

**APPROVED MINUTES
OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2023 – 5:00 PM**

CALL TO ORDER:

The Work Session of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, November 14, 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, Parks and Recreation Superintendent; Keith Mykleseth, Water and Light General Manager; Megan Nelson, City Clerk; and Jason Stordahl, Public Works Director.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:

The Council President Determined a Quorum was present.

1. Update on Draft Street & Highway Element of Transportation Plan – Teri Kouba

Ms. Kouba informed the Council that Mr. Jason Carbee was joining them online who was the consultant on the plan. She explained the process was getting close to the adoption of the plan, they would review updates since this was last brought forward and let Mr. Carbee start the review. Mr. Carbee said this would be a high-level overview, there were 10 chapters of the plan, the plan included street and highway strategies, the types of projects to be included, state of good repair, improvements to existing corridors, new connects, new bridge crossings, and paving gravel roads. He reviewed the alternatives that were considered and how they looked at operations and safety improvements. He stated they also conducted a financial analysis of the federal, state, and local funding sources by using a conservative approach to determine what was physically constrained or what could reasonably be afforded. He said two of the main items were to maintain the current system and safety, so the plan was for a state of good repair on both sides of the river.

Mr. Carbee said for East Grand Forks they were able to identify projects to include improving safety at the intersection of Bygland Road and Rhinehart Drive, the reconstruction of 10th Street NE, and reviewed the long term projects utilizing federal subtarget funds. He said they coordinated with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) on the State routes, the proposed treatments, and it would keep the system in a state of good repair. He added they were looking to have the plan adopted by the end of the year and asked Ms. Kouba if she had any additional comments. Ms. Kouba told the Council the plan information was reviewed with the Planning Commission, the adoption of the plan was required by the ordinance, a public hearing was required, and the plan would be adopted following the public hearing.

Ms. Ellis asked if they could inform the Council what the illustrative projects were. Ms. Kouba said Grand Forks wanted to include the bridge project in the illustrative project with urban grant funding. She said they had asked both cities if there were any other illustrative projects that should be included and were given the list of the south end city bridge, the Merrifield bridge, Rhinehart Drive south of 13th Street, River Road north of 23rd Street, and a back road between the schools on the south end of the city. She said all of the projects were included on the alternative list and they would be able to pull any of them into the plan. She added they would let them know of any changes when this was brought forward again and asked if there were any other suggestions.

Council President Olstad asked about 10th Street NE and if there was anything else included from the industrial park study. Ms. Kouba said most of the suggested paving was based on the study of what was needed in the industrial park area, there were some projects included that were further south, and they were making sure connections were being made. Mayor Gander asked if the full study of the industrial park was completed and if they could get the highlights of the study. Council member Larson said they should make sure that 11th Avenue NE was also included because of the improvements that were needed. Ms. Kouba said it was included in the long-term plan, things were always being reviewed, and could be included. There were no other suggestions.

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

2. Resident Request to Discuss Snow Removal Along Bygland Road – Reid Huttunen & Jeremy King

Mr. Huttunen stated the packet included a letter from Ms. Jennifer Boushee and a petition that had been signed by residents that were affected by the Council's decision not to move snow from the sidewalks on the west side of Bygland Road. He added some of those residents were at the meeting to address the Council about the decision. Council President Olstad asked the residents to state their name and address.

Ms. Jennifer Boushee, 1214 Bygland Road, stated they all lived there when the sidewalks were installed and were promised the sidewalks would be maintained by the City like it was on the east side. She said they did not have a letter or paperwork stating that promise but they felt that this was unfair. She explained she watched them come down the east side and it did not make sense they would not continue to clear the sidewalk. She added some of the houses did not face Bygland Road so it was difficult for them to get out and clear the snow or move snow following the plows clearing the streets. She said Mr. King informed her the letter sent to the east side property owners had it in writing the City would maintain the sidewalk, they did not have proof, but they all remember being promised the sidewalk would be maintained and just want what was fair.

Mr. King said the change in snow removal was not a huge cost savings but was a time saver. He explained since they were a smaller department, any time after a snow event it could take four hours clear that stretch of sidewalk, so staff time could be used in other areas of recreation. He added there would be less wear and tear on the equipment and staff was not able to come across anything that stated the west side property owners were promised the sidewalk would be maintained by the City like it stated in the letter to those that lived on the east side of Bygland Road. Council President Olstad asked about time savings. Mr. King stated staff would be able to get to clearing the greenway trails faster or spend time at the outdoor rinks. He said there was a comment about snowplows and how they could reduce speeds when plowing and try to pull snow sooner from the berms allowing for more capacity. Ms. Boushee said Bygland Road was different than other roads, the sidewalk was to benefit kids, and was not installed for their benefit. Mayor

Gander commented that staff would defend the Council's position because they had to follow the direction given. He added this was a unique situation and could be reconsidered but reminded everyone again city staff was carrying out the Council's decision.

Rhonda Hollarn, 1423 Greenway Blvd SE, told the Council she had concerns about clearing the snow at the crosswalk because the city equipment had a difficult time getting through. She said she was willing to do her share, but the other side of the street did not need to move the snow from the intersection. She added not many kids walked in the winter months. Ms. Boushee commented the townhome property owners did not know how they would have to clear the sidewalk because it was in their backyards. Mr. Huttunen stated that the intersection was discussed by staff and the snow would be pulled more frequently by Public Works at that intersection.

Kristi Swanson, 1034 Bygland Rd SE, stated she met with the Mayor in September, she would have 406 feet of sidewalk to clear, and the sidewalk was only five feet away from the street. She said there were areas where there was a lot more space between the street and sidewalk, they would have to walk their snowblower down the street to get to the sidewalk, and how they would have to deal with what the plows push from the streets. Mayor Gander asked them to share pictures. Ms. Swanson added the kids should be safe, but no kids walked in the winter.

Ms. Ellis reminded everyone how the City needed to be ADA compliant in order to receive funding, the sidewalks were not just for kids but for everyone. Ms. Swanson stated they did not have proof, but they all remember being promised the sidewalk would be cleared by the City, they did not have access to Bygland, and again it wasn't just the snow but what the plows pushed up because at times city employees even had issues clearing the sidewalks. Council member Vetter said a solution might be not clearing Bygland Road to the curbs because it was such a wide road. Discussion followed about how snow from the plows could still end up on the sidewalks, how there were other areas in town where the sidewalks were right next to the street, and those property owners cleared their own sidewalks.

Council member Helms said he voted no for other reasons, he did not doubt they were promised about snow removal, but other residents had the same issue so they could not have it both ways. He stated everyone should clear their own sidewalks because he looked at the City as a whole. Mayor Gander stated staff looked through everything and did not find a paper trail where it stated the City would maintain sidewalks on the west side of Bygland Road but it could still be discussed. Council member Larson said he believed they were promised, and it bothered him there was a break in trust. He said they could be creative and see if this would get voted on again. Council President Olstad said that was why he asked to have this brought back because it was beneficial to discuss. Mr. Huttunen reviewed how the Council approved the motion to stop moving snow, one of the council members on the prevailing side had to request to bring this item back, and they would need direction from the Council otherwise the current decision would stand. Council President Olstad said more discussion was needed and asked staff to bring back ideas to the next work session. Discussion followed about staffing levels, how it had been difficult to fill the seasonal position, this year the Parks Department was better staffed, so it could be a year-by-year issue.

Council member Pokrzywinski said it was not fair for the City to clean the sidewalks and asked if there were areas that could be exempt from the requirements from the sidewalk ordinance. Ms. Ellis said anything could be put in an ordinance, the City would receive complaints if certain areas were exempt, there would still be a need to add sidewalks, and some sidewalks were put in with funding so it eliminated costs of the sidewalks but maintenance would always be an issue. Council member Pokrzywinski asked

if the snow from the street could be pushed all to one side. Mr. Stordahl said they could try different things, but it could take longer to get the snow removed. Ms. Peterson said the Ad Hoc Committee worked to find cost-saving measures, this was discussed, and the decision was made based on the documentation. She added they were not trying to put different groups against each other but the paper trail which got things to this point. Council President Olstad asked to have ideas brought back to the next work session.

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

3. Consider Station 2 Assessment & Renovation – Jeff Boushee

Chief Boushee said the assessment for Fire Station 2 was received and the supporting documentation had been included in the packet. He reviewed how the station was built in 1977 and was the oldest building in the city that had not been renovated. He explained the building was vital to operations, it housed one full-time employee and gave them the ability to reach end of the city within four minutes which helped with insurance rates. He added the station was in a very good location and a biggest reason for this was for gender equality because it was a matter of when there would be a woman hired because one applied for the paid-on call position.

Council President Olstad asked for the main points of the assessment. Mr. Brent Dammann said the assessment did not include any roof work but most of the work was for mechanical and architectural to address accessibility issues in the building. Mr. Josh Lunski said the sanitary sewer has started to fail so that would need to be replaced in the near future. Mr. Jeff Blake told the Council much of the electrical panel and lighting was original from 1977 and updates would make it more efficient. Mr. Dammann said it was a sound building but would need upkeep and could be used for another 50 years. Council member Vetter asked if the improvements included a decontamination washroom. Chief Boushee said the proposed changes did not include that washroom.

Council member Larson thanked them for the work done and asked if the work could be completed in phases. Chief Boushee said he had worked with Mr. Huttunen and Ms. Anderson about the project and informed the Council the roof work was scheduled to be done in 2027. Ms. Anderson explained how the work could be done in phases and funding could be used over a couple of years with a project starting later in one year and being completed in the next year. Council Vice-President Riopelle asked if there were grants available. Chief Boushee said there was not much available for structures. Discussion followed about staff would continue to look for grants and the difference between the partial and full reconstruction was electrical projects. Council member Larson asked what would need to change to the floor plan. Mr. Dammann said the shower room needed ADA improvements, some of the spaces would need to be reconfigured to allow for single user spaces and possible individual sleeping quarters. Discussion followed about how the Fire Department was planning for more growth and how the request was looking to move forward with plans.

Council President Olstad said this project could tie up the building maintenance fund for a couple years. Mr. Huttunen said the department heads discussed this, there were no immediate projects, but things did pop up. Ms. Ellis reminded the Council the plans and specifications were being prepared and the cost might be closer to \$800,000 and they should be getting a price estimate once the plans were completed. Mr. Mykleseth reminded the Council there would be rebates available to help with the lighting project at the fire station. Discussion followed about how the project was needed but funding still needed to be determined before dedicating the building maintenance funds to this one project for a couple of years.

This item will be brought back to a future meeting.

4. Review of Lease Agreements for City Hall Offices – Nancy Ellis

Ms. Ellis told the Council the lease agreements with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) with Tri-County Probation were expiring. She suggested a modest increase of five cents per square foot to the MPO agreement based on comparable office space, commercial spaces were being rented for \$13 up to \$17 per square foot, the higher rates were for more noticeable locations or brand new buildings and were not government entities so they were where they needed to be. She added she had talked with Tri-County Corrections and they were comfortable with a 50 cent per square foot increase each year of the contract. She stated she was trying to get Corrections the same rates as the MPO and the leases would be for a two year term. She asked for questions, there were none.

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

5. Review of Lease Agreement for Infill Building – Paul Gorte

Mr. Gorte said there was 3,420 square feet leased to Galstad, Jensen, and McCann in the Infill Building. He explained years ago the EDA developed a plan to get the rental rates up to market rate, based on previous years they were suggesting a 25-cent rate increase per year over the five year lease agreement, and added the Council may want to discuss the rates. Council member Larson said there was a difference in rental rates between downtown and city hall and asked why there was such a difference. Mr. Gorte said it was because of how things were set up in 2015 and it might not be sufficient. Council member Larson asked to have another survey done to show the disparity between the rental rates. Discussion followed about the information should be brought to the next work session for further discussion, the lease was expired at the end of the month, and it should be done right.

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

6. Consider Easement for Encroachment – Ron Galstad

Mr. Galstad explained the Blue Moose replaced their HVAC system, it would encroach on city property, there were discussions with staff about the location of the system, and how they may need to be notified to remove the system in a very short time in an emergency situation. He said a survey was done showing all the encroachments. Council member Pokrzywinski asked if this would have to be removed every time it floods. Mr. Stordahl it would not have to be removed every time but in certain circumstances which were explained to the Blue Moose prior to the installation of system. There were no other questions.

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

7. Discussion on Police Department Recruitment and Retention Bonuses – Reid Huttunen

Mr. Huttunen reminded the Council they had approved two Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for the recruitment of new officers and the retention of existing officers. He stated both MOUs were only for one year, during negotiations it was being asked if the MOUs were going to be continued, so this was brought before the Council for consideration. He informed the Council the second payment for the retention bonuses scheduled to be paid in January of 2024 was already included in the proposed 2024 budget so additional funds would be needed if the programs continued. He asked for questions and

feedback.

Council member Helms asked if the programs worked. Chief Hedlund said it was difficult to say but believed it helped, they were currently fully staffed with the school resource officer not being filled, that hadn't happened for some time, so he thought it helped. He added they had only lost one officer in over a year so he thought the retention bonuses also had an effect, but some might wait to see what happened with the MOUs and negotiations. He commented that many of the officers were from the area but might make decisions based on what happens in negotiations. He added he was shocked they were not recommended for a pay grade increase because of how many other places pay their officers more than what was paid in East Grand Forks.

Council member Pokrzywinski asked if this would be reviewed every year and included in the budget every year. Chief Hedlund said he thought the pay study would have increased the pay to where the MOUs were not needed but that was not the case and he would like to see it included with the two year contract to help retain staff. He added the recruitment bonus costs were relatively small but if they lost six people, it would become more significant costs. Mr. Schrage said this was a bandaid until negotiations, the MOUs were clearly separate from the contracts, and it was fair to address it annually. Council President Olstad said negotiations were still taking place, this was being asked about, and he would like to continue this for another year. He reminded the Council the second payment was not included in the budget. Mayor Gander said he would support a one-year renewal and not tie the MOU to the contract. Council member Vetter suggested the Council review the pay equity study to help make their decision. Council President Olstad asked to bring this item back to the next work session.

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

ADJOURN:

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER POKRZYWINSKI, TO ADJOURN THE NOVEMBER 14, 2023 WORK SESSION OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 6:46 P.M.

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

Voting Nay: None.

Megan Nelson, City Clerk