

A regular meeting of the City Council for the City of Fairfax, Minnesota was held on February 14th, 2023 at 7:00pm in the City Council Chambers.

Members: Josh Bunkers, Steve Schmidt, Jim Schroeder, Jill Pelzel, Tina Castillo

Absent: None

Visitors: Andrea Merkel, City Administrator
Joel Grejtak, Superintendent of Streets and Utilities
Scott Froehlich, Chief of Police
Aaron Walton, City Attorney
Jim Cuff
Lindsey Heine, GFW Schools

The meeting was called to order.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The agenda was reviewed. Andrea Merkel requested additional items to Claims for Payment and the addition of the consideration of hiring Derek Carlson as a full-time police officer to the agenda and move #7 from the consent agenda to #17 on the meeting agenda for further discussion. A motion was made by Pelzel and seconded by Schmidt to approve the agenda. All voted in favor. None voted against. The motion was carried.

The consent agenda was reviewed. A motion was made by Schmidt and seconded by Schroeder to approve the consent agenda. All voted in favor. None voted against. The motion was carried.

Consent Agenda:

1. Approval of Consent Agenda
2. Consider Approval of Minutes
 - a. January 10th, 2023 Council Meeting Minutes
3. Consider Approval of Claims for Payment

The council reviewed the updated comp time policy to the personnel policy that was discussed at the December council meeting. With no additional comments on changes or additions a motion was made by Pelzel and seconded by Schmidt to approve the new comp time policy. All voted in favor. None voted against. The motion carried.

The council reviewed a proposal of employment with the current city building inspector. Merkel informed the council that the city has not had a contract with the existing inspector since 2010. Since he is currently an employee of the city of Sleepy Eye as their building inspector, he is not covered by either city's insurance when he is performing building inspection services in the city of Fairfax. If the council approved hiring the current inspector as a part-time city employee, he would be covered by the city of Fairfax's insurance when he is working in Fairfax. He is currently paid via a monthly retainer and 80% of building permit fees. The employment proposal would keep this same pay structure. The monthly retainer would be paid via an hourly wage at a

fixed number of hours each month, but would be \$280 higher per month than the current retainer amount. Merkel reported that the city did get a quote from another company to perform building inspections in the city, but the monthly retainer was higher than the current inspector's employment offer. Merkel informed the council that city does have the option of not having a building inspector with a population under 2500, but would need to form a plan of who would be monitoring building activities in the city if the decision is made to not have a building inspector. The council agreed to table the employment proposal until the March council meeting to allow time to gather more information on increasing building fees to cover the increased cost of having a building inspector.

A motion was made by Pelzel and seconded by Schmidt to approve hiring Trevor Schweiss, Wyatt Hoffman, Luke Sandgren and Tyler Sandgren to the Fairfax Fire and Ambulance Department. All voted in favor. None voted against, motion carried.

The council reviewed bids from Northland Lumber and Justin Winch Construction LLC for demolition of interior walls of the police department office and fire hall meeting room to clean mold, replace walls and replace ceiling tiles in both rooms. Both bids included materials, but only Justin Winch Construction's bid included labor. The council agreed to table the construction bids until an additional labor quote for the repairs can be obtained. The council also reviewed bids from Farm Mercantile for materials and labor to replace the lighting in both rooms with LED lighting and materials to update the electrical panel. The council agreed to table the quotes for upgrading the lighting until an additional bid can be obtained for the same materials and labor. The council agreed to table the quote for upgrading the electrical box to be budgeted for 2024. A motion was made by Schmidt and seconded by Pelzel to accept the painting quote from Jim Prax for the final painting of both rooms. All voted in favor. None voted against. The motion carried.

A motion was made by Schmidt and seconded by Pelzel to approve liquor licenses for the Fairfax Baseball Association, Squirrel's and The Shedd. All voted in favor, none voted against. The motion carried.

The council reviewed a proposal update to the city's current utility policy. The proposed changes include additional wording to clearly state the steps that the city will take when a utility bill is past due. The proposed changes also include a notice that the city can use a collection agency to collect on unpaid utility bills, if necessary. Merkel reported that there have been instances where an unpaid balance either cannot be assessed to the resident's property taxes or an assessment of the utility bill to the resident's property taxes will not be effective in collecting the unpaid balance. Merkel reported that the additional use of a collection agency in these instances as a final resort will give the city leverage in collecting unpaid balances. The collection service Merkel obtained a service contract from does not charge any fee for using their service, they are paid via retaining a portion of any amounts collected. The proposed changes to the utility policy also include a requirement that all payment plans on delinquent utility accounts must be made in writing. A discussion was had regarding increasing the city's current utility reconnection fee of \$25. The proposal from the council was to increase the fee to \$100 for reconnections during

normal city business hours and \$150 outside of business hours. The updated policy will be reviewed at the March meeting with the discussed changes.

The council reviewed the current lease agreement for the lower level of the Neisen's Bar building. The current owner is exploring the sale of the building and the original lease agreement includes wording that the city has the first right to purchase the building back. The council agreed that they do not have interest in purchasing the building back at this time as long as the current lease remains in effect with a new building owner. Attorney Aaron Walton stated that the city will need to put their intentions to waive their right to purchase the building into writing and that this should be done in conjunction with renewing the lease of the space with a new building owner. A motion was made by Schmidt and seconded by Castillo to proceed with cancelling the right to purchase the building and negotiating a new lease agreement. All voted in favor, none voted against. The motion passed.

The council reviewed 2 quotes for services that would allow city staff to send text messages to residents that have signed up for the service. Merkel reported that this service has been requested for snow emergency notices informing residents of when city crews will be removing snow that are currently only posted on the city's Facebook page. Police Chief Scott Froehlich informed the council that this service could possibly be done thru the current Renville County Code Red system. The council chose to table the quotes until more information is obtained on whether using the Renville County Code Red system for snow emergency notices is an option.

A motion was made by Schmidt and seconded by Schroeder to hire Derek Carlson as the new full-time police officer for the city at Step 5 of the current city pay plan for the position of police officer. All voted in favor, none voted against. The motion carried.

A motion was made by Pelzel and seconded by Schmidt to approve updating the Rural Township Fire/Ambulance Contract to include a 50/50 ownership of the replacement truck for the 2004 Freightliner between the city and the townships. All voted in favor, none voted against. The motion carried.

In staff reports, Andrea Merkel updated the council on the progress of re-opening the Fairfax post office. The removal of the former Smokey Hollow building has started. And due to Phil Nestande taking down the south wall of the former Jimmy's Pizza building, the repairs to the post office can now move forward. The USPS is estimating that the repairs to the building will be completed this spring.

Merkel shared a thank you letter to police officer Denny Adamski from a resident with the council. The resident was very thankful for assistance officer Adamski provided during the blizzard leading up to Christmas.

Merkel reported that the community center has been seeing some facelifts recently with repairs to the walls and a fresh coat of interior paint. The back door to the large room at the community center was damaged earlier this month and has been turned into insurance. The damages should be covered less the city's deductible and some of the interior painting will be paid for by insurance. The city is also starting the process of finding lifeguards for the pool this summer.

Merkel also presented the council with city financial information for the month of January.

Joel Grejtak reported that the city crews have been working on inventory and maintenance.

Scott Froehlich reported that the police department responded to 66 incidents and worked on larger investigations during the month of January. Froehlich also noted that he is looking into purchasing body cameras via grants that are available.

A motion was made by Pelzel and seconded by Castillo to adjourn the meeting. All voted in favor. None voted against. The motion was carried.

Attest:

Mayor

City Administrator