

**APPROVED MINUTES
OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2023 – 5:00 PM**

CALL TO ORDER:

The Work Session of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, September 12, 2023 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 Tim Riopelle, Council Members Clarence Vetter, Ben Pokrzywinski, Dale Helms, Brian Larson, and Karen Peterson.

Staff Present: Karla Anderson, Finance Director; Jeff Boushee, Fire Chief; Nancy Ellis, City Planner; Steve Emery, City Engineer; Ron Galstad, City Attorney; Paul Gorte, Economic Development Director; Michael Hedlund, Police Chief, Charlotte Helgeson, Library Director; Reid Huttunen, City Administrator; Jeremy King, Interim Parks & Recreation Superintendent; Keith Mykleseth, Water and Light General Manager; and Jason Stordahl, Public Works Director.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:

The Council President Determined a Quorum was present.

1. 2050 Transportation Plan Street & Highway Element Update – Teri Kouba

Ms. Kouba stated she was attending the meeting along with the consultant, Mr. Jason Carbee, to give an update on the plan and they were hoping to have the plan adopted by the end of the year. Mr. Carbee said they would review the State of Good Repair plan, what that meant, travel model results, and a vision plan based on input they had received. He reminded the Council there was a range of different project and strategy types they were trying to use in the plan that would focus on operations, safety, widening of corridors, adding new streets and crossings, and paving gravel roads.

Mr. Carbee continued with the model run, it included projects that were committed, but no other projects beyond the short term, and how there was growth in East Grand Forks along the Highway 2 Corridor. He said based on the needs identified, safety issues, and operations a vision plan was developed. Ms. Kouba said they also were reviewing intersections and addition of railroad crossings. Mr. Carbee said they took the range of alternatives and put them into the travel module, there were three different versions, one with two bridges, one with just a south end bridge, and one with just a Merrifield bridge. He started with the travel module with both bridges which showed significant decreases in traffic volume along 4th Street, Cherry Street, and Belmont Road. He said there was also a decrease on Demers Avenue into East Grand Forks but an increase in areas where people would get to a south end bridge.

Mr. Carbee moved on to the second option with just the Merrifield Bridge and how there was some decreases in some of the same corridors but not as a significant decrease to traffic on the Point Bridge as compared to the previous module. He stated with a neighborhood bridge there was more of a difference

compared to just have Merrifield Bridge but again it did not have the same impact as the addition of both bridges. He reminded the Council that this plan was federally required, they needed to review what the funding sources were including local funding sources, the pavement management plan done by both cities, and determine the funding that was needed to maintain the system. He said this would be a plan that would focus on maintaining the current infrastructure, other funding sources such as grants were available, but the majority of projects would try to keep the system in a state of good repair. He reviewed the list of projects for East Grand Forks which included intersection improvements at Bygland Road and Rhinehart Drive, intersection improvements at River Road and 12th Ave NW and 17th Street NW, and addressing a lot of needs in the industrial park. Ms. Kouba asked if they were getting things right or if things needed to be re-evaluated before they completed the final plan.

Council member Larson asked about the intersection at Bygland Road and Rhinehart Drive and if it should be broader to address different intersections along Bygland Road. Ms. Kouba said that was something they could include because there were two other intersections listed in the Bygland Road study so it could be brought to the Technical Advisory Committee to move things forward. Ms. Ellis reminded the Council the Safe Streets and Roads for All study was going to be started, items included in the plan could then be included in the implementation plan, and it would allow the City to qualify for federal funding without having it included in the long range transportation plan. Ms. Kouba said they would have a list of projects that were fiscally constrained and another list of projects so when funding became available, they would be able to move forward with them. She added the Technical Advisory Committee would be reviewing the information because they were the steering committee for this process. She then asked for questions, comments, or input.

Council member Helms asked about the intersection by the Point Bridge and if the stoplights would be replaced with a round-a-bout. Ms. Ellis said that had been included in the Bygland Road study. Ms. Kouba said they would take suggestions to see if additional studies needed to be completed. Mayor Gander asked if there was a study that included the intersection of 17th Street NW and River Road. Ms. Kouba said it was towards the top of the project list, it was included in the plan, and it would help address safety issues. Mr. Carbee reviewed what would be included in the plan and what would be included in the draft. He informed everyone there would be an open house on September 21st from 4pm to 6pm at the River Cinema and the plan should be adopted by the end of the year. Ms. Kouba said if people were not able to attend the open house, they could still give input online at the project website. There were no other questions.

This item will be brought back to a future meeting.

