

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

CALL TO ORDER:

The Work Session of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, December 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 (5:01pm), 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. Request to File Plans and Specifications and Proceed with Advertising for Bids for the 2023 City Project No. 2 LaFave Park Improvements – Steve Emery

Mr. Emery reminded the Council they had received bids last May for this project, they came in much higher than expected, the bids were rejected, and the plan was to rebid the project in the winter. He explained the bid was split into three proposals allowing for flexibility when awarding the project. Mr. Huttunen stated the City had received additional funding which still needed approval from the Legislature and there was a 20% local match. Mr. Emery said it would be brought forward the following week for approval.

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

2. Discussion on Demers Avenue Traffic Signal Replacement Project – Steve Emery

Mr. Emery stated the City had entered into an agreement with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) for the traffic signal replacement at 2nd Street and 4th Street along Demers Avenue. He explained only one bid was received which was higher than expected, if it was awarded the City's share would have increased from \$283,000 up to \$562,000, so he reached out to MNDOT to ask what their plan was, and found out they were considering rejecting bids. He said they were reviewing how they might move forward and asked what the consensus was from the Council on how to move forward. Discussion followed about the material costs were much higher than expected, how the road by Cabela's was not owned by the City so they might want to ask Cabela's to participate in the cost, and the priority was to

change the traffic signals at the intersection of 4th Street NW and Demers Avenue NW. Mr. Emery said he would bring the feedback to MNDOT.

This item will be brought back to a future meeting.

3. School Resource Officer Update – Michael Hedlund

Chief Hedlund stated the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the School Resource Officer had been suspended, discussions had continued with the school during this time, and they were working on trying to get the School Resource Officer back in the school. He said they were working on updating the MOU for the remainder of the school year. Council President Olstad asked to have that brought back to a work session for review.

This item will be brought back to a future meeting.

4. Requesting Authorization to Hire – Jason Stordahl

Mr. Stordahl stated there was a vacancy in the supervisor position in Public Works, they reviewed positions, and were able to combine some duties. He said the positions had been reappointed with one dropping a grade and one increasing by a grade, the job descriptions had been reviewed by the Civil Service, and he would like to start an internal hiring process. Mayor Gander asked if the jobs fit in the budget. Mr. Stordahl said they did.

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

5. Discussion on the Proposed 2024 Budget – Reid Huttunen

Mr. Huttunen said they were handing out updated documents, they were able to come to an agreement with three of the unions with one still outstanding, so changes had been made. He explained they reduced the amount in the budget for the Accounting Technician position because it would not be hired until June or July, expenses were reduced in Public Works, and they were trying to be conservative in estimates but at this time the deficit was now at \$64,500. He stated the Senior Citizen Board had met earlier in the day, many were interested in what was happening with the Senior Center and director position, how there were discussions about the elimination of director position or if the hours of the director would be reduced. He said if the hours were cut benefits would be prorated, time would be needed if activities were to be moved to the library, and they would need to determine what programming would be like and what staff or volunteers would be running things and again transition time would be needed.

Ms. Helgeson reviewed what had been discussed regarding programming, how library and parks staff could be split 20 hours per week for senior programming, their current scheduled programs could take place between 10am-3pm at the library, they might not be able to continue all programming but they would also rely on volunteers to help with the programming. Mr. King stated things worked out on paper but there were many unknowns and there would be bumps they would have to deal with along the way. He added staff would have to work out of the office at the Senior Center and they would also need to talk to Lutheran Social Services (LSS) and see if there was anything they could help with because of the additional maintenance costs due to the commercial kitchen so they would need to determine if they wanted to maintain or sell the building. He stated they would also need to address the stove soon as well. Ms. Helgeson said they need to determine the long-term plans because many things would need to change.

Mr. King added programming could remain the same but attention given to the members might be different than what they get now. Council member Helms asked if they would have things in the evenings and on weekends. Mr. King said the current hours of the Senior Center were 8am to 4:30pm Monday through Friday.

Council member Peterson stated plans had been proposed, direction was needed, transition time would also be needed if changes were made, and to consider other ways to utilize the space because they could rent out the building after hours to try and help offset costs. Council President Olstad asked who rented the facility. Mr. King said it was a church group and there were other sporadic rentals. Mayor Gander stated unless it was requested, he did not want to see these programs rolled into an arena space or the library. He asked what they would want in a facility. Council member Peterson told the Council the food program used to send out 10 to 15 meals a day and now that had increased to 85 up to 100 meals per day so that was something to consider. She added it would take LSS 9 months to a year to move into another space. She commented how it was a great service and it brought the seniors together. Discussion followed about how there was a local senior center that ran its own food program, that was also privately owned, if the building was put up for sale it could sell faster than expected, LSS could partner with a fraternal organization or a church, and they don't want to lose any programs but rather add more programming.

Mr. King stated direction was needed from the Council to reach a solution. Council member Vetter suggested putting the building up for sale on January 1st. Mayor Gander said there should be a free-standing Senior Center unless they wanted to move into a different location. Council member Peterson said they needed to work with the Senior Citizen Board to develop a plan, they had a feeling of discourse, and if the building was sold February 1st they did not have a place to move into. Mr. King said a director would be needed for a smooth transition. Council member Pokrzywinski asked if the deficit included the director position or not. Mr. Huttunen said the budget included the director position for the full year. Council member Pokrzywinski said if the position was eliminated, they would then have a surplus. Mr. Huttunen said it would depend on when the position would be eliminated. Council member Pokrzywinski asked about carryovers. Mr. Huttunen said there would be carryovers from 2023 and would be spent in 2024. Council member Pokrzywinski said he did not see a need to sell the building, they could keep the position, and keep the discussion going.

