

**APPROVED MINUTES
OF THE CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS
TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2020 – 5:00 PM**

CALL TO ORDER:

The Council Meeting of the East Grand Forks City Council for March 17, 2020 was called to order by Council President Olstad at 5:00 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 Vice-President Chad Grassel, Council Members Clarence Vetter, Dale Helms, Tim Riopelle, Tim Johnson, and Marc DeMers.

Karla Anderson, Finance Director; Jeff Boushee, Interim Fire Chief; Nancy Ellis, City Planner; Steve Emery, City Engineer; Ron Galstad, City Attorney; Paul Gorte, Economic Development Director; Mike Hedlund, Police Chief; Reid Huttunen, Parks and Recreation Superintendent; Keith Mykleseth, Water & Light Manager; Megan Nelson, City Clerk; and Jason Stordahl, Public Works Director.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:

The Council President Determined a Quorum was present.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

OPEN FORUM:

Council President Olstad stated the open forum was an opportunity for members of the public to address the City Council on items not on the current agenda and items requiring Council action may be deferred to staff or Boards and Commissions for research and future Council Agendas if appropriate. No one came forward for the open forum.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

1. Consider approving the minutes of the “Regular Meeting” for the East Grand Forks, Minnesota City Council of March 3, 2020.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER DEMERS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE “REGULAR MEETING” FOR THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL OF MARCH 3, 2020.

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

Voting Nay: None.

SCHEDULED BID LETTINGS: NONE.

SCHEDULED PUBLIC HEARINGS: NONE.

CONSENT AGENDA: NONE

ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF REPORTS OF OFFICERS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:

2. Regular meeting minutes of the Water, Light, Power, and Building Commission for February 19, 2020.
3. Regular meeting minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission for December 18, 2019.

COMMUNICATIONS: NONE

OLD BUSINESS: NONE

NEW BUSINESS:

4. Consider adopting Resolution No. 20-03-19 appointing Richard Audette to a four year term on the Planning Commission.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER DEMERS, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 20-03-19 APPOINTING RICHARD AUDETTE TO A FOUR YEAR TERM ON THE PLANNING COMMISSION.

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

Voting Nay: None.

CLAIMS:

5. Consider authorizing the City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer to issue payment of recommended bills and payroll.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, TO AUTHORIZE THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR/CLERK-TREASURER TO ISSUE PAYMENT OF RECOMMENDED BILLS AND PAYROLL.

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

Voting Nay: None.

OTHER:

6. Update from Polk County Public Health – Public Health Director Sarah Reese

Ms. Sarah Reese introduced herself to the Council as the Polk County Public Health Director. She stated she had been asked to give a situational report and answer any questions. She explained the COVID-19 situation has been changing over the last several weeks, the first response was similar to what happens during the flu season, and those precautions are still important. She said due to the changes with the situation they are having to start with community mitigation strategies because they want to be intentional to reduce the number of cases and slow the spread because this is a new virus. She told the Council there

is no vaccine or treatment that is readily available and the healthcare system can become overwhelmed quickly because only so many beds are available. She commented how life is still happening with people needing to access healthcare facilities because of strokes, heart attacks, or other needs. She stated the community mitigation strategies are very intentional, one is social distancing which means keeping six feet between people along with other precautions, and how this is important for everyone, especially for those that are at high risk. She reviewed who is considered to be at high risk which includes age and or if they have current health issues. She said the spread of this disease had been similar to influenza, they are now seeing community transmission of this disease, and this is raising the level of concern which is why they were implementing community mitigation strategies.

Ms. Reese continued with the school closure plan, that this is not related to the public health response, rather it is to allow them time to get things in place for distance learning if it is needed. She explained how the Governor has taken action with executive orders to implement other mitigation strategies based on what is happening. She stated her department has been very engaged with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), they are in contact frequently with the CDC, they are watching what is happening on each of the coasts, and the public's health and safety is of the utmost importance. She added everyone needs to continue to wash their hands, stay home if they are sick, use hand sanitizer, cover coughs, and how all these are important for individuals to do.

