

Committee of the Whole Minutes  
March 27, 2024

The Fergus Falls City Council held a Committee of the Whole meeting on March 27, 2024, at 7:00 am in the City Council Chambers. Council members in attendance were Job, Kvamme, Rufer, Thompson, Rachels, and Hicks. Kremeier and Fish were absent.

**City Logo**

In September of 2023 the council adopted the city's communications plan which included a logo refresh. The proposed new city logo was designed with the input of three external and two internal focus groups and reflects the forward motion, reliability, and natural aspects of the community. If approved, the logo would be implemented into the city's print and digital communications and those costs have been budgeted for 2024. The new logo would gradually be added to signage, vehicles and the water tower as time and budget allows. A motion and second were made by Kvamme and Rufer to recommend the council approve the new city logo and the motion carried.

**Open Forum Policy**

At the March 18 meeting the council directed staff to amend the city's open forum policy. City Administrator Andrew Bremseth reviewed the changes the council requested including holding the open forum prior to the council meetings at 5:15 pm; not televising, broadcasting, or streaming the comments; asking participants to provide the spelling of their name and contact information for the official record and responses. If the council requests a response be provided staff will conduct the necessary research and the mayor will give a recap at a future council meeting. A written summary of the speaker and their subject matter will be included in the city's records, but not a part of the official minutes. Holding the open forum prior to the council meeting will ensure a speaker doesn't come to the open forum to comment on a subject on the agenda that staff and the council have not yet discussed. Bremseth did not feel the open forum should be used for the public to direct staff work and said it is meant as a time for public communication, not as a political platform. If a topic needs to be addressed immediately by the council, it can be added to that evening's agenda by unanimous consent of the council. A motion and second were by Rufer and Kvamme to recommend the council approve the revised open forum policy language as proposed.

Rufer believes there have been residents who have taken advantage of their time on camera to pursue their own agenda and spread misinformation. He felt it was reasonable to ask people to follow a basic set of rules that will promote positive conversations with the council. Kvamme suggested several edits including the notation that the open forum will also not be recorded. Hicks suggested the open forum is televised and recorded and felt it is the council's role to hold speakers accountable to following the rules of the policy. Staff voiced concerns about the time involved in rebooting the city's technology between recordings. Schierer agrees with the need for transparency and acknowledged several individuals have taken advantage of the city's open forum to address the council in a manner that doesn't lead to productive conversations. The motion to recommend the council approve the open forum policy as presented by staff was called to a vote and was adopted.

**Pathways to Policing Grant**

The Fergus Falls Police Department successfully applied for a \$16,380 grant administered by the Office of Justice Programs to help fill police officer positions in the form of tuition and salaries for non-traditional applicants. The grant requires a 50% match which the department plans to cover with

funds retained from two open positions not currently filled. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Rachels to recommend the council authorize the city to enter into this agreement and the motion carried.

### **Council Cannabis Committee**

The Council Cannabis Committee has met three times to plan how the city will handle the state's legalization of marijuana. Police Chief Kile Bergren explained the city can regulate the number of licenses given and the allowed zoning. The committee agrees mezzo, and micro retail operations should be conducted in industrial zones. They have had extensive conversations about allowing marijuana sales in the downtown area or B-3 zone. The state's legislation allows cities to impose a setback of up 500 feet from parks and treatment facilities and 1000 feet from schools. The splash pad is considered a park, and its downtown location would significantly limit businesses from selling cannabis products in the city's downtown area. Bergren encouraged the council to focus on a recommendation for the downtown business zone noting the city needs clear laws they can enforce. The council was asked to consider if they want to move forward with the 500-foot setback, something lower or have no setback requirements at all.

Rachels was not in favor of allowing marijuana businesses in the main business district and advocated the 500' setback be enforced downtown. Mayor Schierer does not want to do anything that would create law enforcement or public safety issues but didn't feel we can prevent stores from selling marijuana downtown as liquor sales are already allowed within a 500-foot radius of a park. He spoke about the stigmas of marijuana usage and reminded the council that cannabis is now a legal substance to use and soon the sales of these products will also be legal.

Kvamme agreed the city's reach only extends to registration and zoning and he spoke against allowing cannabis sales in residential areas, including downtown. He felt these businesses should only be conducted in a stand-alone structure and should follow the same zoning regulations as listed for adult use businesses. Kvamme suggested the Planning Commission take up the downtown zoning question and hold a public hearing for community input that could be shared with the council. Rufer asked why the city had to impose setbacks and did not feel marijuana sales should be more regulated than alcohol sales citing restaurants located downtown can serve alcoholic beverages within 500 feet of a park. He said the signage at these establishments isn't intrusive and sales are regulated to patrons 21 years of age or older. Kvamme felt the use of alcohol was something that can be kept to the individual using the product whereas the smoke from marijuana products will disturb others. Thompson did not want alcohol and marijuana treated in the same manner and expressed his opinion people are using cannabis with the intention to impair themselves. Bergren acknowledged the passion around this issue and asked the council to focus on the issues the city can control such as the number of businesses being allowed a license and the zoning for these businesses. The city needs to set up parameters that can be loosened with time and experience. The Council Cannabis Committee will work with the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing and will continue other discussions such as the building codes that will need to be enforced.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 am

*Lynne Olson*