

**APPROVED MINUTES  
OF THE WORK SESSION  
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS  
TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023 – 5:00 PM**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

*The Work Session of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, April 11, 2023 was called to order by Council President Olstad at 5:00pm.*

**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 Tim Riopelle, Council Members Clarence Vetter, Ben Pokrzywinski, Dale Helms, Brian Larson, and Karen Peterson (5:01pm).*

*Staff Present: Karla Anderson, Finance Director; Jeff Boushee, Fire Chief; Steve Emery, City Engineer; Ron Galstad, City Attorney; Paul Gorte, Economic Development Director; Michael Hedlund, Police Chief, Charlotte Helgeson, Library Director; Reid Huttunen, Parks and Recreation Superintendent; 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. Discussion on Proposed Police Recruit Position – Michael Hedlund**

Chief Hedlund told the Council made some changes were made based on the previous discussions and it was ready to move forward. He reviewed the two circumstances when a recruit would be eligible for the program, when they were either in their last semester of a two-year program or after the completion of their four-year degree and they were in a skills program. He explained an application would have to be submitted, reviewed, and interviewed by the Civil Service, and qualified applicants would have a second interview with the Police Department. He added that all applicants would have to meet the same seven requirements as a police officer including successfully completing their education and skills, successfully pass the MN POST License test, pass a background check, pass the pre-employment medical and psychological exams, pass the physical agility testing program, and officially be approved by the City Council. He stated that they would be paid \$400 which would be a forgivable loan and would have to be paid back if they left before they worked for the department for less than two years. He asked if there were any questions.

Council member Helms asked if anyone had reached out that was interested in the program. Chief Hedlund said no but that they had not advertised the program either because it had not been finalized. Discussion followed about how this process had been reviewed by the Civil Service, the Human Resource Department, and by Mr. Galstad, modifications had been made, and how depending on which program they were in they would receive the payment for 10 weeks but could be up to 16 weeks. Council member Pokrzywinski asked if the repayment of the loan would be prorated. Discussion followed about prorating the forgivable loan.

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

## **2. Police Department Climate Assessment Summary – David Murphy**

Council President Olstad thanked the officers and staff that had gone through the process, he supported the Chief, they would be going to move forward together, anyone that wanted to reach out to have a conversation should, and they had appreciated the feedback they had received. He added they wanted the department to be successful. Mayor Gander stated he also fully supported the Chief, he had the deepest respect for the police officers, and it was painful to think there was a divide in the department. He commented how they had to be ready for maximum effectiveness and if any of them had ideas to reach out to meet with him and Council President Olstad. He said they were compiling the information, they would continue to work through this, he was thankful where they currently were, and wanted to make it a great department for current employees and for those looking for employment. Council President Olstad stated they were not done with this process, they were continuing to move forward, and they would be addressing issues, and invited anyone that wanted to talk to reach out.

Mr. Murphy stated they had received information about dissatisfaction in the department, so an assessment was done on the working conditions. He said 19 staff members were interviewed, a summary was put together, and presented to the department where all but two employees were able to attend. He reviewed the four takeaways from the process that included being on the right track but needing everyone to be united, there would be respectful workplace training, a rotation would need to be determined for certain assignments within the department, and the amount of time spent in the office or in dispatch versus patrolling was going to be reviewed. He said next steps included identifying a company for training for a respectful workplace, review of rules and responses, and determine a course of action to rotate positions.

Chief Hedlund thanked those that participated in the process, for the support, and how they had a very talented group working in the police department. Council member Larson thanked those who participated in the process, he liked how there were four take aways, and asked to have a follow-up so they could measure improvements. Mayor Gander suggested setting up a follow-up in three to six months.

## **3. Update on the LaFave Park Project – Steve Emery**

Mr. Emery informed the Council they had been working on the LaFave Park project. He reviewed some of the project that included a mill and overlay, there would be a picnic shelter, old pavement would be closed off, and the proposed parking area. He said they would be relocating the kayak launch and how there would be curb and gutter in the parking lot, but the parking area would remain as gravel, it would have drive over curb so people could access an additional parking area, and posts could be used to define the edge of the parking area. He continued saying there was going to be a concrete seating area, solar lights, and a sidewalk was going to be added down to the boat ramp. He said there were some areas that they could plant native grasses and how there were some options of what native grasses could be planted, how there was some maintenance with the grass the first couple years, but once established it could eventually be maintenance free. He asked for feedback on what grasses to plant, the gravel trail, and the parking area.

Mr. Huttunen asked the Council about the overflow parking area and if it should remain gravel or if they should plant grass. He asked what native grasses should be planted and with the initial concept there were posts to designate areas to drive, he was in favor of the posts, but there may be push back from the community members that like to drive to certain fishing spots. Council member Larson suggested the

parking area should stay gravel and see how things go. He added that native grasses may be hard to get started but once established the root system could help stabilize the bank and he was in favor of using posts to designate the driving areas. He asked if speed bumps would be included on the street that will be milled and overlaid because the vehicles may be going fast through this recreational area and how it can be tough to launch a boat into the river because of the current so whatever could be done to be able to launch in calmer waters would help. Mr. Emery said they were cutting the boat ramps in to help with that.

Mayor Gander said he would like to see the parking area left as gravel, it may need to expand in the future, and how they would need to plan to mow at least once a year to help keep the number of trees down. Council Vice-President Riopelle also suggested keeping the parking area as gravel and how it may need to be dragged from time to time. Council member Pokrzywinski asked about the area where the roads meet and if anything could be done for traffic control. Discussion followed about how there was a yield sign up, how staff would look into widening the road under the train bridge, patch potholes, and look into traffic control for the area.

#### **4. Discussion on Outdoor Rink Project – Reid Huttunen**

Mr. Huttunen thanked Mr. Emery and Widseth for the work they had done for this project and Mr. Judd Stauss for helping set up a budget for the project. He explained there were two options, one with grass, and one with a concrete slab. He stated the boards would need to be altered, the area needed to be prepared, the grass option was estimated at \$175,000 with the concrete slab option being estimated at \$267,000. He added there were items that were not included in the estimate because they needed to determine what would need to happen with the sanitary sewer and manhole that were in the area and lighting for the rink was also not included. He asked for questions.

Mr. Stauss told the Council that the Blue Line Club would like to take the lead on this project but would need financial help from the City, the donated boards helped, but they would still need help with the project. Mr. Mike Kolstoe commented they were very committed to this project, it was a great opportunity, and could enhance an amenity in the city. He added they would need help with the project and how there could be a possibility it would be ready for winter. Discussion followed about what the Blue Line Club was prepared to do for the project, how they would have a meeting the following week to discuss this project, the feedback received preferred the concrete slab option, if there were possible funding sources the City could use towards this project, and with a concrete slab it could be used year round. Mr. Huttunen told the Council a concrete slab would make it easier to make ice because once it froze, they could start building ice and use less water in the process.

Council member Larson said they would need to look at possible funding sources, but this was a great project. Council member Vetter asked how high the retaining wall would have to be and if the sidewalk would be sloped. He added that this rink would not have the same feel as Stauss Park. Mr. Huttunen said that was a valuable concern, the rink would be open and available like at Stauss Park, he did not want to close any rinks, but one of his biggest concerns was maintaining all three rinks. Council member Vetter suggested adding outdoor seating and another door to get on the rink by the road. Council member Helms said he was also concerned about the Stauss Park rink being closed. Discussion followed about how it was tracked who used the different rinks, how Nash Park typically had ages 6 to 14, Stauss Park typically had high school and college aged, which was why if they were already driving, they could drive to another location, and there was a concern about the ability to maintain the outdoor rinks because of other priorities Parks staff were tasked with.

Council member Riopelle said this outdoor rink may open time at the indoor rinks for open skating. Mr. Kolstoe said they had not talked about scheduling practices on the outdoor rink but opening skating could be publicized for the outdoor rink. Mr. Emery commented that the proposed retaining wall would be about two feet and there may be a step because the slope might be too big of an increase. Council member Pokrzywinski asked about using the outdoor rink for practices. Mr. Stauss said it was not planned to include the markings, benches would be added, and practices outdoor could be possible. Council member Peterson said she was concerned about the timing of this along with the other projects they were planning with the arenas and would like to know what kind of funding would be coming from the Blue Line Club before moving forward. Discussion followed about how the concrete slab option could be used for a variety of activities throughout the year. Council President Olstad asked for this item to come back to the next work session for more discussion.

This item will be brought back to the next work session.

### **5. Consider the Outdoor Fitness Court Grant Initiative – Reid Huttunen**

Mr. Huttunen said this item had been discussed before but now there was an additional partner which was Blue Cross Blue Shield. He said they were trying to build 20 of the outdoor fitness courts in the next two years. He explained it was a 40 foot by 40 foot pad and they provided the equipment which required a local commitment. He stated they would work with the City to find a location and the local match was \$50,000 up to \$75,000 and asked if there was interest in pursuing this. He told the Council they had looked at cell phone data, so they were already looking at the Sherlock Park area and asked for comments. Council member Larson said he would like to prioritize the outdoor rink over this project. Mayor Gander asked how much it would be utilized, if there was no local match he would consider it, but at this time he did not see this as a good investment. Council President said he agreed and was not in favor of this project at this time.

### **6. Update from Ad Hoc Finance Committee – Clarence Vetter**

Council member Vetter said the committee had met a number of times, they reviewed revenues, if anything could be adjusted, and reviewed expenses along with contracted services. He said some changes were being made to get everyone on the same contracts, but the group was struggling and needed more direction from the Council and what levy increase they wanted to see. He asked if it would be a 3% or 5% increase, what the make-up of it would be, if positions would be cut, or if services should be cut. He added they looked at positions, considered if some safe routes to school should now be cleared by the property owners, and asked what the Council was comfortable cutting or how the group should move forward.

Council President Olstad asked about what the regional library system was because it had been included in the information. Ms. Helgeson said it was looked at every few years, she talked with the director of the system, and if the City decided to join they would lose programs, staffing, and have to cut hours. She said the library building would be taken care of by the City but everything else would be under the regional system including all special collections which the library had. She added that they would not receive any rural funding so there was not a benefit for the library. Discussion followed about how there would be a decline in services, the collection would be a part of the regional system, residents would be allowed to use additional libraries that were also a part of the regional system, how the regional system would request funds from the City, and the employees would be a part of the regional system but it would depend on the City if the library director would remain a department head or not. Ms. Helgeson said it would take six to nine months to negotiate a contract with the regional system. Council President Olstad asked how much

services would be cut. Ms. Helgeson said services would be cut by 30% or up to 50% and how they currently use the East Grand Forks Library as an example of how a library should be run.

Council member Vetter stated that the committee had talked about many things. Discussion followed about how Polk County Dispatch would need more staff before they could take on dispatching for the City, how the staff was being challenged on how to do things differently, how contracted services were reviewed including attorney and engineering fees, and again how the committee needed direction. Council member Vetter said if they only wanted to see a 5% increase that would help give direction. Mayor Gander said the last increase was 10%, valuations had gone up, 5% could be the target and they should be mindful that everyone was getting pinched. Council member Larson said 5% was a good goal, it would be a challenge to get there, and how they would need to cut operating expenses and not just one-time expenses. He said there could be cuts to services, but they would need to be careful on what was cut because if they go too far people won't want to live here. Council member Riopelle said they would have a better idea once they complete labor negotiations but he liked 5%. Discussion followed about how it will be challenging process. Council member Vetter thanked the Council for their comments.

**ADJOURN:**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO ADJOURN THE APRIL 11, 2023 WORK SESSION OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 6:34 PM.**

*Voting Aye: Peterson, Vetter, Pokrzywinski, Riopelle, Helms, Olstad, and Larson.*

*Voting Nay: None.*

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David Murphy, City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer