

**APPROVED MINUTES
OF THE CITY
COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS
TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2019 – FOLLOWING THE SPECIAL MEETING**

CALL TO ORDER:

The Work Session of the East Grand Forks City Council for July 23, 2019 was called to order by Council President Olstad at 5:14 P.M.

CALL OF ROLL:

On a Call of Roll the following members of the East Grand Forks City Council were present: Mayor Steve Gander, Council President Mark Olstad, Council Members Clarence Vetter, Dale Helms, Tim Riopelle, Tim Johnson, and Marc DeMers (5:15).

Karla Anderson, Finance Director; Nancy Ellis, City Planner; Steve Emery, City Engineer; Ron Galstad, City Attorney; Paul Gorte, Economic Development Director; Mike Hedlund, Police Chief; Charlotte Helgeson, Library Director; Reid Huttunen, Parks and Recreation Superintendent; Gary Larson, Fire Chief; David Murphy, City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer; Megan Nelson, City Clerk; and Jason Stordahl, Public Works Director.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:

The Council President Determined a Quorum was present.

1. Update from the North Country Food Bank – Paul Gorte

Mr. Gorte introduced the Council to Ms. Susie Novak who is the Executive Director of the North Country Food Bank and she was present to talk about the food bank will be moving from Crookston to East Grand Forks and this will bring 11 jobs to the City. He turned it over to Ms. Novak. Ms. Novak handed out information about the food bank including information on what they do. She explained they had been operating for 36 years out of Crookston, they source donated food nationally, regionally, and locally, it is brought into their warehouse, and it is given out to 220 charitable organizations across northwest and west central Minnesota. She stated their growth has increased tremendously over the years because when she had started at the food bank they were distributing 1.8 million pounds of food annually and last year they distributed 10 million pounds of food, which is the approximate equivalent of 8.5 million meals in northwest Minnesota. She reviewed the different organizations they distribute food to, the organizations have to be a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, and cannot charge for the food they distribute to people in need.

Ms. Novak stated they have outgrown their facility over the last few years, they had been looking for a different building, and they are also required to find a new space since their current space is now non-compliant with the regulations they are supposed to meet. She said again they had been looking for a facility, considered building new facility, and a few weeks back this building in East Grand Forks came up for sale and will save them approximately \$4 million dollars. She added they were hoping to be in the

building by the end of this year after some renovations are completed. She commented how this will be much sooner than expected and will address the capacity issues they were having.

Ms. Novak told the Council there are only five food banks in the State of Minnesota and usually end up serving the community they are in more because of proximity and timing issues. She stated they had already reached out to the local food shelf in town and they are excited to have the food bank coming to town. She added they intended to stay in Crookston but they want to be good stewards with their funding, every dollar they raise helps provide five meals, and anything they can save on the building project is a huge deal.

Council member DeMers said it is an unfortunate need but look forward to them making East Grand Forks their home. Mayor Gander said they have great efficiency distributing the food and he hopes this works out well for them. Ms. Novak said 70% to 90% of the food distributed by the 220 organizations they work with comes from the food bank. She added 96 cents of every dollar raised goes back into feeding people, which is something they are very proud of. She stated they are excited to be coming into the community and there are going to be many volunteer opportunities available. Mr. Gorte asked if the Council would be able to see the operation. Ms. Novak said once everything is ready they will be holding an open house and invite the community to come to see what they do. Mr. Gorte reminded everyone they are moving to East Grand Forks because they have grown out of the current space and needed a facility to meet their needs.

Council member DeMers said there would be lots of traffic coming in and out of the facility and the road this is on is in need of repair. Ms. Novak said there would be many trucks coming in and out, the road is not in the best condition, but it was not something she was going to bring up at this time. Council member DeMers said this area has been on the Council's radar for some time. Council President Olstad thanked Ms. Novak for coming in. Ms. Novak thanked the Council for their time and she would be letting them know when things are happening.

2. Discussion on Potential Jurisdictional Transfer of US Bus Hwy 2 & Demers Ave – Steve Emery

Mr. Emery stated Mr. Darren Laesch was present for this discussion and explained the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) has contacted the City to see if the City would like to take over Business Highway 2 from Demers out to Highway 2. He said MNDOT would then take over the rest of Demers Avenue from 4th Street NW to Highway 2. He reminded the Council he had listed some pros and cons in a memo that had been included in the packet which also included the fact that the Minnesota Legislature has set aside funding to repair trunk highways before they are turned back to local jurisdiction. He added if the City would take over the 2.1 miles of road it would add an additional \$38,000 in State Aid funds received each year. He reviewed the different options of the City taking over this road, how the State could make all of the repairs before turning it over, the City could complete the reconstruction project on this road and be reimbursed or receive a lump sum to complete the work. He stated the third option was to do nothing. Mr. Emery said if they would like to move forward the next step is to adopt a resolution.

Mr. Laesch told the Council if the City takes over this stretch of road this will allow for more money to be used in the region because MNDOT does not have access to the dollars that have been set aside by the State. He explained Demers Avenue is part of the central highway system and MNDOT would receive more funding taking over Demers Avenue. He said they are looking for input to see if this is something the City would be interested in, the City has time to make a decision, and regardless what happens

MNDOT will still maintain the Sorlie Bridge. Discussion followed about if any trunk highway miles were being added, how the focus is on the miles that are to be turned back to local jurisdiction, and the roads being turned over to local jurisdiction were to be turned over in like-new condition. Mr. Laesch told the Council there would be a low risk for the City moving forward with option one because the costs would be covered by MNDOT or if they choose option two the City would be able to fix the road as needed. More discussion followed about the street lights at the intersection of US Highway 2 and 2nd Avenue NE will be replaced with new lights in 2024, there will be a local cost since there are local streets, and if turned over those street lights would then be maintained by the City.

Council member DeMers asked if this would affect State Aid mileage. Mr. Laesch said this would add 1.6 miles to State Aid mileage for the City. Council member DeMers commented that this is an interesting opportunity, there is a risk for the City, and receiving 10 million to restore the road is not bad. Council President Olstad asked if any safety upgrades that needed in this area. Ms. Ellis said the intersection of 5th Avenue NE and US Business Hwy 2 may come up because of the angles at the intersection. Mr. Laesch stated that is something that could be realigned with this project. Council President Olstad said in 2021 Highway 2 was going to be worked on and asked what was going to be happening with the intersection of Highway 2 and Business Highway 2. Mr. Laesch said the intersection was going to remain open, they were going to change some of the grades, and there will be no left turns onto Highway 2 from Business Highway 2. Discussion followed about considering this as a future project, the Council requested estimates and conditions of each section of the road to consider which would be the best way to repair the road, there would need to be conversations with the business owners along this road, and this is an interesting proposal. Mr. Murphy said staff would get an idea of the current condition of the road. Mr. Emery said they would reach out to MNDOT when appropriate.

This item will be brought back to a future work session.

3. Request for Direction on Unlawful Signs – Michael Hedlund

Chief Hedlund asked how the Council would like to proceed. Mr. Murphy reminded everyone the City had received a complaint; it is common not to allow signs in the right-of-way, taking a proactive approach can cause more issues, and it is his recommendation to continue with the current method of responding to complaints. Mayor Gander said he had been contacted by a realtor who said if this ordinance was softened there would be an explosion of signs so it should be kept how it is. Mr. Murphy commented that most people are general are good at picking up their signs and most issues are when the signs are not picked up. Discussion followed about how changing this ordinance could make things time consuming for the Police Department and how there are still some that drive around looking for garage sale signs.

Mr. Gary Schwingler said they have a flea market on the north end of town across from Northland. He explained they put out signs for the business, they talked with the mowing crew so they don't put signs out on the day they mow, and they place signs during the three days they are open. He stated sometimes their signs have been taken and he found out there was an ordinance against it. He commented they had not received any complaints and asked if they are able to put their signs out because a lot of their traffic comes from people that see the signs. Council member Riopelle stated he had taken complaints on these signs but no one has made a formal complaint. Discussion followed about how the City will continue enforcing this ordinance on a complaint basis, a permit is allowed for placing signs on someone's personal property, and the police department will try to work through this process.

4. Request to Purchase New Canine Patrol Vehicle – Michael Hedlund

Chief Hedlund reminded the Council how the K9 vehicle had been purchased about a year and a half ago and this program has been very successful. He stated the K9 vehicle had been purchased used from the City of Fridley but now it has more than 124,000 miles and over 14,000 hours on the engine. He explained they had recently received \$5,000 from BNSF for the program bringing the donation total to \$20,000, \$16,000 had recently been received from a seizure, and they are trying to sell the current K9 vehicle. He added with additional donations they should be able to purchase a new vehicle without using any city funds. He explained this vehicle should last 5 to 6 years and is looking for support for this purchase.

Council President Olstad thanked Officer Hajicek for the work he has done and how he has only heard great things about the K9 unit. He said the donation and the auction funds should pay for the vehicle. He added people realize the benefit of having a K9 unit and he would support this. Mayor Gander commented that it would be good to get the vehicle at no cost for the City. Council member Vetter said if there were enough donations, he would support this purchase. He added the Council has been told that many equipment has met its useful life expectancy and if something only requires low maintenance it could be kept, and he would consider replacing something when there gets to be lot of maintenance.

Council member DeMers asked if there was a policy or account set up for the auction funds and asked what the funds could be spent on. Mr. Galstad stated those funds go to the Police Department. Council member DeMers asked to get that as a written opinion. Ms. Anderson explained the amounts vary from year to year but the City does budget revenue based on collections of fines and forfeitures. She added the auction proceeds go to more than just the City because of the partners in the drug task force. Council member DeMers asked if these funds could be set up in an enterprise fund. Mr. Murphy stated that could be seen as trying to raise funds, the revenue amounts are based on what has been collected over the years, not as a goal to achieve. He told the Council the officers are not car hunting. Council member Riopelle added they are not trying to reach a quota. Discussion followed about all of the steps that need to be followed when dealing with a vehicle that has been forfeited, how the Chief has been in law enforcement and never been told to reach a quota, it is not something they do in the police department, and it is expensive to change over a vehicle for different uses.

Lieutenant Hajicek told the Council the K9 unit is in the city shop on a monthly basis and reviewed some of the issues they have been having with the vehicle. Officer Hajicek added this vehicle is only two-wheel drive and how it can be difficult to get around in the wintertime. Chief Hedlund said the vehicle they were considering was all wheel drive.

This item will be referred to a City Council Meeting for action.

5. Discussion on Use of Sales Tax for Arenas & Park Improvements – David Murphy, Karla Anderson, and Reid Huttunen

Mr. Murphy stated staff has been discussing when the city sales tax will be done and when that happens the City would have to wait a year before another sales tax could be implemented. He explained staff is looking at unfunded needs and they would like to start the discussion and see what the opinion was of the Council. He said staff met and identified 13 projects that could be considered to be paid for by a sales tax. Council member Vetter said the bridge was not included on the list. Mr. Galstad stated there could only be five projects listed for the sales tax. Ms. Anderson told the Council the updates to the Civic Center and improvements to the parking lot would be considered one project. Discussion followed about setting

up a master plan for the parks, if they should consider including street improvements, that JLG will help set up the scope for the arenas this fall, and how they might want to also consider the down town parking lot, the industrial park, and other items. Mayor Gander said this would need to be intentional and the projects should be a cross-section of the community so there is a benefit for all residents.

Council member DeMers said the first sale tax was a good test for the community and it has been a success with the people supporting it. He continued saying the Council needs to think bigger, opportunities like this don't happen all of the time, the projects need to have a regional impact, and there needs to be a master plan so they can look at bench mark options. He asked if they should bond for the projects and pay it back with the sales tax. He added projects like the Civic Center and VFW Arena will need to be done at the same time. Council President Olstad stated they might also want to consider including the Economic Development Authority to see if projects could be enhanced. Discussion followed about how the projects need to be specific, a reminder was given about the phase out of R22, maintenance of the arenas has been costly in recent years because of the old system that requires parts to be specially made, and how staff was looking for priorities from the Council along with setting a timeline. Council President Olstad asked how they were limited. Ms. Anderson stated she would find out. Ms. Nelson commented that the State could pull projects out as well as the voters could vote them down during this process. Council member DeMers asked for amortization schedules of different percentages to consider.

This will be brought back to a future Work Session.

OTHER:

Mr. Murphy informed the Council the bike racks had arrived for the downtown area. He explained they need a space of 8 feet by 20 feet, one would be located in the Cabela's parking lot and the other location will be by the Blue Moose. He said the Blue Moose was very enthusiastic to have it located by them but a cement pad would be needed. He told the Council this information was given to him in the morning and there will need to be an answer as soon as possible. Council President Olstad said to look at the different aspects for this and bring an estimate forward.

ADJOURN:

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, TO ADJOURN THE JULY 23, 2019 WORK SESSION OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 6:54 P.M.

Voting Aye: Olstad, DeMers, Vetter, Helms, Riopelle, and Johnson.

Voting Nay: None.

Absent: Grassel.

David Murphy, City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer