

Committee of the Whole Meeting
November 15, 2023

The Fergus Falls City Council met as a Committee of the Whole on November 15, 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: Fish, Job, Kvamme, Rufer, Kremeier, Thompson, Rachels and Hicks.

Driveway Easement

The original driveway for the home located at 3809 Pebble Shores Drive had to be abandoned and moved due to high water issues after the home was built. The new driveway crosses city property which creates the need for an ingress/egress easement agreement. A motion and second were made by Fish and Hicks to recommend the council authorize the Mayor and City Administrator to execute the easement agreement and the motion carried.

Community Energy Transition Grant

On November 6, 2023, the City Council authorized submitting a Community Energy Transition Grant focused on workforce housing. One component of the grant is holding a public meeting allowing public input about the project, grant application, proposed use of the grant funds and how it relates to the community's transition planning. The city's grant application is acquiring the former lumber site or "Checkers building" for workforce housing. The city would then partner with a developer to create multi-family housing opportunities on this site. The Letter of Intent with the property owner was signed on November 14. This letter, along with a Purchase Agreement outlines the standards of the owner to clean up the property so that when the city takes ownership, it meets all requirements. Large local employers have indicated their desire to add to their workforce and providing housing for the new workers is their biggest challenge, especially in a price range that is affordable to young working families. This proposed housing project would not only address these workforce challenges, but the construction would add immediate tax base growth to help offset the loss of the power plant closure. A proposed housing project was identified and adopted in both the Downtown Riverfront Master Plan and Strategic Plan. Letters of support from local employers including Vector Windows, Otter Tail County, Lake Region Healthcare, the Fergus Falls School District, Greater Fergus Falls, the Fergus Falls HRA, Fergus Falls Chamber of Commerce, Green Plains Ethanol Plant and Pioneer Care have been secured. The public comment period was opened.

Jeff Ackerson, President, and CEO of Vector Windows said their business relies on attracting workers and there is a shortage of housing options within the City of Fergus Falls. Workers often go to other communities within the county where housing options are more readily available. The proposed housing complexes would add to our local tax base, and he wanted to express not only his written, but his verbal support for the project.

Kvamme asked if the city had any matching fund obligations for this grant. City Administrator Andrew Bremseth said applications with matching funds may receive higher consideration for the funds, but this project has been a part of the city's planning process for several years and there have been considerable investments made to support this project and redevelopment along the river. If the city were unsuccessful in obtaining the grant this year, there will be another grant cycle in 2024.

Local Road Improvement Program Grant

On January 17, 2023, the city entered into an agreement with Otter Tail County to construct a roundabout at the intersection of Fir and Friberg Avenue. Currently the city plans to use their municipal state aid funds to pay for their portion of the project. MnDOT has a Local Roads Improvement Program Grant (LRIP) which can offset a portion of the city's share of the actual capital construction costs. If the city were successful in obtaining the LRIP funds, the municipal state aid funds could be used for other local street improvements. A motion and second were made by Rufer and Rachels to recommend the council provide a resolution of support for the Local Road Improvement Program grant and authorizing the submission of the grant application to MnDOT and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 am

Lynne Olson