Council President Olstad reminded the Council about the process that had taken place, many positions had been discussed over the last several months, and they were trying to find long term savings. Council member Larson stated there had been great comments, he did not see a need to sell the building, there could be many things there in the future, and they should look at efficiencies while trying to bring in more revenue. He added they would be having the same conversation the following year so they would be revisiting this again.

Ms. Dottie Stone stated she was confused because LSS had not been talked, this was the seniors place to go and do things. She said the Council needed to look at the big picture, look at all the avenues, ways to raise funds, and asked why they were not planning ahead. Council President Olstad explained how they had planned ahead with a space in the expansion of the arenas, that had to be scaled back, and now they had to wait on the vote in 2024. He stated they were trying to figure out what to do because they were looking at the city as a whole and were looking at every department. He added they had talked with LSS before as well. Discussion followed about how the city found out it could receive 10 cents per meal, how it was unlikely due to the cost of the meals, but then there was also discussion about possible rent for the use of the facility that would be around \$200 or \$300 per month which would help but utility bills totaled \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year. More discussion followed about how they have tried to get LSS to apply for

grants to help bring in more funds. Mayor Gander said he wanted to exceed expectations and they need to do right by the seniors. Ms. Stone stated that they enjoyed the building, the meals, and they wanted to keep it all in one space. Council member Peterson said they would keep working with the Board because they need to know what were wants and what were needs.

Council member Dale asked if the same programs were offered at both the library and senior center. Ms. Helgeson said they did not have the same programs, but the library did see many seniors that utilized the library. Council member Helms informed the Council 56% of the city residents had library cards, 60% of seniors had library cards, and the library was a very busy place so they needed to work together to figure things out. Ms. Judy DelValle introduced herself as the Senior Center Director and told the Council trying to increase programs while reducing staff would be a failure. She has encouraged many people to attend events at the Senior Center, how some people have already come to check out the building, and asked why these people were checking out the building if it was not up for sale. Council President Olstad stated the Council had not told anyone to go and look at the building. Discussion followed about how some were told the building would sell fast and Council member Vetter said he was asked about it but told the people to present an offer to the city which had not been done.

Ms. DelValle said she had improved programs, people enjoyed themselves at the center, and she has dealt with a variety of things including seniors crying on the phone. She stated how the center was a place for seniors to go and socialize and participate in activities to keep their brains going. She added that seniors had already raised funds throughout their life so they should be able to just enjoy. She added they would get more rentals if people were allowed to rent out the kitchen and if they were allowed to bring in alcohol. She mentioned how rental rates were different between the center and the library and suggested the possibility of selling the Nash Park Warming House instead because so much was done for the youth in the community but not for the seniors. Mayor Gander said again that he was not aware of anyone that wanted to buy the building and they were trying to make things manageable. Discussion followed about the programming, how use of the meal service had grown, they have called for welfare checks on members, and if there were grants available. Ms. DelValle said she was never told to look for grants. Mr. Huttunen stated many of the grants require applicants to be non-profit and how Ms. DelValle had worked on and received some grants. More discussion followed about how the discussion would continue.

Mr. Huttunen continued with other parts of the budget. Council member Larson asked about the general fund carryover and if that was a one-time savings or if it was ongoing. Mr. Huttunen said it was one-time savings and the changes in salaries were accounted for. Council President Olstad asked if they would bring forward a 6% levy. Mayor Gander said no because they need to be mindful of the taxpayers. Council President Olstad asked about where the reserves would be at. Ms. Anderson said it would be at 48% because there were more savings from 2023. Discussion followed about how that had increased from 44% up to 48%, how this had changed, how the State recommended the fund balance to be between 35% up to 50%, how the parks truck was budgeted in both years, so those funds would need to come from the reserves to be spent in 2024, and that changed the \$64,500 deficit down to a \$14,500 deficit. More discussion followed about the fund balance, what the percentage would be with a 5% levy, and that information would be available at the next meeting.

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

6. SRF Consulting Bridge Study Planning Funding Opportunity – Reid Huttunen

Mr. Huttunen said there had been a bridge meeting, there was a new funding opportunity that could be

used for planning, there was a short turnaround, millions could be awarded and there was no local match required. He stated it would cost around \$25,000 up to \$30,000 to have the application completed and the City could take the lead on the project just like the bridge study. Discussion followed about how it could be added as an amendment to the current contract and the question was asked of all the entities had to agree to move forward with the grant process. Mayor Gander said it would be short-sighted to not apply for the funds. Council member Larson stated the City was the lead entity, letters of support would be favorable from elected officials at all levels of government, try for cost sharing, the funds were only available for planning and design, there was potential savings if the current contract was amended, and this was a great opportunity. Council President Olstad asked to stay updated about the process.

ADJOURN:

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, TO ADJOURN THE DECEMBER 12, 2023 WORK SESSION OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 6:52 P.M.

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

Voting Nay: None.

Megan Nelson, City Clerk