

Committee of the Whole Meeting
August 16, 2023

The Fergus Falls City Council met as a Committee of the Whole on August 16, 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: Kvamme, Rufer, Kremeier, Rachels, Hicks, Fish and Job. Thompson was absent.

PI 9502, Demolition of Old Wastewater Treatment Plant

Plans and specifications are complete for PI 9502, the demolition of the old wastewater treatment plant. In November of 2022, the council accepted Otter Tail Power's Letter of Intent to acquire city owned property in this area to construct a new substation for their express feeder program. The project has been divided into two phases. Phase I demolition work covers the property required by the utility company at an estimated cost of \$582,590. Phase II would finish the demolition of the abandoned site for an estimated cost of \$614,770. Funding for the work would come from the Sanitary Sewer Enterprise Fund. A motion and second were made by Rachels and Hicks to recommend the council accept the project plans and specifications and authorize the advertising of bids and the motion carried.

PI 5361, Active Transportation Infrastructure Program

In October of 2022 the council authorized submitting a letter of intent to the Minnesota State Active Transportation Infrastructure Program and the application was denied. MnDOT recently notified the city they were allocating additional funding to the program and the city was awarded \$391,960. To receive the grant funds, the city must provide \$71,250 and a funding source has not yet been identified. Staff are reaching out to the Fergus Falls School District to participate in the funding as the proposed projects would address safety concerns around the schools. Staff were asked to contact MnDOT to see if they could only use a portion of the funds and lower the city's cost. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Fish to recommend the council initiate Public Improvement 5361 and authorize requesting MnDOT prepare the final Active Transportation Grant Agreement and the motion carried.

HRA Levy

Mikel Olson of the HRA requested authorization to levy a tax of 0.0185% of the estimated taxable market value within the city for 2024. He reviewed the need for the funds, the programs they administer that link residents with community services, provide affordable housing, and rehabilitate homes and rental properties. The 6,425 parcels in Fergus Falls are worth an estimated \$1,315,549,500 and the levy would provide \$240,000 of operational funding to the HRA. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Kvamme to recommend the council approve the HRA levy request of 0.0185% of the estimated taxable market value within the City of Fergus Falls and the motion carried.

Goats Allowed for Vegetation Purposes

Karen Terry explained the benefits and process of using goats to remove weeds, poison ivy and invasive species such as buckthorn. She asked the city to consider an ordinance allowing the temporary use of goats and electrified fences to remove unwanted vegetation. The animals would not be allowed to roam, kept as pets or be used in densely populated neighborhoods. The fence must be electrified to contain the goats and protect them from predators. It was suggested a second non-electrified fence and signage should be installed to deter people from getting too close to the animals. Tom Kingston, a resident of Pine Circle described his sloped, rugged, and overgrown yard and said goats would provide a safe solution to controlling the excessive vegetation. The council discussed

several natural parks or city owned property that could benefit from the use of goats. City ordinances do not allow goats in areas other than R-A and it was suggested adjacent property owners must provide written consent to the use of goats by their neighbors and the owner would carry insurance on the animals. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Kvamme to recommend the council direct staff to research how other cities allow goats for this purpose and to bring a proposed ordinance for the council to consider and the motion carried.

Vacant Property Registration

In 2009 the City Attorney drafted an ordinance establishing a vacant building registration, but the ordinance was not adopted. There is a growing number of vacant properties that have come into disrepair, and it puts an excessive demand on limited city resources to take on the role as their property manager, ensure they are safe and not a blight on the neighborhood. The owners of the vacant residential and commercial properties would be asked to register their properties with the city, like the rental registration process, provide contact information, their plans to maintain the property and provide an estimate of how long the property will be vacant. Council members questioned what incentive there is for property owners to pay a fee to register their property and is there a penalty to enforce the ordinance. The intent is to incentivize property owners to do something with the property sooner than later. The penalty for non-compliance would be citing the property owner with a misdemeanor and sending the issue through the court system. A motion and second were made by Rachels and Job to recommend the council direct staff to work with the City Attorney to establish a vacant building registration and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 am

Lynne Olson