Ms. Reese stated they are currently doing a lot of surveillance and monitoring, they are taking in calls and making sure people are getting the correct information, and they are making sure they are getting out the most up-to-date information while assisting people in different situations. She added they are working with the mental health centers, primary care providers, local law enforcement, emergency managers, and their own internal plans. She explained if there is a positive case in Polk County they would conduct an investigation, the person would be put into isolation, and others may be quarantined. She informed the Council the terms quarantine and isolation mean two different things. She stated if someone is in isolation it means they are sick, have symptoms, they have been tested and waiting on results, or have been diagnosed. She continued saying if someone is in quarantine may be well but have been exposed to someone who is sick, they could be sick, they are monitoring their symptoms, and they are monitored at different levels based on their risk.

Ms. Reese continued saying once someone has been diagnosed with COVID-19 the Minnesota Department of Health will be conducting an interview, the person would be put in isolation, they would be asked questions to determine if there are others at risk, and reach out to those at risk. She stated how there are essential services provided by the local public health to make sure these people in isolation get what they need including food and medications. She said they would like people to utilize resources or get help from family and friends but ultimately Public Health is responsible for providing those services. She continued saying how they are learning new things every day, things keep changing, they had predicted the cases would increase, and they are doing the best they can with the resources they have. She said she is really proud of all of their partners and the collaborating they have done with local law enforcement, emergency managers, schools, business partners, and others. She added she would answer questions now or when the question comes up.

Council President Olstad asked if there was a phone number for people to call if they have questions. Ms. Reese said people could call (218) 281-3385 to reach Public Health and all of the calls were going to the Crookston office. Council member Helms asked what people are supposed to do if they get sick with this

virus. Ms. Reese stated 80% of people that get this disease will have mild symptoms, it will be worse than a cold and some people have also developed pneumonia. She said 20% of people that get this will have severe symptoms, they will be hospitalized, and there is no vaccine so they are treating the symptoms. She added there was a small percentage that have died which they are trying to prevent which is why the mitigation strategies have been put in place. Ms. Reese informed the Council she had was talking with the Polk County emergency manager about the current pandemic plan, it references getting medication to people, and this is a very different situation so they are working on a new plan.

Council member DeMers thanked Ms. Reese for attending the meeting and for the work she was doing. He asked if someone thinks they have it or if a family member may be sick how they should go about getting checked. Ms. Reese stated things have been changing quickly, people should call before they go in, testing is being limited because there are only so many tests kits available, and those recommendations are constantly changing. She suggested that anyone who has symptoms should call their healthcare provider to determine what they should do. She added people need to find reputable sources when they are looking for information, how they should utilize the State's resources such as the Minnesota Department of Health, and they should be looking on a regular basis because the information has been changing quickly. She stated anyone with questions could call Polk County Public Health to help them find resources. Council member DeMers said there were the guidelines for social distancing and washing hands and asked if there was evidence this has gone airborne. Ms. Reese said first there were airborne precautions and on Friday it changed to droplet precautions which is different. She added this could change again. She said there were guidance documents about when things should be used because personal protective equipment supplies were low.

Mayor Gander commented that a reason to call in first is because if a person did have the virus all the people they came into contact with or were around would then need to be put into quarantine. He added if you called ahead of time they would be expecting you and would minimize the exposure to everyone in the facility. Ms. Reese added she was asked this already but at this time it was recommended to keep public buildings open as long as they are able to keep social distancing. Council member Riopelle commented that Altru is recommending that people call their health care provider, they will talk you through what needs to be done, and how they do have a screening available in the emergency room. Ms. Reese said again people should call to their primary healthcare provider first, get direction from the provider, and if someone doesn't have a primary provider they can call Public Health to determine what provider may be closest to them. Council President Olstad thanked Ms. Reese for coming in and sharing information. Ms. Reese said any questions that come up can be directed to Public Health.

7. Mayoral Declaration of Local Public Health Emergency

Mayor Gander said there was a meeting with staff and Mr. Warren Strandell from the Polk County Commission and how it was determined a declaration was needed and this would take away some restrictions so decisions could be made if needed. He stated Mr. Galstad helped put this declaration together and read the declaration into the record.

Mayoral Declaration of Local Public Health Emergency

Whereas, the City of East Grand Forks, Minnesota, has a current local public health emergency resulting from imminent health conditions caused by the presence and increased number in cases of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) in the State of Minnesota; and

Whereas, the City of East Grand Forks is a public entity within the State of Minnesota; and

Whereas, the Center for Disease Control identifies the potential public health threat posed by COVID-19, and has advised that person-to-person spread of COVID-19 will continue to occur; and

Whereas, the State of Minnesota has confirmed multiple positive test results for COVID-19; and

Whereas, the United States and the State of Minnesota have both declared states of emergencies related to urgent conditions created by the presence of COVID-19; and

Whereas, the necessary resources to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic may exceed the resources available in the City of East Grand Forks; and

Whereas, the following conditions exist in the City of East Grand Forks as a result of this local public health emergency:

1. COVID-19 is present in the State of Minnesota and the number of cases has continued to spread throughout the State.
2. Significant community spread of COVID-19 is now a very high risk based on data from the Minnesota Department of Health and confirmed by the Department of Health and federal health authorities. This risk has resulted in specific recommendations from the Minnesota Department of Health regarding sizes and formats of public gatherings.
3. The presence of COVID-19 may have the potential to compromise the provision of essential City services, including a reduction in the size of the workforce due to school closures, isolation, or quarantine.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Steven Gander, Mayor of the City of East Grand Forks, do hereby declare a Local Emergency pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, Ch. 12.29, and East Grand Forks City Code of Ordinances, Section 34.05 and the City Charter Section 3.15.

I further declare that:

1. The emergency exists on the date of this declaration as indicated below and shall continue and remain in effect as long as the State of Minnesota peacetime emergency declaration remains in effect, pending initial ratification by official act of the East Grand Forks City Council within seventy-two (72) hours of this declaration. Pursuant to City Code Section 34.05(A) the City Council retains the ability to disapprove of the declaration at any time following initial ratification.
2. The Director of Emergency Management for the City of East Grand Forks shall request and coordinate the appropriate aid and resources from surrounding city and county jurisdictions, the State of Minnesota, and the United States Federal Government.
3. That Section 3.15 Emergency Bids of the East Grand Forks City Code shall take effect dispensing with competitive bids. Competitive bidding shall not be required due to the emergency, it is essential to the health, safety and welfare of the people of East Grand Forks that immediate action be taken, and there is insufficient time for competitive bids.
4. The emergency executive authority section of the East Grand Forks Emergency Operations Plan, and all other applicable sections of the Plan, is immediately invoked.
5. Emergency regulations promulgated by mayoral proclamation to protect the public health, safety, and welfare during this emergency as authorized by the City Code Section 34.06(C) are subject to rescission by the City Council at any time. If not sooner rescinded, every such regulation shall expire at the end of thirty (30) days after its effective date or at the end of the declared emergency, whichever occurs first.

6. A Policy Group is hereby convened to coordinate, support, advise, and assist in the communication of and discharge of the duties and responsibilities pertaining to this declared state of emergency and the City's response and mitigation efforts. The Policy Group shall consist of the Mayor, the President and Vice President of the City Council, the City Administrator, City Clerk, the City Emergency Management Director, and additional selected Department Heads.
7. All City departments shall review all existing City of East Grand Forks regulations, policies or rules and be prepared to recommend the alteration, modification or temporary suspension of same for the purpose of aiding the residents, workforce, and visitors present in East Grand Forks during the pandemic.
8. All City departments shall evaluate and recommend resources that can be acquired and deployed for the purpose of aiding the residents, workforce, and visitors present in East Grand Forks during the pandemic.
9. This declaration of local emergency, all emergency regulations of any kind, any additions or changes to this declaration, and the eventual termination of this declaration, and all official communications pertaining to same, shall be posted by the City Clerk on the front page of City's website.
10. The Mayor's office and relevant city staff and department heads will provide public updates on COVID-19 related work at City Council meetings.

Mr. Galstad stated the Mayor would need to sign this declaration, the Council would need to ratify this within 72 hours to extend it longer than 3 days, and if needed past 30 days the Council would then need to extend the emergency.

