

**APPROVED MINUTES  
OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS  
TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2024 – 5:00 PM**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

*The Council Meeting of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, April 2, 2024 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 (5:04pm), 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.*

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:**

**OPEN FORUM:**

Council President Olstad stated the open form was an opportunity for members of the public to address the City Council on items not on the current agenda and items requiring Council action maybe deferred to staff or Boards and Commissions for research and future Council Agendas if appropriate. He asked if anyone would like to address the City Council, please come up to the podium to do so. No one came forward.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

1. Consider approving the minutes of the “Regular Meeting” for the East Grand Forks, Minnesota City Council of March 19, 2024.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE “REGULAR MEETING” FOR THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL OF MARCH 19, 2024.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

**SCHEDULED BID LETTINGS: NONE.**

**SCHEDULED PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

2. Public Hearing to consider a request for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NW intersection within the BNSF right-of-way to be vacated.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO OPEN THE PUBLIC HEARING.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

Mr. Huttunen stated he would review the timeline of the project, the three project areas, which crossing would be closed, how the gate system would be upgraded at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue crossing, curb and gutter would be added and fencing would also be added. He explained the discussion for this project started in 2017, staff had been working on items since then, letters were mailed out to the neighborhood in 2020 with information about the closure of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, 16 responses were received back, and 11 responses were in support of the closure. He added one was not in favor and one other response was not legible.

Mr. Huttunen continued saying how in July 2020 BNSF offered an incentive to the City to close the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street crossing, which was \$206,000 to help pay for the project. He explained a resolution was adopted in 2020 to close the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street crossing, the design phase had been taking place since then, there was a long lead time, and the City had already spent \$96,000 on the project. He stated bids were opened on February 7<sup>th</sup> and they were good for 60 days. He said a common question was why a closure was needed and the main reason was for safety. He added that the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) would be covering the necessary upgrades to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue crossing which was around \$400,000. He stated because of the angle at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street crossing, it would require a quad gate system, 100% of that cost would be the City's, it was estimated to cost \$750,000 up to \$1 million, and the City would not received the incentive to help pay for the project. He stated the project cost was \$1.375 million based on the bids received, MNDOT and BNSF would contribute an additional \$700,000, and asked if there were any questions.

Ms. Arlene Holtman, 906 16<sup>th</sup> Ave SE, asked if this item had been voted on by the citizens and stated she did not want the crossing closed. Mr. Huttunen said this had not been voted on by the citizens and explained how the property owners with property abutting the project area were the ones that received the letters about the possible closure. Ms. Holtman said she did not understand why the citizens would not be able to vote on this. She added she used to live by the train tracks and did not mind the train horn.

Mr. Ruben Samuelson, 124 4<sup>th</sup> St NW, told the Council he had lived in the community for 9 years, he worked for the railroad for 36 years, and he understood their focus on safety. He stated they did not need to continue this way, it was amazing there were no hearing issues with the students at the school, and he would support a 3<sup>rd</sup> Street crossing because he very seldom used it. He said it would be nice if they could accommodate the school but there would be serious effects for the kids, and funding from BNSF would help. He added he was here for the kids, how a crew could be called in to work, and how they could lay on the horn to wake everyone up because they had to be at work. He said he hoped this could get figured out.

Ms. Kelicia Christianson, 124 4<sup>th</sup> St NW, pointed out where she lived, how she was raising two kids in her house, and the train horn caused issues. She explained she worked from home and had to mute her

computer when the train passes by because of the loud horn, there were no limits for how many times a train passes day or night, and they couldn't enjoy life at their home because of the train horns. She added she did not use the crossing so closing it would not be an issue, there was a lot of turnover in the neighborhood and the number one reason for her wanting to move was because of the trains. She commented it might be inconvenient if the crossing closed, there were other attempts to create a quiet zone, and was glad to see progress being made. She added she could share numerous videos she has of the train horn and how the decibel level was damaging.

Mr. Richard Osborn, 111 3<sup>rd</sup> St NE, stated he had moved into his home 2 years ago, both he and his wife were very firmly in favor of the quiet zone with the crossing being closed. He explained he used the crossing about six times a day, there was more benefit to have the crossing closed, he also drove the different routes from the point area about 10 times, and using a different route took about 10 seconds longer. He said he was not sure if they understood how negative the train horn was for people that lived by the tracks, they were not able to sleep with their windows open, the horns really affected their sleep, and others in the neighborhood were also in favor of the quiet zone. He added it would be a great benefit to the neighborhood.

Mr. Emery thanked everyone for their input. He stated if the project moved forward the work would start this summer, they had to work with BNSF on some parts of the project, and some of the work might not be completed until the summer of 2025. He added that all the work had to be completed before the quiet zone could be implemented.

Mr. Christopher Lider, 304 Central Ave NE, said he was with Entech Industries and he agreed it was impossible to conduct business with the train horns. He asked if there were going to be changes to the property lines. Mr. Emery explained what would be implemented at the Central Avenue crossing and it would not require changes to the property lines.

Council member Helms thanked everyone that spoke. He stated he lived three blocks north of the railroad, he had been there for 50 years, he could verify the train horns were very loud, and it wasn't getting any better. Mayor Gander reminded everyone this was not voted on by the whole city, there had been many meetings, input was gathered, there has been a lot of back and forth between the City and the railroad along with other groups, and he appreciated the work that had been done. Mr. Samuelson added he appreciated Council member Pokrzywinski because he knew he was concerned about this, so he called him to make sure he knew about this meeting.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

**CONSENT AGENDA: NONE**

*Items under the "Consent Agenda" will be adopted with one motion; however, council members may request individual items to be pulled from the consent agenda for discussion and action if they choose.*

**ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF REPORTS OF OFFICERS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:**

3. Regular meeting minutes of the Water, Light, Power, and Building Commission for March 6, 2024.

**COMMUNICATIONS: NONE**

**OLD BUSINESS: NONE**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

4. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-03-30 permanently closing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NW crossing (DOT No. 081280B) to vehicular traffic from the BNSF right-of-way, install continuous curb along 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NW and Hill Street, file the resolution, and authorize the Council President and City Administrator to execute all necessary documentation.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER POKRZYWINSKI, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-03-30 PERMANENTLY CLOSING THE 3<sup>RD</sup> STREET NW CROSSING (DOT NO. 081280B) TO VEHICULAR TRAFFIC FROM THE BNSF RIGHT-OF-WAY, INSTALL CONTINUOUS CURB ALONG 2<sup>ND</sup> STREET NW AND HILL STREET, FILE THE RESOLUTION, AND AUTHORIZE THE COUNCIL PRESIDENT AND CITY ADMINISTRATOR TO EXECUTE ALL NECESSARY DOCUMENTATION.**

Mr. Huttunen stated the Charter required 75% of the Council to vote in favor for the vacation to be approved so that would require six out of seven to vote to approve.

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

5. Consider approving the Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Closure Agreement between the City of East Grand Forks and BNSF Railway Company for the closure of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NW crossing and donation to the city for the elimination of the crossing.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER POKRZYWINSKI, TO APPROVE THE HIGHWAY-RAIL GRADE CROSSING CLOSURE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS AND BNSF RAILWAY COMPANY FOR THE CLOSURE OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup> STREET NW CROSSING AND DONATION TO THE CITY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF THE CROSSING.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

6. Consider approving the Grade Crossing Construction and Maintenance Agreement between the City of East Grand Forks and BNSF Railway Company for the reconstruction of the roadway, adding pedestrian facilities to a crossing, center medians, and curb and gutter for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NE crossing.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, TO APPROVE THE GRADE CROSSING CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS AND BNSF RAILWAY COMPANY FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ROADWAY, ADDING PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES TO A CROSSING, CENTER MEDIANS, AND CURB AND GUTTER FOR THE 2<sup>ND</sup> AVENUE NE CROSSING.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

7. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-03-26 accepting the bid and awarding the project for the 2022 City Project No 3 for the Quiet Zone/Street and Sidewalk Improvements to Opp Construction for a total of \$1,051,314.50.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-03-26 ACCEPTING THE BID AND AWARDING THE PROJECT FOR THE 2022 CITY PROJECT NO 3 FOR THE QUIET ZONE/STREET AND SIDEWALK IMPROVEMENTS TO OPP CONSTRUCTION FOR A TOTAL OF \$1,051,314.50.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

8. Consider awarding the Annual Sewer Cleaning and Televising Project to Johnson Jet-Line for a total of \$69,832.15.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER PETERSON, TO AWARD THE ANNUAL SEWER CLEANING AND TELEVISIONING PROJECT TO JOHNSON JET-LINE FOR A TOTAL OF \$69,832.15.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

9. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-04-31 accepting and awarding the bid for the City Hall Roof Replacement to the Equity Builders Company for a total of \$635,560.00.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-04-31 ACCEPTING AND AWARDING THE BID FOR THE CITY HALL ROOF REPLACEMENT TO THE EQUITY BUILDERS COMPANY FOR A TOTAL OF \$635,560.00.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

10. Consider approving the Grant Agreement between the City of East Grand Forks and the Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund for \$3,700 to support the purchase of solar lights for the boat ramp area in LaFave Park.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER POKRZYWINSKI, TO APPROVE THE GRANT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS AND THE BASS PRO SHOPS AND CABELA'S OUTDOOR FUND FOR \$3,700 TO SUPPORT THE PURCHASE OF SOLAR LIGHTS FOR THE BOAT RAMP AREA IN LAFAVE PARK.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

11. Consider authorizing the hiring process to fill the Parks and Recreation Specialist position.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER POKRZYWINSKI, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER PETERSON, TO AUTHORIZE THE HIRING PROCESS TO FILL THE PARKS AND RECREATION SPECIALIST POSITION.**

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

*Voting Nay: Vetter.*

12. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-04-32 approving the proposed increases to the Mayor, Council President, and Council members salaries starting January 2025.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-04-32 APPROVING THE PROPOSED INCREASES TO THE MAYOR, COUNCIL PRESIDENT, AND COUNCIL MEMBERS SALARIES STARTING JANUARY 2025.**

Council member Helms said he was not on City Council for the money and with all the cuts they had talked about this was not something he could support.

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

*Voting Nay: Vetter and Helms.*

13. Consider waiving the special event related fees for the Cruz-In Forks Downtown Car Show for the 2024 events.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO WAIVE THE SPECIAL EVENT RELATED FEES FOR THE CRUZ-IN FORKS DOWNTOWN CAR SHOW FOR THE 2024 EVENTS.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

14. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-04-33 filing the proposed assessments and setting the final public hearing date for May 7, 2024.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-04-33 FILING THE PROPOSED ASSESSMENTS AND SETTING THE FINAL PUBLIC HEARING DATE FOR MAY 7, 2024.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

**CLAIMS:**

15. Consider authorizing the City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer to issue payment of recommended bills and payroll.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, TO AUTHORIZE THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR/CLERK-TREASURER TO ISSUE PAYMENT OF RECOMMENDED BILLS AND PAYROLL.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

**COUNCIL/STAFF REPORTS:**

Mayor Gander stated he had visited the North Country Food Bank when Land-O-Lakes had donated 20,000 pounds or 50,000 servings of fresh macaroni and cheese to the food bank. He added the Food Bank could use some assistance and any help would be greatly appreciated.

Council Member Larson thanked everyone who attended the meeting and gave input.

Council President Olstad also thanked everyone for their input and if anyone needed anything to reach out to them, send an email, or give them a call.

Mr. Emery stated Widseth would be hosting a lunch for staff from 11:30am to 1pm, it would be a free will donation that would be going to the East Grand Forks Food Shelf, and invited the Council to attend.

**ADJOURN:**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER PETERSON, TO ADJOURN THE APRIL 2, 2024 COUNCIL MEETING OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 5:42 P.M.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

---

Megan Nelson, City Clerk