

Committee of the Whole Meeting  
May 29, 2024

The Fergus Falls City Council met as a Committee of the Whole on May 29, 2024, at 7:00 am in the City Council Chambers. Mayor Schierer called the meeting to order, and the following council members were in attendance: Rachels, Hicks, Fish, Job, Kvamme and Kremeier. Rufer was absent.

**Prairie Wetlands Learning Center Memorandum of Understanding**

The City of Fergus Falls and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) entered a partnership in 1996 for the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC) as the city owns the building and land the PWLC sits on. The current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) expires on June 30, 2024, and it was recommended to extend it to June 30, 2029. An amendment was proposed to change the language from the annual amount payable to the city of \$8,500 to cover insurance costs to read the USFWS will cover actual annual costs. Neil Powers, Project Leader for the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District addressed the staffing concerns and their efforts to fill two positions by the start of the school year. Since the pandemic, the center has been open one day a week with their priority focused on the Prairie Science classes. As staff are hired, their programming and guided services will expand. Until then, the trails remain open and available for the public to use as self-guided tours. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Rachels to recommend the council extending the Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Fergus Falls and the US Fish and Wildlife Service for the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center and the motion carried.

**Street Closures Policy**

Due to an influx of requests, staff developed a draft policy for businesses requesting a street closure that impacts other business owners. Without a policy, staff don't have the criteria to approve or deny the request and they are trying to balance support for community events while not inconveniencing traffic in major thoroughfares of the city. The council was consulted for their thoughts on notifying other affected businesses with street closures, if residents living in the downtown area must also be notified of a street closure and does the council want to consider the street closure requests. Mayor Schierer felt if a business is requesting such a closure, they should be required to notify any impacted businesses and property owners, but not necessarily those living downtown. Fish did not feel a policy was necessary. Job asked how much time is needed to make a request in advance and provide notification. Kvamme was concerned the notification process will be cumbersome and questioned how a street closure will be advertised to the rest of the community. Hicks did not feel it was necessary to fix something that is not broken and businesses requesting closures are doing a good job of notifying their neighbors. Staff will take the council's conversation into consideration and bring a new draft policy at a future meeting.

**West Central Initiative**

Rebecca Petersen, Camille Pearson Walz and Kurt Mortensen spoke on behalf of West Central Initiative on the grants and loan programs the organization provides to their service area. Their Start A Ripple campaign is seeking to raise \$1 million by June 30<sup>th</sup> to focus on the areas of early childhood, community development, climate resilience and rural leadership development.

**Fergus Falls Liquor Stores and Bigwood Event Center Update**

Brandon Currie manages the city's two municipal stores and the Bigwood Event Center. He complimented the Bigwood Event Coordinator Brooke Solheim for the great job she is doing and

noted they are open for business events, gatherings, and weddings. Their focus at the liquor stores is safety and responsibility with their products. Sales were up 2.42% last year and their gross margin was up 1% while operating expenses were down \$27,000 from the previous year. In 2023 the taxes levied would have been 9% higher without transfers from the liquor stores to the General Fund. In recent years \$400,000 was transferred from liquor store profits for the downtown riverfront project and \$200,000 for Dr. Allen Magnusson Park. Currie spoke about their aging point of sale system and shared various renderings to possibly update the exterior of the downtown store to increase the curb appeal. The city is financially preparing for these future expenses.

### **Police Squad As Surplus Property**

A motion and second were made by Fish and Rachels to recommend the council declare Unit 2093, a 2020 Ford Police Interceptor as surplus equipment and the proceeds be used to purchase a new vehicle and the motion carried.

### **Police Radio Grant**

The Police Department is seeking authorization to apply for the 2024-2026 ARMER Equipment Grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety to replace the 8 portable radios the department has yet to upgrade. If successfully awarded, the grant would cover \$39,469.40 of the total cost of \$43,855.20. The 5% local match of \$4,385.70 would come from the emergency management equipment budget. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Rachels to recommend the council authorize the submission of an equipment grant to replace police radios and the motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:59 am

*Lynne Olson*