8. Consider adopting Resolution No. 20-03-20 ratifying the mayoral declaration of the local public health emergency.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 20-03-20 RATIFYING THE MAYORAL DECLARATION OF THE LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.

Council member DeMers said the declaration asks to have information be brought to public meetings and asked if there are no public meetings if there was another channel to get that information out. Mayor Gander stated it says the city clerk will be posting information on the website and said he would be open to something else if something more needed to be done. Mr. Galstad stated a public meeting could be an ITV meeting or an email could be published because of the need of an emergency which also could be posted on the website.

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

Voting Nay: None.

COUNCIL/STAFF REPORTS:

Mayor Gander commented it's hard to get reoriented with the COVID-19 threat. He stated there is a flood coming and staff has been meeting and staying up to date with information and preparing. He said the flood walls will go up as needed and thanked everyone who has been working on that. He continued saying that he, Mr. Huttunen, Council member DeMers, and Council President Olstad made a trip to the State Capitol to talk with legislators about the City's proposed sales tax and various issues of concern for the City, they were able to testify at a hearing, and that went well because they were guided through that process which they were thankful for. He added how they were looking at going back to testify at a Senate

hearing but that had been canceled with everyone focusing on COVID-19. He commented that if this goes quickly there may be a tax bill but if this dominates the session there may be very few bills passed this year.

Mayor Gander said so much what has happened seems a little extreme or reactionary. He stated fires have burnt up thousands of acres of forests before they can be stopped, the forest floors can also start on fire since it is all organic material, and there are areas that are large areas that are cut clear with much of the organic material removed. He explained these clear cut areas are firebreaks, they help stop the spread of forest fires, and help firefighters focus their efforts. He stated these breaks are put in place is before a fire starts and it is intentional on where they are located. He continued saying the coronavirus safety measures that have been put in place will help limit the spread of the disease, it will help focus efforts for the medical field, financially, and help save lives. He added now was time to create these firebreaks before the pandemic comes through, it may seem extreme, but this is to help save lives. He asked people to learn these measures, implore these measures, support those who care for others, and also support businesses to help minimize the effect of this.

Council Member Riopelle reminded everyone to keep the healthcare workers, police officers, and fire fighters in their thoughts during this time.

Council Member Johnson reminded everyone to wash their hands.

Council Vice-President Grassel said there was information available on the school website as well as other websites regarding where meals can be picked up because the buses were going to be at drop off locations starting at 11am the following day. He added there are also restaurants that have stepped up which they are thankful for and how the school is also providing childcare for essential workers.

Council President Olstad thanked all of the healthcare workers and staff of the City for making sure things are being done according to current guidelines at city facilities. He said information will be provided to citizens on the website and hopefully everyone can weather through this.

Mr. Galstad said it can be alarming to some with the passing of the local public health emergency and at this time no cases were confirmed in the city and hopefully they can keep it that way.

Ms. Ellis said the City does own an apartment facility, it cannot be put on lock down like an assisted living facility, but the community room has been locked, and residents were told all gatherings need to stay under 10 people, and visitors need to stay at a minimum. She explained that transit is still operating, they are trying to maintain space between riders, and there are single riders for dial-a-ride and senior ride services with the vehicle being cleaned in between rides. She commented this has dropped the amount of riders and they are trying to keep this rides to what is necessary such as to doctor appointments, getting groceries, or prescriptions. She added they are trying to do what is necessary at city hall and asking people to utilizing online bill pay or using the drop boxes, and they are asking people to do things remotely if possible.

Council President Olstad asked if at some point if the doors to city hall will be locked. Ms. Ellis said she wasn't the one to make that call, Grand Forks has locked their city hall as of 5pm to the public and only having essential personnel come in, and East Grand Forks staff has been looking into what it would take

to work remotely. She said there are some that are being asked to work from home because of what their spouse does, they are working with staff, and she would like to close city hall down to the public. She added she is working with the public information of Grand Forks who is willing to help with anything the City may need.

