

Committee of the Whole Meeting
March 29, 2023

The Fergus Falls City Council held a Committee of the Whole meeting on Wednesday March 29, 2023 at 7:00 am in the City Council Chambers. Mayor Schierer called the meeting to order and council members in attendance were Job, Kvamme, Rufer, Kremeier, Rachels and Fish. Thompson and Hicks were absent.

Neighborhood Impact Program

Gate City Bank presented a symbolic check to kick off their Neighborhood Impact Program. The program provides homeowners with loans for home improvement projects that improve the housing stock and neighborhoods within the community.

Community Service Officers and Tuition Reimbursement Program

Police Chief Kile Bergren spoke about the difficulties in recruiting police officers. He is seeking authorization to hire up to four Community Service Officers (CSO's) for this summer. The candidates in this role will be local students pursuing a career in law enforcement. The department will be able to observe their abilities and potential for future employment after completing their degree. The cost to hire the CSO's would be made up from attrition and a retirement within the department this year. A motion and second were made by Fish and Rufer to recommend the council approve the hiring of up to four part-time/temporary community service officers and the motion carried.

Bergren advocated the council include part-time or temporary Community Service Officers in the city's tuition reimbursement program as a part of the recruiting process. If an officer is hired and agrees to provide a certain number of years of service to the Fergus Falls Police Department, they can be reimbursed for a portion of their tuition expenses. A motion and second were made by Kremeier and Rachels to recommend the council support the Pathways to Policing and amendment to the city's tuition reimbursement policy and the motion carried.

Police Wellness Plan and Policy

The League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust has been instrumental in developing a wellness plan to support public safety officers. The plan will emphasize officer wellness through physical and mental health, financial and spiritual well-being and bring the city into compliance with pending legislation pertaining to public safety officer health. Bergren requested the ability to change this living document as needed as it will require amendments. A motion and second were offered by Kvamme and Fish to recommend the council approve the Public Safety Officer Wellness Plan and Policy and the motion carried.

Surplus Property

A motion and second were made by Rufer and Rachels to recommend the council declare three squad cars and miscellaneous office chairs as surplus equipment and authorize their disposal or trade-in value and the motion carried. Rufer asked Chief Bergren about his thoughts on switching to electric vehicles in the future and encouraged moving in that direction when the technology evolves for uses of police squad cars.

Surface Water Assessment

Dan Disrud of the Department of Health presented information on the source water assessment of public water systems. The department is working with the city and numerous state and local partners to create a Surface Water Intake Protection Plan (SWIPP). The study will determine the activities undertaken to protect the surface water derived sources for drinking water for the city. Disrud commented on the priority areas, emergency procedures to keep water safe and long-term health impacts of keeping pollution out of the drinking water. Once the plan is implemented, state and federal grants may be available for the city to access. Kvamme asked questions about the various project partnerships and felt the language pertaining to increasing temperatures in the watershed be labeled differently. Rufer offered a counterpoint to expect more extreme weather patterns with climate change and to plan for these changes accordingly. A motion and second were made by Rufer and Kvamme to recommend the council adopt the updated Source Water Assessment plan and the motion carried.

Oak Grove Cemetery

The Oak Grove Cemetery Board of Trustees has been working with the city regarding expanding their cemetery footprint. They have officially requested the city gift them five acres of land north of their current location as they are running out of plots. The cemetery has agreed to take on the costs of the development and there would be no cost to the city. They have also offered a land swap, but the land they are willing to give up has no value to the city. Council members commented on the long term needs of this historic non-denominational cemetery and the long-term partnership with the city. A motion and second were made by Rufer and Fish to recommend the council consider gifting five acres of city owned land to Oak Grove Cemetery and the motion carried.

Other Business

City Administrator Andrew Bremseth said Council Member Rufer is requesting the council consider amending the City Code to allow contractors to begin working prior to the current start time of 9 am. The proposed amendment will be placed on the April 12 Committee of the Whole meeting agenda.

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 am

Lynne Olson