

City Council Minutes
January 19, 2021

The Fergus Falls City Council held a regular meeting on Tuesday January 19, 2021 at 5:30 pm in the City Council Chambers. Lake Region Healthcare Chaplain Deb Forstner gave the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Mayor Schierer called the meeting to order at 5:39 pm. Council members in attendance were Arneson, Gustafson, Hicks, Fish, Kvamme, Rufer and Thompson. Hagberg was absent.

Approval of the Agenda

A motion and second were made by Hicks and Thompson to approve tonight's agenda with the addition of two new business items: authorizing a United Prairie Foundation grant and amending a resolution to include additional language to the Federal Recreation Trail grant application approved on January 4. The motion carried.

Retirement Ken Wolenetz

Fish offered **Resolution #9-2021** acknowledging the retirement and 18 years of service from Ken Wolenetz, which was seconded by Gustafson and was adopted.

Consent Agenda

The following items were approved under **Resolution #10-2021** by Rufer: Motion approving the minutes from the January 4, 2021 City Council meeting and the January 13, 2021 City Council work session. Motion approving the following licenses: Excavating Leitch Excavating; Mechanical Esser Plumbing & Heating, Plumbers Inc.; Minnesota Lawful Gambling Permit Fergus Falls Youth Baseball, Inc. for raffle on June 30, 2021 at Delagoon Park. **Resolution #11-2021** authorizing the Fire Department to apply for the Fiscal Year 2021 FEMA Assistance to Fire Fighters Grant for a new Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) station compressor and a mobile fill station. **Resolution #12-2021** initiating PI 5278, 5319, 7202, 8205 and 8218 and combining them into CP 5955, the Whitford/Bancroft area street and utility improvement project; ordering a preliminary engineering report and accepting a professional services report. **Resolution #13-2021** initiating PI 8184, a 775 L. F. of 20" water main extension on the 1200-1500 blocks, Douglas Avenue West to complete a loop of the city's water system. **Resolution #14-2021** approving the city's Pay Equity Report. The resolution was seconded by Gustafson and was adopted.

Dog Park Donation

A donation in the amount of \$7,969 was received for the dog park. Tami Revering and Chelsey Belihartz were thanked for their fundraising efforts to bring a dog park to fruition. The park is scheduled to be built this year. Kvamme offered **Resolution #15-2021** accepting a donation for the dog park and authorizing the corresponding budget adjustments, which was seconded by Thompson and was adopted.

Sales Tax Resolution

Last year the council adopted a resolution seeking the support of legislative approval for a sales tax to fund an aquatics center, a trails project and improvements at Delagoon Park. When COVID-19 shut down the legislative process, the sales tax bills died. The city is seeking authorization to submit the same three projects to the state legislature for their consideration this session. If the state approves the projects and associated tax, the city would be prepared to bring the issue forward to the voters at

the November 2022 General Election. If sales tax bills are not considered this session, the approval could still be sought in 2022. This sales tax would not go into effect until the library bonds have been paid in full. The library sales tax collections have exceeded the projections and it is estimated these bonds will be paid in full in 2022. Hicks asked about changes that may be necessary as we move into life after Covid. The council would still have the ability to alter the projects and their scope from consideration, even if approved by the legislature. Inflation was factored into the proposed projects, but costs will have to be refined. Rufer expressed his support for projects that will improve the quality of life for our residents and make Fergus Falls an attractive place to visit. Mayor Schierer addressed questions asked by a constituent earlier in the day stating these projects would not increase the current sales tax, which is 7.875% (Minnesota State Tax 6.875%, Otter Tail County one-half of one percent, City of Fergus Falls one-half of one percent) as it would not be applied until after the current sales tax has been fully paid. Rufer offered **Resolution #16-2021** supporting the authority to impose a local sales tax to fund the specific capital improvements providing regional benefit, to establish the duration of the tax and the revenue to be raised by the tax, and to authorize the city to issue bonds supported by the sales tax revenue, which was seconded by Fish and was adopted with Hicks voting in opposition.

Resolution of Accounts

Fish offered a resolution authorizing the payments and claims in the amount of \$3,020,156.03, which was seconded by Rufer and was adopted.

RTC Master Plan Update

As a part of the city's mitigation plan for Phase II of the RTC demolition project, SHPO required the city to conduct a master plan for the RTC. Representatives from Collaborative Design Group, Economic Development Services Inc. and Biko Associates provided an update on their reuse plan that has been done in conjunction with local members of a project management team. The committee decided to focus on two priorities: residential treatment for PTSD and brain trauma and housing. They concluded residential treatment was not as a viable reuse for the RTC since healthcare is moving away from physical infrastructure and retrofitting existing buildings to meet requirements is difficult. The city's recent market analysis on housing options shows a need for additional senior housing options that would free up existing housing stock for young families. Veteran housing was considered, but ruled out as national veteran supportive housing focuses on large urban markets. A physical assessment of the facility was made and it was their opinion the building is structurally sound. Roofs, especially in the west attached would need work due to water problems. The interior has been altered so it no longer has the historic integrity, but there are interesting interior features that could be capitalized upon. With the conclusion housing would be the best reuse of the property, they created preliminary design concepts for the building to potentially create apartments and condos. Another update will be provided later in this master plan process.

United Prairie Grant

United Prairie Foundation requested the city allow them to submit a grant application to the MN DNR for prairie restoration work on a number of city owned sites near each water tower and Kennedy Park. They are seeking a grant for \$30,000 and no cash match requirement. The city would provide in-kind donations of chemical application and periodic mowing. The United Prairie Foundation is working on restoring city owned sites that have been mutually determined good candidates to restore to a native prairie state. This would help reduce the amount of acreage the city is mowing. Gustafson offered **Resolution #17-2021** authorizing United Prairie Foundation to submit a grant application to

the MN DNR for prairie restoration work on city owned property, which was seconded by Arneson and was adopted.

Amendment to Resolution #8-2021

On January 4, 2021 the council adopted Resolution #8-2021 authorizing Pedal Fergus Falls to apply for a Federal Recreation Trail Grant for Ferber Park. Pedal Fergus Falls requested the resolution be amended to include language assuring the city will maintain the Ferber Mountain Bike Trail for a period of no less than 20 years. It was also clarified the grant includes the purchase of a trail grooming machine that will be used to maintain the trail. It would continue to be a public/private partnership as it is now. A motion and second were made by Rufer and Fish amending Resolution #8-2021 to reflect the additional requirement grant language and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 6:29 pm to a closed meeting to consider a real estate offer pursuant to MN Statute Sec 13d.05.

Lynne Olson