Mr. Jeff Boushee introduced himself as the interim fire chief and emergency manager for the city and that his thoughts and prayers go out to all of the citizens and the nation because this is a difficult time for everyone. He said that life safety is his number one objective for citizens and his staff. He explained they have changed how they are responding to emergency calls to help reduce the spread of the disease, they have canceled inspections, and canceled public educational events. He added they are following and implementing guidelines from the Governor, from Altru, Polk County Public Health, the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Center for Disease Control. They are making sure they are getting their information from reputable sources, Ms. Reese did a good job covering how this is a dynamic situation, and they are trying to keep up with all of the information. He commented that he is new to this but staff has been great to work with and they are doing an excellent job. He added the biggest concern was safety of the citizens and staff.

Council member DeMers stated he had skimmed the documents that were sent out, the level of detail and organization gave a lot of information, and it was appreciated. He asked about the recommendation and the closure of public buildings, and if they were going to be holding board and commission meetings. He said staff held a flood and COVID meeting but they should be held separately. Council member DeMers asked about the boards and commissions, how there was a Water & Light Commission Meeting scheduled for the next day, and if that meeting was going to be held. Mr. Keith Mykleseth, General Manager of the Water & Light Department, stated they had been discussing things, how meetings could be held remotely, and the commission will adopt the declaration and start following what the Council and City advise.

Ms. Anderson informed the Council that Ms. Helgeson had been in contact with the Minnesota Library Association, they have suggested closing, and Ms. Helgeson is waiting for direction from the City. She stated many people utilize the library so they don't want to close but will do what is necessary. She asked for guidance and direction on what should happen with the building. She added Mr. Murphy will be returning from California and will be in self-quarantine since it is recommended to do so if coming from that area, he will be available by phone and will be getting a laptop so he is able to work from home.

Council member DeMers asked what the process would be for shutting down the library. Mr. Galstad stated it was just set by the declaration because it set up the policy group to make decisions. Mayor Gander said he values the opinions of the Council for guidance and input, the library is connected to many different resources, and they are giving guidance and get input from Ms. Helgeson on how to move forward. He added there will be many more of these decisions to make such as closing city hall to the public, only allowing people in by appointment, and there are other things to consider. Council President Olstad stated Ms. Helgeson sent an email with information suggesting libraries close. Ms. Anderson told the Council they have stopped all outreach programs, they have canceled all meetings, they starting sanitizing items such as the toys and are not bringing them back out. She said the tax preparers have canceled their services and other national groups have taken action so the City didn't have to such as the national figure skating group canceling the skating shows. She said they are looking for guidance on the library and other buildings. She added they have purchased chromebooks in preparation for staff working remotely.

Mayor Gander asked for the opinion of the Council and if they are on board with closing the library. Council members Riopelle and Johnson said to close the library. Mayor Gander asked about City Hall. Council member DeMers said a staged lock down of City Hall would be fine, he does see it as essential, and its hard to reopen once closed. He suggested limiting access. Ms. Ellis said what makes her nervous is many of those that came to pay their bill are 70 or older and if City Hall stays open they will continue to come. She added how staff works in separate offices and is not prepared to work offsite so if they can close at noon to the public that would allow people to do what they need. Mayor Gander said they are looking at a limited closure and alternate ways for public service.

Mr. Mykleseth said they already sent out information about other ways to pay the water and light bill. Mr. Gorte said Economic Development is coordinating with other agencies on types of financial resources which will be posted. He added at the EDA meeting they talked about how to utilize city resources for businesses so he will be working with Mr. Galstad to make that possible. Mayor Gander stated that he gave an announcement with Mayor Brown on their hope of the economic development departments being the clearing house for businesses to be able to access the federal, state, county, and local programs allowing paychecks to keep coming and to keep businesses standing strong after this. Council member DeMers reminded everyone that not everyone uses the internet and to utilize the local media to get that information out there. Mr. Gorte said employees will be available to answer phones as well. Ms. Anderson stated there was a drop box in the parking lot at City Hall for those that do not use the internet or a payment can be made over the phone.

ADJOURN:

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON, TO ADJOURN THE MARCH 17, 2020 COUNCIL MEETING OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 6:11 P.M.

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

Voting Nay: None.

David Murphy, City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer