the council should have acted on the other policies that were brought for approval.

Duane Cookman stated his opinion on the definition of equity.

Approval of the Agenda

A motion and second were made by Kilde and Kvamme to approve tonight’s agenda with the removal of the joint powers board for public transportation and solar RFP from the consent agenda and the motion carried.

Consent Agenda

The following items were approved under **Resolution #30-2025** by Leighton: Motion approving the open and closed minutes from the February 18, 2025, City Council meeting and the February 26, 2025, Committee of the Whole meeting. Motion approving the following licenses: Mechanical Fergus Home and Hardware, Fire-N-Ice Heating & A/C, E & H Enterprises of Alexandria, Air Mechanical Inc; Minnesota Lawful Gambling Permit Vets R Us Inc. for BINGO at the Eagles Aerie on April 19, 2025; Excavator Ben Wolden Landscaping; Mobile Food Vendor Lone Pine Soup Company, Bossy Babe’s BBQ. **Resolution #31-2025** approving a separation agreement with Mike Hartwell. **Resolution #32-2025** declaring Summerfest, Over the River and Shop, Move & Groove as community festivals. **Resolution #33-2025** approving the art selections for the year 2025 downtown sculpture walk. **Resolution #34-2025** granting an easement to Otter Tail Power Company for a utility replacement project in the alleyway north of Lincoln Avenue. **Resolution #35-2025** approving an Outdoor Lighting Services Contract with Otter Tail Power Company. **Resolution #36-2024** setting a final cost hearing for City Project 5961, the Junius Avenue: Union to Cascade street improvement project for April 7, 2025, at 5:30 pm in the City Council Chambers. The resolution was seconded by Rachels and was adopted.

Joint Powers Board for Public Transportation

Leighton asked for more information on the proposed joint powers board for public transportation. Kayla Sullivan of the Otter Express asked if the city is interested in participating in this board as most of the public transportation they offer occurs within the Fergus Falls city limits. If the city is interested,

they will select up to 2 elected officials to serve as advisory members who would create the policies, routes, staffing and other decisions necessary to continue operating public transportation. Leighton offered **Resolution #37-2025** authorizing the participation in a joint powers board for public transportation, which was seconded by Kilde and was adopted.

Solar RFP

Leighton stated his preference to permanently remove the installation of solar panels from the agenda. Several council members commented on the cost of the initial output, the uncertainty the city would see a savings and not being a big enough return on investment. Job reminded the council this is not a final approval but rather a request to seek RFP's. Rachels offered **Resolution #38-2025** authorizing the participation in an RFP process led by West Central Initiative for the installation of solar panels on municipal buildings, which was seconded by Kilde and the resolution failed 1-6 with Job being the only affirmative vote.

Child Care Project Manager

Community Development Manager Klara Beck explained Fergus Falls was selected to participate in the First Children's Finance Rural Child Care Innovation Program. The program addresses the critical challenges of rural child care through the lens of economic development. A community engagement process was developed to find solutions to address the child care shortage. Six goals have been identified to address these challenges including hiring a project manager to implement childcare initiatives. West Central Initiative approved a \$20,000 grant to hire a project manager and Beck recommended Katie Ganoe for the position of Child Care Project Manager. She explained the RFP process, Katie's background and expertise in early childhood and her involvement in various childcare initiatives. Beck answered questions regarding the RFP process, the role of West Central Initiative as fiscal host and concerns with conflicts of interest. Rachels offered **Resolution #39-2025** approving the Independent Contractor Agreement for the Child Care Project Manager position and authorizing the City Administrator to execute the agreement, which was seconded by Kilde and was adopted.

Council Chambers Technology

There have been concerns regarding the sound quality in the City Council Chambers. Staff presented a technology proposal to install ten new 6.5" ceiling speakers to replace the seven existing 4" speakers at a cost of \$8,395.10. Leighton offered **Resolution #40-2025** authorizing staff to enter a contract with Bluum Technology to upgrade technology in the Council Chambers, which was seconded by Rachels. The council asked staff to get references from other governmental entities using this technology, to consider local vendors and to engage PEG Access for their opinion on the proposed technology. City Administrator Andrew Bremseth suggested the council approve entering this contract contingent upon successful references and the input of PEG Access. If the city waits, the project could be delayed by Bluum's contracts with school districts. Leighton wanted a guarantee the city would not have to pay until they are satisfied with the product. He and Rachels agreed to amend the resolution to be contingent upon successful references and the resolution was adopted.

Resolution of Accounts

Kilde offered a resolution authorizing the payments and claims in the amount of \$367,482.32, which was seconded by Rachels and was adopted.

New Business

Leighton asked the city's zoning code to be reviewed so the owner of 712 Springen Avenue can construct a stand-alone garage/mancave structure which is currently not allowed by City Code. Kilde felt this topic should follow the process and be discussed by the Planning Commission. A motion and second were made by Leighton and Kilde directing the Planning Commission to review code language regarding accessory structures and the motion carried.

A motion and second were made by Leighton and Mortenson to discuss the future of the Bigwood Event Center. Bremseth said he plans to place this topic on the March 17 agenda in a closed meeting to report back on past council direction and give an update on a potential real estate transaction. The motion carried.

Mortenson asked a copy of the US Constitution to be displayed in the Council Chambers.

Mortenson would like to review the legal ability and appetite of the council to double the city's lodging tax and use the additional 3% to fund economic development. A motion and second were made by Mortenson and Kremeier to discuss the lodging tax the city receives at a meeting within 60 days and the motion carried.

A motion and second were made by Leighton and Mortenson directing staff to bring all contracts up for renewal in April, May and June of 2025 to the council who will decide if the city should seek RFP's, and the motion carried.

Mortenson said he secured the West Fargo Economic Development Director to participate in the council work sessions planned for March 12 and 26 from 7-9 am. These sessions will be open to the public and they will be livestreamed. Rachels said he would like to follow parallel paths to continue the community visioning process.

The meeting adjourned at 6:38 pm

Lynne Olson