

M I N U T E S  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
September 18, 2023  
5:30 PM  
Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Laura Helle, Jason Baskin, Michael Postma, Joyce Poshusta, Geoff Baker and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert, Police Chief David McKichan, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Fire Chief Jim McCoy, Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, City Attorney Craig Byram, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, and City Clerk Ann Kasel

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald, KAUS Radio, Elaine Hansen, Elizabeth Wefel

Mayor King called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Mayor King introduced An Le. Mr. Le stated he is excited to be a part of the Council.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Fischer, approving the agenda. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baker, approving Council minutes from September 5, 2023. Carried.

#### AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

Elizabeth Wefel with the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities presented a recap of the 2023 legislative session and progress for the group. She stated one of the main priorities from the CGMC was to increase local government aid to cities, which was accomplished.

#### CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Postma, approving the consent agenda as follows:

Licenses:

Food: Tienda La Oaxaquena, 801 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE

Temporary Liquor: Austin Area Commission for the Arts on August 28, 2023,

December 16, 2023 and December 22, 2023 at the Paramount Theatre

Claims:

- a. Pre-list of bills
- b. Investment and Credit Card Reports.

Event Applications:

Opioid Awareness Walk on September 22, 2023  
AHS Homecoming Parade on October 6, 2023  
Eclipse the Nature Center 8k race on October 14, 2023  
Peer Power Partners Awareness Walk on October 16, 2023  
Hometown Christmas on November 24, 2023

Carried.

PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

Administrative Services Director Tom Dankert requested the Council set the proposed tax levy and budget for 2024. He stated the levy was proposed to increase 9.93% to a total of \$9,070,000 but the Council took additional reductions, resulting in a 5.66% tax levy at \$8,752,000 for a total budget of \$46,060,105. He also requested the Council set the truth-in-taxation hearing on Wednesday, December 6, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Baker, to set the proposed tax levy at \$8,622,000. Motion failed 4-3 with Council Members Helle, Postma, Fischer and Poshusta voting nay.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Fischer, adopting a resolution setting the 2024 proposed property tax levy at \$8,752,000 and adopting a proposed budget of \$46,060,105 for 2024 taxes. Carried 4-3 with Council Members Baskin, Baker and Council Member-at-Large Austin voting nay.

Public Works Director Steven Lang requested the Council approve the placement of a stop sign on the west bound service drive at the intersection of Oakland Avenue West and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street NW. He stated the sight lines and roadway layout make it a good place for a stop sign.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Poshusta, approving the placement of a stop sign at on the west bound service road at the intersection of Oakland Avenue West and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street NW. Carried.

City Administrator Craig Clark requested the Council increase the sick leave use for fitness from \$1,000 to \$2,000. This is at no cost to the City.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Fischer, increasing the sick leave for fitness maximum amount to \$2,000. Carried.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting a resolution accepting donations to the City of Austin. Carried 7-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang requested the Council authorize setting the fall yard waste program from September 23, 2023 to November 26, 2023 at the Cook farm site. The site would accept leaves, grass and plants.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, setting the fall yard waste program from September 23<sup>rd</sup> to November 26, 2023. Carried.

Public Works Director Steven Lang requested the Council approve change order number 1 to the contract with Rice Lake Construction Group for the waste water treatment plant project. He stated the change orders have been reviewed by SEH, Hormel Foods and the City and all three entities recommend approval.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution approving change order number 1 with Rice Lake Construction Group on the waste water treatment plant project. Carried 6-0 with Council Member Baskin abstaining.

Public Works Director Steven Lang requested the Council approve a grant with the State Aeronautical department for the design of the proposed 10-unit t-hangar at the airport. Mr. Lang stated the grant is in the amount of \$73,305 with a 5% State match and 5% local match.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Poshusta, adopting a resolution approving a grant for the design of an airport t-hangar. Carried 7-0.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly reviewed a fence appeal from Kris Heichel. Ms. Wallace stated the petitioner is requesting a variance from the City requirement that there be a 12.5 foot setback from the side yard for privacy fences. The Planning Commission reviewed the matter at their September 12, 2023 meeting and recommended approval of the matter by a 6-0 vote.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Fischer, approving a fence appeal from Kris Heichel. Carried.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace reviewed a fence appeal from David Lammers. She stated the petitioner is requesting a variance from the fence height over six feet on a fence he has almost already fully completed. The Planning Commission reviewed the matter at their September 12, 2023 meeting and recommended approval of the matter by a 6-0 vote.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the 12.5 foot setback is for visibility purposes. He stated the property is on 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW and 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW and is near a school and the fence may impact visibility. He provided additional photos that were not considered at the Planning Commission meeting.

City Administrator Craig Clark asked if approving the 7-foot fence would create a precedence in

the City and if the metal panels are allowed by code.

Ms. Wallace stated she doesn't believe it will set a precedence since each set of circumstances is individually evaluated. She added that a fence can be constructed with a variety of materials as long as the materials are suitable for outdoor use.

Council Member Baker asked Mr. Lang if he was in favor of granting the variance.

Mr. Lang stated the home is located on some very busy roads and there are concerns for potential issues.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member Poshusta, recommending the Planning Commission review the matter with additional photos at their next meeting. Carried.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly reviewed a variance request from Nick and Megan Crouch for a variance from the accessory structure square footage. The petitioners requested a 600 foot variance over the allowed amount to build a 2400 square foot detached accessory structure. The total lot coverage would be around 6% which is much less than the 40% allowed. The Planning Commission reviewed the matter at their September 12, 2023 meeting and recommended approval of the matter by a 6-0 vote.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, approving a variance request from Nick and Megan Crouch. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Poshusta, granting the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 807 9<sup>th</sup> Street NE, Ramiro Alejo Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Poshusta, granting the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 1407 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW, Janning Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Postma, granting the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 707 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, Dornink Property. Carried.

#### CITIZENS ADDRESSING THE COUNCIL

Elaine Hansen, with the Austin Area Chamber of Commerce, stated she appreciated the City's work to bring down the tax levy.

#### REPORTS

Council Member Postma stated there is a new statewide local housing aid coming from the State.

Council Member Laura Helle stated the Culture and Arts commission will engage in strategic planning this week. She noted Luke Reese with Hormel Nature Center is working on grants to

address the Emerald Ash Borer issue in the City. She also noted it is welcoming week and was excited to see so many community events.

Council Member Helle noted the work anniversaries in September thanked employees for their service.

Moved by Council Member Baker, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adjourning the meeting to October 2, 2023. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:18 p.m.

Approved: October 2, 2023

Mayor: \_\_\_\_\_

City Recorder: \_\_\_\_\_