2. Review & Consider Increase to Building Permit Fees for 2024 – Nancy Ellis

Ms. Ellis stated the Finance Committee reviewed and considered many different things such as combining maintenance agreements, how services were provided, and looked at revenue sources as well as expenses. She said the building permit fees had not been changed for 10 years and there was going to be a review to consider to hire a full time person or continue with contracted services but then COVID happened which delayed things. She said it was a good time to review the fees and set the plan to review the fees every three to five years. She explained they were following the State standards for buildable values and reviewed the charges that were based on buildable value. She said the amount being paid for permits did not meet the costs of administering the permits so different options were developed for the Council to consider with the largest option increasing fees by 25%.

Ms. Ellis said she did not want to wait 10 years to review fees again but also did not want to increase fees so people were not obtaining them for projects because of the additional costs for enforcement. She recommended moving forward with having a \$45 flat rate and the \$9 increase which would be a 20% increase to fees. She told the Council new construction fees were based on the buildable value that the State set per square foot and set the plan review fees. She said a lot of information had been provided about the rates and the building inspection group also provided information. She stated new construction was based on square footage, if there was a basement, and it was determined by cost per square foot. She reviewed an example using the current fees, the cost of the example based on the State fees, and how the City has set costs on a five-year weighted average but building costs had increased. She stated there were three options for the Council to consider for new construction and suggested moving forward with the City's weighted average.

She reminded the Council the building inspectors collect all the planning review fees and they received half of the permit fees. She added it would not be a noticeable difference to the budget, it would bring in approximately an additional \$10,000 per year, and they would be covering costs of the service. She told the Council the majority of the fees come from remodels and asked for questions. She informed the Council it was difficult finding people to fill the building inspector positions, the fees helped pay the building permit technician's salary, and the process was more than before. She stated there were two other types of permits for excavation and working in the right-of-way. She said the right-of-way permit took more time because staff had to determine where the City's utilities were, so they wanted to set that at \$100 and increase the excavation permit to either \$50 or \$55.

Council member Pokrzywinski said he had been a part of the process of trying to sell a home, the previous owner had not gotten a permit for a change, and asked Ms. Ellis to outline the consequences of not getting permits. Ms. Ellis said when a permit was not taken out, they were not able to use staff or the Minnesota Department of Labor to figure out the situation without it costing the homeowner, and they were trying to protect residents from poor work or having a fence located in the right-of-way. She stated they wanted to make sure they were out and available to make sure things were done upfront instead of trying to figure things out once a project was completed. Discussion followed about how getting permits ensures what was being done was the current legal standards and how some permits involve many different departments which took more time. Council President Olstad said to move forward with the \$45 flat fee, the additional \$9 increase, and weighted average. Ms. Ellis stated that would be her recommendation and it would take effect on January 1, 2024. There were no other questions.

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

3. Consider Motor Grader Rentals for 2023-2024 Winter Season – Jason Stordahl

Mr. Stordahl told the Council the City usually rented one motor grader each winter season, but they were requesting to rent two because one of the motor graders needed a transmission and it was not certain the repair would be completed in time for the winter season. He explained they requested quotes from three companies for the two rentals, Zielger Cat could not get two machines, Butler Machinery was not sure they could get two machines but submitted a quote for \$7,500 per month plus \$70 per hour after the allotted 50 hours per month, and RDO Equipment said they could get two machines and would charge \$6,300 per month plus \$65 per hour after the first 250 hours. He stated it was about a 5% increase from the previous year. He added if the City's motor grader was repaired and could be used they would be allowed to return one of the rentals and the fee would be pro-rated. He recommended

leasing two motor graders from RDO Equipment.

Council member Pokrzywinski asked if they were ordering a new transmission or fixing the current transmission. Mr. Stordahl said it would be a rebuilt transmission that would be ordered, and it was back ordered. He explained they would have to ship the motor grader to a facility to complete the repair and added there could also be a shipping costs for the rented motor graders. Council member Pokrzywinski asked if the repair had been budgeted for. Mr. Stordahl stated a certain amount was budgeted for repairs each year but not specifically for this repair which would be brought back before the Council. Council member Helms asked what year the motor grader was and if there would be more to repair. Mr. Stordahl said he would be bringing lots of information to a meeting regarding the transmission repair before anything was done.

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

4. Discussion on Snow Removal along Bygland Road and 13th Street SE – Jeremy King

Mr. King said this item had come from the Finance Committee when looking for cost savings. He explained that the Parks Department spent approximately 8 hours cleaning the sidewalks along Bygland Road and 13th Street SE, the question was asked if this practice should continue, and if not, staff could prioritize other areas for snow removal. He stated there was no major budget impact but there would be savings on staff time, fuel, and use of equipment. He asked for feedback from the Council and did not have a recommendation at this time. He reviewed the documentation that was included in the packet, reviewed the history of when the sidewalks were installed, and how it was determined that the City would maintain both sidewalks. He added if there was a change and the City was no longer maintaining the sidewalks it was a good opportunity to inform the property owners about what to expect this winter. He told the Council the City owned less property along the routes now compared to when the sidewalks were put in and they would need to decide if they wanted to use the time savings in other areas.

Mayor Gander stated he remembered when the sidewalk was put in, the City would be taking care of snow removal to make it easier for residents to accept it, and asked if the maintenance of the sidewalks in this area be reverted back to the city wide policy for the rest of the City. Mr. King said there was no time limit given on how long the City would clear the sidewalk, the sidewalks in the back yards could be more of a challenge for some of the property owners to keep clear, and there were a couple different options that could be considered. He added there was some property still owned by the City that would have to be maintained. Council member Pokrzywinski said they start by the fire department and head towards the schools. He asked if they could cross by Orton's and going back north because the snow did not get moved by the Crestwood area and if they would be assessed. Ms. Ellis stated the Crestwood area had a homeowners association that hired snow to be removed and were told they needed to remove snow from the sidewalks. Mr. King said the sidewalks along the VFW Arena and frisbee golf course would be the City's responsibility, the City had used the McBrotter area as a snow dump and kept the sidewalks cleared but that area was developing so it would no longer be used to dump snow so they could also consider turning over the sidewalk maintenance.

Mr. Huttunen told the Council there were some inconsistencies when applying the policy, before the townhomes were built it was city property and the City was maintaining the sidewalks, once the townhomes were built it was then the property owners' responsibility to clear the snow. He added this also happened with the large piece of property to the south of the townhomes but across the street the City sold property but had continued to move the snow on the sidewalks. He stated it was his

understanding the City had made the commitment to move the snow from the side and back yards along the east side of Bygland Road, additional sidewalk along 13th Street was cleared as the sidewalks were added, and by removing this work load it would allow staff to get to other amenities such as clearing the trails and working on outdoor rinks. Council President Olstad asked about additional maps and suggestions. Mr. King stated if the Council wanted staff to spend the time, they could come forward with a strong recommendation. Mayor Gander said to review the original commitment and to consider if the sidewalk seemed more like a rec trails.

Council member Larson asked why this job was tasked to the Parks and Recreation Department. Mr. Huttunen said all city sidewalks had fallen under Park and Recreation possibly based on equipment. Mr. King commented that all of the Public Works equipment would be too large to fit on the sidewalks. Ms. Ellis told the Council about the installation of the sidewalks, how there was a concern about snow removal that were in people's back yards so the City had agreed to remove snow, snow removal was not the same on the other side of the street, and due to federal dollars being a part of the project it had to be maintained but did not have to be done by the City. She added that over time the City had taken on more snow removal, she was not sure why, and how transit was also moving snow in certain areas. Council member Larson asked what was available for enforcement if someone did not clear their sidewalk. Mr. King read part of the ordinance that did allow for assessing the cost of clearing sidewalks that were not cleared by the property owners. Council member Helms said he understood about the backyards but they need to be careful, make sure they were fair, and make sure students could get to school. Mayor Gander said they would need solid reasoning on the decisions that were made.

This item will be brought back to a future meeting.

5. Discussion on 2024 Preliminary Budget – Karla Anderson

Ms. Anderson reminded the Council that things were still changing, when the information had been sent out there was a deficit of \$370,307, a change was made, so the deficit was now at \$369,000. She told the Council the preliminary levy had to be approved by the end of September, they could vote on it at the next meeting, or if needed a special meeting could be held. She stated an additional \$25,000 had been added to expenses for the rental of the additional grader and to break even the levy would need to be set at 11%. She asked for suggestions. Council President Olstad said they can always go down and suggested setting the preliminary at 11% and work things back down. Mayor Gander commented it was a reasonable approach. Council member Larson asked if there was any history of starting more aggressive with the preliminary levy and if they were successful. Discussion followed about how they did not remember setting it lower before, the Mayor said he would veto anything over a 5% levy increase for the final levy, and they had always worked at lowering the levy each year.

Ms. Anderson reminded the Council they could utilize some of the fund balance, the finance committee had reviewed everything, and the only place to cut would be to personnel. She stated they did not use a mill system so it was difficult to determine how homes would be affected so if they used 10% with the goal of getting the levy down to a 5% increase they could let people know it would be half. Mayor Gander said they were still waiting on some numbers and due to unforeseen issues so they might want to leave the preliminary levy a little higher. Council member Helms asked when the final budget needed to be approved. Ms. Anderson said the final budget had to be approved by the end of December and asked what percentage should be included on the resolution for the next meeting. Council President Olstad suggested leaving it blank and the Council could discuss and decide at the next meeting.

ADJOURN:

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, TO ADJOURN THE SEPTEMBER 12, 2023 WORK SESSION OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 6:11 P.M.

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

Voting Nay: None.

Megan Nelson, City Clerk