

Committee of the Whole
August 31, 2022

The Fergus Falls City Council met as a Committee of the Whole on August 31, 2022, at 7:00 am in the City Council Chambers. Mayor Schierer called the meeting to order, and the following council members were in attendance: Rufer, Thompson, Arneson, Gustafson, Hicks, Fish, Hagberg and Kvamme.

Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities

Elizabeth Wefel of the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities provided an update on their organization's goals and legislative lobbying efforts. The Coalition focuses on LGA/property taxes, economic development, annexation and land use, transportation, environment and energy, labor, and employment. The 2022 legislative session started with potential, including a \$9.3 billion surplus, but challenges including the pandemic and redistricting caused negotiations to fall apart resulting in the disappointment of neither the House nor Senate producing a bonding bill. Wefel spoke about the plans for the next session and encouraged interested elected officials to sign up for the Coalition's committees and upcoming events.

Surplus IT Equipment

The city's IT department has two printers and 17 desktop computers they would like to declare as surplus equipment. The hard drives on the equipment have been erased and reset and will be sold on the GovDeals.com site. Hicks asked staff to provide a summary of the city equipment sold on the auction site. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Fish to recommend the council declare the computers and printers as surplus equipment and authorize its disposal and the motion carried.

Fee Schedule

The following changes were proposed to the 2023 fee schedule:

- Water reconnection fee increase from \$40 to \$50
- After hours reconnection fee increases from \$75 plus \$40 fee to \$100 plus \$50 fee
- Addition of a \$100 annual food truck permit and \$50 for a short term (three day) permit
- Addition of City Council/Mayor filing fee \$5
- Special event street closure \$250
- Fire personnel rate increase from \$15 to \$20
- Removal of fire lock box fee as they are now sold through a third-party vendor
- GIS services increasing between \$2.50 and \$5 each
- Kids Kamp (2-week session) increasing from \$175 to \$185 per session per child
- Youth sport sponsorships increasing from \$275 to \$285
- Addition of police services for building moves and traffic control
- Addition of police community room rental fee \$100 per event
- Standard rental registration fees increasing \$5 each

Finance Director Bill Sonmor explained most of the changes are proposed to help the city cover their costs. Hicks asked the \$250 special event street closure fee be reconsidered as it would be cost prohibitive for many events, especially in addition to the city services such as barricades, picnic tables and refuse containers that are requested. Staff's goal is to bring conversation to these requests as the city does not have a mechanism to say no to the numerous requests to close streets. When staff must

mark the streets, tow vehicles, and reroute emergency meetings, it is taking away resources from other duties. Rufer agreed staff time could be better spent if more events occurred at the riverfront pavilion rather than closing streets. He preferred putting the rental costs on those requesting the closures rather than the taxpayers. Staff is willing to relook at this fee and bring back a recommendation later. There will also be additional study of the fees being charged for the community arena.

PI 5327 Broadway Avenue Project

The city is planning a street improvement project along the nearly one mile stretch of Broadway: Fir to Lincoln Avenue as a part of the State Transportation Improvement Project (STIP) in 2023. The scope of work includes mill and overlay, base patching, and ADA improvements, but no water or sewer projects. The material in the street milling will be ground and reused for street improvement projects. The estimated project cost is \$1,200,000 and 80% of the cost would be covered by federal funds while the other 20% would be covered by the state's share. The state's share would cover the construction, engineering design and contract administration costs. MnDOT has indicated there may be an additional \$500,000-\$600,000 in federal dollars available for this program so staff is reviewing additional streets to include if the additional funds are secured. This project would be in addition to the Union Avenue street improvement project which was bid earlier this year and rejected when the bids far exceeded the cost estimates. The Union Avenue project will be rebid this fall or early spring. A motion and second were made by Gustafson and Thompson to recommend the council initiate PI 5327, the Broadway Avenue resurfacing project and accept Interstate Engineering's professional services agreement for final design and construction administration in the amount of \$100,000 and the motion carried.

