

Committee of the Whole  
February 1, 2023

The Fergus Falls City Council held a Committee of the Whole meeting on Wednesday February 1, 2023 at 7:00 am in the City Council Chambers. Mayor Schierer called the meeting to order and the following council members were in attendance: Thompson, Hicks, Fish, Job, Kvamme, and Kremeier. Rachels and Rufer were absent.

**Community Festivals**

The city annually declares which events are community festivals, which authorizes the city to waive some of the labor and equipment fees. The criteria to meet the definition of a community festival says the activity benefits the community as a whole; the activity directly relates to functions of a government and the activity does not have as its primary objective, the benefit of a private interest. The intent of the language is meant to be fairly restrictive and although there are many good causes and organizations holding events, the city is legally bound on their ability to publicly spend funds. In the past the city has declared SummerFest, Over the River Festival and Shop, Move and Groove as community festivals and the council was asked if they would like to continue citing these events as community festivals. Hicks felt all were justified and offered a motion the council recommend naming these three as the 2023 community festivals, which was seconded by Fish and was adopted.

**Trail Equipment Grant**

The city has been partnering with the Nordic Ski Association to groom and maintain cross country ski trails in Roosevelt Park and Kirkbride Park. The grooming has been done with equipment borrowed by the DNR and has limitations. The ski association has asked the city for authorization to submit a \$21,850 grant to the MN DNR for two “Yellowstone Ginzu groomers”. The Ottertail Nordic Ski Association has agreed to cover the 25% required matching funds (\$5,462.50). If successfully awarded, the groomers would become part of the city’s fleet and any preventive maintenance/repairs would be borne by the equipment fund for the duration of the groomer’s useful life. Proposed projects in these parks may alter the paths in the future, but multiple trails would be created and maintained. A motion and second were made by Fish and Thompson to recommend the council authorize the submission of a grant for two cross country ski trail groomers and the motion carried.

**Fire Department Equipment Grant**

The Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) station compressor and mobile fill station does not have the capacity to provide enough psi to fill the department’s storage tanks and needs replacement. The Fire Department is seeking authorization to replace this equipment as well as other rescue equipment including a supplied air system, confined space air monitoring, entry/rescue equipment and communication headsets for apparatus and on scene communications. The total amount of the grant is \$134,000 and requires a 5% local match that would be paid if successful from the capital funds within the Fire Department budget. A motion and second were made by Kvamme and Hicks to recommend the council authorize the Fire Department to apply for the Fiscal Year 2022 AFG grant for the department’s equipment needs and the motion carried.

**Fire Relief Association Service Benefits**

Luke Draxten, representing the Fire Relief Association Board of Trustees recommended an increase in service benefits from \$5,850 per year of active service to \$5,900 per year effective March 1, 2023. The Fire Relief Association Special Fund is a self-supporting fund and the \$50 per year increase falls

within the range established by state statutes. Despite the volatility in the market, the Board has sufficient funds to cover the request. A motion and second were made by Fish and Thompson to recommend the council approve an increase in service benefits for retiring paid on call firefighters and the motion carried.

### **Strategic Planning**

Klara Beck reviewed the process employed in the city's strategic planning process. Efforts began in October of 2021 when a joint work session between the City Council and Port Authority was convened to develop a common vision for an economic development policy and defining the parameters used when offering various city financial incentives. A survey was sent to each of these members as well as members of Business Development for Fergus Falls, Greater Fergus Falls and city department heads. The overarching theme was growth within the community and seven priorities were identified: Increasing the number of employees, increasing the number of businesses, increasing the workforce living and working in Fergus Falls, increasing the number of new businesses formed (not relocations), reducing the number/percent of business closures, improving diversity in the economy with the types of businesses, full-time jobs with benefits and diversified business owners and increasing the taxes collected (sales, income and property). Participants were asked to prioritize strategies to allow the measurement of growth and three priorities were identified: increasing the taxes collected, increasing the number of businesses and increasing the number of employees. The group also discussed recognizing the identify and focusing on the strengths of the community. The discussion led to a follow-up session in December of 2021 to develop an economic development policy for the city and provide the strategic framework to develop a comprehensive plan for the city that aligns with the community's values and goals.

Efforts turned to engaging the community into the strategic planning process. Four areas to focus on were land use, infrastructure, community and social, and economic development. A committee was formed to develop an RFQ for a consultant to help steer the community through these conversations and WSB was chosen in April of 2022 and the \$75,000 earmarked for a comprehensive plan were used for this work. The strategic planning process kicked off in May of 2021 when names of community members were submitted to serve on the four focus areas. Invites were extended to a diversified group of participants. Committee meetings showed the need to narrow the focus even further and the four groups were redesigned into two groups: infrastructure merged with the community and social development while economic development and land use were combined. These committees met three times and additional public input was sought at two sessions held in conjunction with community events. Online options were made available to receive public input as well. The final plan has been developed with priorities highlighted in the plan. Community & Social Development: communications, overall community health and public safety, schools and childcare challenges. Infrastructure: communication/information and the creation of destination places. Economic Development: available tools and a focus on downtown. Land Use: residential development. The strategic plan is designed to be fluid to meet the community's needs and challenges over the next 5 years and staff plan to hold a work session with the council to review the city's priorities annually. The plan will help staff develop a policy to decide when the city's various economic development tools should be employed and determine which kinds of development the city is interested in subsidizing. Staff will be seeking council approval of this plan on Monday night. The meeting adjourned at 7:33 am.

*Lynne Olson*