

Committee of the Whole
February 26, 2025

The Fergus Falls City Council held a Committee of the Whole meeting on Wednesday February 26, 2025, at 7:00 am in the City Council Chambers. Acting Mayor Laura Job called the meeting to order, and the following council members were in attendance: Kilde, Job, Kvamme, Leighton, Kremeier and Mortenson. Hicks, Fish and Rachels were absent.

Community Festivals

Since 2015 the city has declared the Summerfest, Over the River and Shop Move and Groove events as community festivals and participated in the sponsorship with labor and equipment. Staff are requested these events continue in perpetuity as community festivals or until which time the council deems them to be ineligible. Staff will report the city's costs to these events on an annual basis. A motion and second were made by Kvamme and Kremeier to recommend the council declare Summerfest, Over the River and Shop Move & Groove as community festivals and the motion carried.

Joint Powers Board for Public Transportation

Kayla Sullivan and John Groothius asked the city to consider participating in a joint powers board for public transportation. Since 2006 Productive Alternatives has provided public transportation and in February, their board made the decision to discontinue this service. The Otter Express provides transportation to 46 work sites daily and nearly 50,000 of their 64,000 rides provided in 2024 were within the City of Fergus Falls. State statutes allow for the formation of a joint powers board to oversee operations, rates, routes and governance of the transportation services. If the city agrees to participate, the elected officials of the city would be given up to two board seats. A motion and second were made by Kilde and Leighton to recommend the council agree to participate in a joint powers board for public transportation and the motion carried.

Downtown Sculpture Walk

In 2024 the council approved the creation of a sculpture walk which was implemented through the Public Arts Commission. The project was funded for three years through the Veden Trust and Lake Region Arts Council and they hired Naomi Schliesman as the Sculpture Walk Manager. The outdoor art sculptures will be mounted on limestone pedestals in six locations along Lincoln Avenue from Union to Cascade with the input of the Public Works Department, so they do not interfere with snow removal. Signs will be affixed to the base to provide information about the art, artists and the cost of the art if someone would like to purchase it. If a piece is sold, the city would receive 20% of the commissions to fund the project beyond the three-year grant. There was a call for artists and six sculptures were recommended for the 2025 display by the Public Arts Commission. The process will be repeated in 2026 and 2027. When the project was initiated, the council asked to see the pieces proposed for public display. A motion and second were made by Kvamme and Kilde to recommend the council approve the selected art pieces for the downtown sculpture walk and the motion carried.

Easements for Otter Tail Power

Nate Kunde of Otter Tail Power presented two projects for the city to consider. The first is the conversion of the overhead utility lines to underground lines in the alleyway north of Lincoln Avenue. The current system is outdated and poses safety concerns. Five utility service providers have agreed to combine efforts for this project including natural gas, electricity and telecommunications. They would use Otter Tail Power's contractor to open trench excavation throughout the scope of the project.

Work would be conducted in a block-by-block manner to provide as little disruption as possible. The street crossings would not be affected and pedestrian traffic and use of the parking lots would still be allowed, but the alleyway would be temporarily closed as work is ongoing. Each building would receive new underground service lines and to complete the project, Otter Tail Power is requesting an easement from the city to locate the pad mount transformers and would provide a payment of \$6,000 for the easement. The city was asked to provide \$25,000 towards the cost of the asphalt reclamation to repave the alleyway after the project is complete. City staff are exploring cost estimates to resurface the abutting city owned parking lots in conjunction with the project. A motion and second were made by Kilde and Kremeier to recommend the council approve an easement with Otter Tail Power for the overhead to underground service line project and the motion carried.

Otter Tail Power has identified a tariff to replace 35 municipally owned light poles and fixtures in the downtown area which have reached the end of their useful life. The bases of the current system are crumbling, pose a safety risk and can be updated with better lighting technology. Otter Tail Power would be responsible for all maintenance including fixture and standard replacement, locating and replacement of facilitates. Allowing Otter Tail Power to install these lights would benefit the city by having less liability with street light related accidents, lower premiums and increased safety. If the city would like to proceed, work would begin this year with the billing to start once the service begins (late 2025/early 2026). The estimated monthly cost to the city is \$988, which does not reflect the net savings from the removal of the inefficient lighting, nor the property tax Otter Tail Power is paying for the base locations. A motion and second were made by Kilde and Leighton to recommend the council approve an Outdoor Lighting Services Contract with Otter Tail Power Company and the motion carried.

TIF Reassignment Request

This item was pulled from today's information as more information is needed from the developer.

Solar Projects on Municipal Buildings

Griffin Peck of West Central Initiative reviewed the potential energy cost savings the city could realize with the installation of solar panels on municipal buildings. If solar panels are installed on the west liquor store roof it was projected they would generate 55,624 kWh at an estimated cost of \$137,500. An equivalent amount of incentives would be available to the city through various incentives the community is eligible for. This equates to an average energy savings of \$4,400 and it is projected to be cashflow positive on day 1 with a savings of \$149,565 over the 30-year lifetime. Various questions about other municipalities using this technology, the likelihood of savings at the community arena and the installation of the panels were addressed. Kvamme offered a motion to recommend the council participate in a RFP process led by West Central Initiative. After getting more information regarding the RFP process and the clarification this action is not authorizing moving forward with solar panels at this time the motion was seconded by Mortenson and carried.

Council Chambers Technology

Concerns have been voiced regarding the quality of sound at meetings held in the City Council Chambers by those attending in person or watching via streaming or broadcasting. Blumm Technology provided a quote on updated technology and concluded the microphones work when they are used properly. The arm on the podium microphone can be replaced to accommodate taller speakers. A quote of \$7,607.04 was received for a document camera, but staff do not feel the cost justifies the use it would get. Blumm has proposed ten new 6.5" speakers for the City Council

Chambers to replace the 7 existing 4” speakers. The additional speakers would be placed above the council dais to amplify the council members as they speak. There was a request that speakers are installed in the overflow area and the input from PEG Access be incorporated into the proposal. The cost of the new speakers is \$8,395.10 and would be funded out of the General Government Buildings budget. A motion and second were made by Leighton and Mortenson to recommend the council authorize entering a contract with Bluum Technology to upgrade the speaker technology in the City Council Chambers and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 8:59 am

Lynne Olson