PI 9349 Airport Runway Project

On April 4, 2022, the council awarded the contract for PI 9349, the airport runway, taxiway, and apron crack fill/joint repairs to National Sealant & Concrete Inc. in the amount of \$320,918 contingent upon the receipt of a State/Federal Grant Agreement. The city has now received this agreement and council action is required to accept the offer and complete the process. The estimated project cost is \$386,100 of which 90% would be federally funded, 5% funded by the state and a 5% local contribution that amounts of \$30,045. There are sufficient funds to proceed with the project. The contractor has agreed to honor the pricing if the project is postponed until 2023. A motion and second were made by Fish and Hagberg to recommend the council accept the State/Federal grant agreement for PI 9349 and the motion carried.

PI 9771 Closed Landfill

The MPCA requested the installation of two additional nested monitoring wells for PI 9771, the Fergus Falls Closed Landfill. The new wells would provide additional sampling points from the upper and lower aquifers to confirm contamination has not expanded from its current points. Because the two wells are on private property, the city has secured a permanent ingress/egress access for installation and future sampling. Burns Appraisal Services has recommended compensation of \$3,500 be provided to the property owner. Property owner Amy Shol has agreed to the easement and amount of compensation. The cost of the compensation, City Attorney, staff time and recording fees will be reimbursed through the city's Post Closure Assurance Fund which the MPCA has approved. A motion and second were made by Fish and Gustafson to authorize the permanent ingress/egress easement between the City and Amy Shol and to compensate Ms. Shol for the easement in the amount of \$3,500 and the motion carried.

Walking Signage

Wayne Hurley requested authorization to place temporary signs advising the distance and estimated time to walk or bike to various points throughout the city. The signs would be paid through a grant and the city's only expense would be staff time to coordinate the installation of the signs. They are looking for an additional grant source to pay for permanent signage. Kvamme suggested an ending date for the temporary signage to be removed and an assurance the signage is maintained. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Gustafson to recommend the council authorize the placement of temporary walking signage and the motion carried.

Hicks left the meeting at 8:00 am

Proposed Highway/Trail Project

Rich Wentzel, a resident of rural Underwood has proposed the city construct a new roadway and trail along the east side of town to connect Hwy 210 and 29 to County Highway 1 near the Water Plant Road. This area was identified as a possible roadway in the Hoot Lake study several years ago and he feels this is the time for the city to consider building the roadway after the demolition of the Hoot Lake Power Plant. He encouraged the council to identify a roadway, trail, and potential funding sources. City Administrator Andrew Bremseth said this would be a substantial project with a substantial cost. He referenced the 50+ years of planning it took along with the right allocation of federal funds to construct the Tower Road Bridge. This proposed roadway would require significant resources from the city to identify easements, secure the land, determine cooperative agreements with other agencies and address wetland conservation issues. If the council believes the project has merit, they could direct staff to invest time and resources into providing a rough estimate of the project cost. The project would be placed in the city's Capital Improvement Plan, which is not actively funded. Rufer agreed this is a good project and trail connection but was concerned about the cost of constructing a trail that would deliberately bypass the city's business district. He encouraged Mr. Wentzel to gather support for the project as it would increase the likelihood of the project's success. He then left the meeting at 8:10 am. Kvamme and Fish spoke in favor of gathering information to put this project on the city's CIP and said projects that would be planned and ready would likely be more favorable to receive federal funding if it becomes available. Arneson and Gustafson felt it made sense to put this project on the city's CIP. Thompson was not in favor of rerouting traffic outside of the business districts and felt staff should be focusing their time and efforts on the city's existing street needs before planning new roads. Finance Director Bill Sonmor said if the council proceeds with direction to place this project on the city's CIP, it would not be included in the 2023 budget. A motion and second were made by Kvamme and Arneson to direct staff to start compiling cost estimates for a proposed project and place it on the city's Capital Improvement Plan and the motion carried 5-1 with Thompson voting in opposition.

The meeting adjourned at 8:17 am

Lynne Olson