

City Council Minutes
September 3, 2024

The Fergus Falls City Council held a regular meeting on Tuesday September 3, 2024, at 5:30 pm in the City Council Chambers. Pastor Tim Molter gave the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Mayor Schierer called the meeting to order at 5:33 pm and the following council members were in attendance: Kremeier, Rachels, Hicks, Job, Kvamme, Rufer. Fish was absent.

Open Forum

Duane Cookman thanked the city for their work on the Stanton Avenue street improvement project.

Approval of Agenda

A motion and second were made by Hicks and Rachels approving tonight's agenda with the removal of two items from the consent agenda and a request to respond to an August 19th open forum comment under old business and the motion carried.

Franchise Agreement Public Hearing/Ordinance 61

The city's franchise agreement with Spectrum Mid-America (Charter Communications) will expire in 2026 and they have initiated the renewal process. Extending the franchise agreement for an additional ten years requires a public hearing that was opened at 5:35 pm. The hearing was closed when no one appeared. Ordinance 61, Eighth Series, Franchise Agreement with Spectrum Mid-America was adopted by a roll call vote.

Consent Agenda

The following items were approved under **Resolution #163-2024** by Hicks: Motion approving the minutes from the August 19, 2024, City Council meeting and the August 28, 2024, Committee of the Whole meeting. Motion approving the following licenses: Paving/Sidewalk Derosier Masonry; Excavator Outdoor Renovations Landscape & Nursery; Minnesota Lawful Gambling Fergus Falls Sertoma Club for BINGO and raffles at the Eagles Aerie 2339 on February 2, 2025. **Resolution #164-2024** approving the purchase of a refuse truck. **Resolution #165-2024** accepting a \$5,000 Fire Assistance Grant for the Fire Department. **Resolution #166-2024** approving a Conditional Use Permit for a detached accessory building at 620 Broken Down Dam. The resolution was seconded by Rachels and was adopted.

After a question about the compactor Rufer offered **Resolution #167-2024** approving the purchase of a stationary compactor for the landfill, which was seconded by Kremeier and was adopted. On August 28, Rachels asked staff to explore the closure of the gravel portion of S Union due to the roadway being washed out by rain and the road behind the city shop. Chief Muchow was asked to comment on the closures, and he said staff have begun talking about scenarios of full closures, closures other than emergency vehicles, gates and fencing. The City Engineer will explore the options and report back to the council. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Rachels directing staff to explore the closure of roadways on S Union Avenue and behind the city shop and the motion carried.

Lake Alice Grit Chambers

Kvamme offered **Resolution #168-2024** approving leveraged funds of \$186,000 from the stormwater enterprise fund; authorizing entry into the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Grant and initiating PI 7774 for the Lake Alice grit chambers project, which was seconded by Hicks and was adopted.

Bigwood Event Center Marketing Plan

After a presentation from Leighton Media on marketing the Bigwood Event Center to increase bookings last week, the Tax Levy Committee was asked to make a recommendation on the proposed 6-month marketing plan. Phase I is an exchange of event space within the facility for the marketing services of Leighton Media. Phase II is a search engine optimization (SEO) or strategic digital exposure at a monthly cost of \$1,250 or a total cost of \$7,500, which would be paid from the liquor store proceeds. The two phases would begin in the fourth quarter of 2024 and run through the first quarter of 2025. The city and Leighton Media would have check-ins every 6-8 weeks to ensure their efforts to increase the number of facility rentals have increased. Kremeier did not take issue with the bartering of services, but he felt the second phase should extend beyond the 20-mile boundary that was established. He suggested Visit Fergus Falls be asked to help contribute towards the cost as the city's lodging tax funds their organization and could be used for marketing the Bigwood and Hicks agreed. Job spoke about her experience in SEO and the extensive efforts required to keep up with website ranking profiles will require a financial commitment from the city. Rachels felt the Bigwood operations are turning around, and this is the most affordable way to make the decision if the event center should remain open. Rachels offered **Resolution #169-2024** approving the partnership with Leighton Media for a marketing plan for the Bigwood Event Center in the fourth quarter of 2024 and in the first quarter of 2025, which was seconded by Job and was defeated by a 4-2 vote. Voting in favor were Rachels, Job, Kvamme and Rufer. Voting in opposition were Kremeier and Hicks. A motion and second were made by Hicks and Kremeier to proceed with Phase I only of the Bigwood Event Center marketing plan and the motion carried.

Mark Leighton felt it was time to cut the city's losses and discontinue operations at the facility. He asked what the carrying cost of the Bigwood Event Center is costing the taxpayers. The city estimates it will be \$124,000 this year. Rachels said it would cost \$68,000 per year to mothball the facility and trying the 6-month marketing plan is the best way for the city to determine whether the city should continue operations.

Resolution of Accounts

Kvamme offered a resolution authorizing the payments and claims in the amount of \$1,322,590.99, which was seconded by Rufer and was adopted.

Old Business

At the August 19 open forum, a school board member commented on the city's lack of communication about the street projects on Summit, Laurel and Linden that will negatively impact traffic in the McKinley School area. The City Engineer acknowledged the city did suspend the contractor's efforts to pave the area earlier this summer because the aggregate road base was unstable due to the high moisture content resulting from this summer's heavy rainfall and the decision was affirmed by Braun Intertec. Paving an unstable surface would result in patching needed immediately. After extensive monitoring and testing, the surface has been deemed suitable for paving and that work did occur prior to the beginning of the school year. There were suggestions regarding additional notices to affected residents.

The meeting adjourned at 6:13 pm

Lynne Olson