

Committee of the Whole Meeting  
June 2, 2021

The Fergus Falls City Council met as a Committee of the Whole on June 2, 2021 at 7:00 am in the City Council Chambers. Mayor Schierer called the meeting to order at 7:00 am and the following members were in attendance: Arneson, Gustafson, Hicks, Fish, Hagberg, Kvamme, and Thompson. Rufer was absent.

**PI 5337**

PI 5337 is the 2021 mill and overlay project, which encompasses Vernon Avenue: Union to Oak; Vasa: Union to Vine and Vine: Vernon to Alcott. The estimated project cost is \$209,000 and if bids are favorable, additional work would be done. The bids will be opened on June 29 and work would be completed by the fall. A motion and second were made by Fish and Gustafson to recommend the council accept the project plans and specifications for PI 5337 and authorize the advertising of bids for the project and the motion carried.

**PI 5338**

PI 5338 is the 2021 seal coat project, which encompasses Cascade: Hwy 210 bypass to Summit Avenue; Summit Avenue: Union to Friberg; Alcott Avenue: Union to Westside Drive. The estimated project cost is \$186,000 and the bids will be opened on June 29, with the work to be completed by the fall of 2021. A motion and second were made by Fish and Kvamme to recommend the council accept the project plans and specifications for PI 5338 and authorize the advertising of bids for the project and the motion carried.

**PI 9768**

Bolton & Menk Inc. has provided a professional services agreement for the Downtown Riverfront project in the amount of \$640,000. They would be responsible for the construction administration, observation, special inspection testing, and construction staking and architectural services. The fee could be lower if the Union Avenue resurfacing and pedestrian improvement project can be constructed at the same time. A motion and second were made by Hagberg and Arneson to recommend the council accept the Bolton & Menk Inc. professional services agreement in the amount of \$640,000 for construction administration and observation and the motion carried with Hicks voting in opposition. Hicks requested staff provide the council with a summary of how much the city has paid Bolton & Menk to date.

**Fire Department Cooperative Agreement**

The city's joint cooperative agreement for mutual aid fire services with the City of Moorhead is expiring. There has been a cooperative agreement with Moorhead for the past 15 years and the agreement has been reviewed by both departments who have consented to the addition of a fee schedule for emergency incidents with a duration of 6 or more hours. Fergus Falls has been requested to provide mutual aid to Moorhead three times over the past 15 years. This contract would only represent the agreement with Moorhead as the city has approximately 20 separate mutual aid agreements with surrounding towns and townships. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Thompson to recommend the council renew the Joint Powers Agreement for the use of emergency operations personnel and equipment with the City of Moorhead and the motion carried.

### **Equipment Purchase**

Unit 259 is a street sweeper that has been in service since 2010 and is scheduled to be replaced. It is been proposed to be replaced by a Tymco sweeper model 500X street sweeper. The purchase price of the new equipment is \$302,965 and Unit 259 has a trade-in allowance of \$55,000 for a total price of \$247,965 from the state contract. Funding for the sweeper would come out of the equipment fund. This purchase would exhaust the 2021 budget allowance and there are still equipment needs within the fleet this year. A budget adjustment from \$670,000 to \$750,000 is being requested. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Thompson to recommend the council declare Unit 259 as surplus equipment and authorize its disposal; to authorize the purchase of a Tymco sweeper Model 500X street sweeper from the equipment fund and authorize the budget increase to \$750,000 and the motion carried.

### **Library Annual Report**

Library Director Gail Hedstrom provided an annual update on the library's 2020 activities. Their staff had to adapt to a new way of conducting business through the pandemic and were able to offer curbside service and they removed the barrier of late fines. Their library visits were down, but they still offered 6,888 reference transactions, checked out nearly 177,000 print and digital items and nearly 5,300 people participated in person and virtual events. The library was an important resource during the pandemic to help provide internet connectivity to many residents for a variety of reasons. The library is planning for a busy summer and will conduct programming for children, teen and adults in different formats. They have added a vinyl record collection and patrons can check out passes to Minnesota state parks. They have 78 children signed up for summer reading tutor services and the library staff will be active at community events. Their Saturday hours will be expanding to 4 pm October-March. The library staff was commended for their flexibility to run the community food shelf during the pandemic when their regular volunteers were unable to operate the facility.

### **Contract between the City of Fergus Falls and Greater Fergus Falls**

Over the past few months council members Karoline Gustafson and Krista Hagberg have met with representatives of Greater Fergus Falls to discuss an agreement between the City and Greater Fergus Falls. During that timeframe, a transition occurred in the Greater Fergus Falls leadership. Gustafson said the agreement language states the city's appropriation of funds is not a donation or grant dollars, but funds dedicated to economic development services to the city. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) has been suggested to be a separate document to the agreement that will allow for mutual adjustments over time. Hicks felt the MOU should be completed prior to the council approving the contract, so the city is not signing an open ended document. He also believed payments should be made quarterly and there should be a stipulation Greater Fergus Falls needs to maintain an office in Fergus Falls. It was confirmed payments are being made monthly. Kvamme asked why a MOU would need to be a separate item and Gustafson replied an MOU would be more flexible as things change over time and it would ensure a good working relationship. Mayor Schierer felt this has become more complicated as the city is giving \$50,000 to leverage against community dollars to help spur economic development within the city. He felt it would show a lack of trust if the city tried micromanaging their budget and professional expertise. A motion and second were made by Gustafson and Hagberg to recommend the council discuss the agreement further at the June 7 meeting.

### **RTC Phase II Bonding Dollars**

During the 2018 Minnesota State legislative session, the city was awarded \$3.5 million for use on the RTC campus. The approved bonding language was read and states the funds must be used by

December 31, 2022 and they cannot be used to demolish the central tower or the U shaped building connected to the central tower. The city has expended \$1,778,558.92 of the bonding dollars leaving a balance of \$1,721,441.08. All of the buildings behind the complex, with the exception of a storage shed and the Memorial building have already been removed. Kvamme spoke about the RTC Master Plan Committee's work and their goal to increase awareness for the redevelopment and preservation of the RTC. The consultant is about to release their 172 page report and has concluded the building is structurally sound and a housing project is the most viable reuse option. The committee prepared a handout of the possible redevelopment options to SummerFest attendees as the event will take place on the RTC grounds. The consultants were recently made aware of the remaining \$1.7 million and they have come up with a list of recommendations on how to expend the funds. The list includes roofing and flashing repairs, dehumidification, life safety and building security issues, mold abatement, debris removal, and tuck pointing. The final report is due in July and it was suggested the council hold a work session to determine how the city should proceed prior to the December 31, 2022 deadline. If the city proceeds with spending these bonding dollars, they would not have to be run through the city's Capital Improvement Plan process. City Administrator Andrew Bremseth said time will be of the essence, but many of the suggested projects could be done inside the building, which extends the construction season. The council's current course of action is to demolish the structure, and they are not obligated to use these funds. The council could return the money, get the language amended to allow more demolition or seek additional funding.

Arneson said housing redevelopment projects have not been successful in the past due to their reliance on housing tax credits and the stringent process used to allocate those funds. Thompson felt if the city were to expend any funds, they would be best used to provide external security due to the extensive damage caused by vandalism over the years. He was concerned with the city's liability of someone getting serious harmed in the building. Thompson asked if the city's exposure would be if the paid for roof repairs and a storm damaged the work. Bill Sonmor said the city has liability, but not property insurance on the RTC, as this is a vacant building the city would not rebuild the structure if it were damaged. A council work session will be set up to discuss this matter further after the master plan has been completed.

The meeting adjourned at 7:51 am

*Lynne Olson*