

**APPROVED MINUTES  
OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS  
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2024 – 5:00 PM**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

*The Council Meeting of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, September 17, 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, 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; 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; 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:**

Ms. Ellis reminded the Council they had hired a consultant for building inspections back in June, they had been doing great work, and they were available on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Mr. Greg Hufnagle introduced himself as the building official and Mr. Alec Jalowiec introduced himself as the building inspector. They thanked the Council for the opportunity to serve the community. They were welcomed by the Council.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

1. Consider approving the minutes of the “Regular Meeting” for the East Grand Forks, Minnesota City Council of September 3, 2024.
2. Consider approving the minutes of the “Work Session” for the East Grand Forks, Minnesota City Council of September 10, 2024.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO APPROVE ITEMS ONE (1) AND TWO (2).**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

**SCHEDULED BID LETTINGS: NONE.**

**SCHEDULED PUBLIC HEARINGS: NONE**

**CONSENT AGENDA:**

*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.*

3. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-09-65 authoring the City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer to certify the listed account for mowing to the County Auditor for collection with the 2025 real estate taxes.
4. Consider approving the Exempt Gambling Permit Application for the East Grand Forks Home Run Club to hold a raffle on December 20, 2024 at the Spud Jr located at 302 Demers Ave NW East Grand Forks, MN 56721 and waive the 30-day waiting period.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER PETERSON, TO APPROVE ITEMS THREE (3) AND FOUR (4).**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

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

5. Regular meeting minutes of the Water, Light, Power, and Building Commission for August 22, 2024.

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

6. The council meeting scheduled for Tuesday, November 5<sup>th</sup> will be moved to Wednesday, November 6<sup>th</sup> starting at 5pm in the council chambers.
7. The Voter Participation Center and Center for Voter Information have informed the Minnesota Secretary of State they will be mailing out absentee applications to voters so we would like to inform residents that they might be receiving an absentee application in the mail they did not request.

**OLD BUSINESS: NONE**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

8. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-09-66 accepting and awarding the bid for the 2024 City Project No. 1 for SCADA System Improvements to Sun Electric Inc for a total of \$336,450.00.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-09-66 ACCEPTING AND AWARDING THE BID FOR THE 2024 CITY PROJECT NO. 1 FOR SCADA SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS TO SUN ELECTRIC INC FOR A TOTAL OF \$336,450.00.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

9. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-09-67 authorizing city staff and Widseth to close out the project and issue the payment of the final retainer for the 2022 City Project No. 6 for the installation of the HAWK System.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-09-67 AUTHORIZING CITY STAFF AND WIDSETH TO CLOSE OUT THE PROJECT AND ISSUE THE PAYMENT OF THE FINAL RETAINER FOR THE 2022 CITY PROJECT NO. 6 FOR THE INSTALLATION OF THE HAWK SYSTEM.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

10. Consider authorizing the remodel of the Community Development/Economic Development Office for approximately \$39,050.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER PETERSON, TO AUTHORIZE THE REMODEL OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE FOR APPROXIMATELY \$39,050.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

11. Consider approving and authorizing staff to host a celebration commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civic Center scheduled to be held on Friday, October 11<sup>th</sup> from 5pm to 9pm and allocating funds not to exceed \$4,000 to cover costs associated with the event.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO APPROVE AND AUTHORIZE STAFF TO HOST A CELEBRATION COMMEMORATING THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE CIVIC CENTER SCHEDULED TO BE HELD ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11<sup>TH</sup> FROM 5PM TO 9PM AND ALLOCATING FUNDS NOT TO EXCEED \$4,000 TO COVER COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EVENT.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

12. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-09-68 authorizing the Police Department to enter into a grant agreement with the Minnesota Department of Public Safety for traffic safety projects.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER VETTER, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-09-68 AUTHORIZING THE POLICE DEPARTMENT TO ENTER INTO A GRANT AGREEMENT WITH THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY PROJECTS.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

13. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-09-69 approving the preliminary 2024 tax levy collectable in 2025 for a total of \$7,623,089 and set the Public Budget Meeting for December 3, 2024 at 6pm with a continuance hearing, if necessary, for December 17, 2024.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-09-69 APPROVING THE PRELIMINARY 2024 TAX LEVY COLLECTABLE IN 2025 FOR A TOTAL OF \$7,623,089 AND SET THE PUBLIC BUDGET MEETING FOR DECEMBER 3, 2024 AT 6PM WITH A CONTINUANCE HEARING, IF NECESSARY, FOR DECEMBER 17, 2024.**

Mayor Gander said there had been a lot of conversation about the levy, if they approved the resolution the maximum amount the levy could be was 10%, they all knew it would be going down, and the preliminary levy needed to come down as far as to 5%. Council President Olstad stated they had talked about how they would like the final levy to be at 3%, they could always come down from the preliminary levy, he did not want to have a negative levy, and they needed to be very cognizant of the reserves. He added they did not know how the Family Medical Leave Act would affect things in the coming years and health insurance was still being worked on. He said staff always worked the levy down, but the Council needed to make sure they were taking care of the reserves.

Council member Larson said he was comfortable with the fund balance at 50% and requested to use a measured approach to reducing the reserves to 50%. Council Vice-President Riopelle said he agreed with Council member Larson and said he would be fine with an 8% preliminary levy because the final levy would be worked down to 3% or 4%. Council member Peterson stated she agreed it should be higher because they could not foresee the future. She added they had done a lot of work on the budget process so even if it was set higher, it would be worked down for the final levy. Council President Olstad informed the group he did not want the reserves to go below 50% because of things that were being proposed, things came up, and how they ended up with higher levies in previous years because of trying to build up the reserves.

Council member Helms said he agreed with the mayor because they were also going to be asking for a 1% referendum, the residents would be paying that, so they needed to keep the levy down. He commented how people were tired of the 5% to 7% increases and wages were not increasing that much so he suggested a 5% preliminary levy. Council President Olstad clarified the request was for a 1% sales tax and it would not be included with the levy. Mayor Gander said the previous year had unusual savings, it wouldn't happen again, so they should find responsible ways to spend down the surplus.

Mr. Huttunen reminded the Council they were working through health insurance, and it could be a 2% swing either way depending on what was decided. He added it was not in the current budget so there could be an additional \$120,000 to \$130,000 or if there was a change to ICHRA it could decrease costs. He stated the proposed rates came out October 1<sup>st</sup> so with the items that were still undecided, he asked for the Council to move forward with the 8% preliminary levy. He reviewed the timeline for the preliminary levy, how it had to be submitted by the end of September, and asked if they were not able to reach a consensus to table this item to a special meeting because if it was not approved before the end of the month, they would revert back to the 2024 levy which would be a 0% increase. He added how staff had the track record of working the levy down and asked for additional time to get it there. Council President Olstad said he did not want to go backwards and asked if the motion would be amended.

Mayor Gander said if insurance could be a 2% change and he wanted no more than a 5% levy, he would go with 7%. Council member Pokrzywinski said he agreed with the comments from Council members Larson and Peterson and was comfortable with an 8% preliminary levy. Council Vice-President Riopelle said he would prefer an 8% preliminary levy and requested to amend the motion to \$7,484,488. Council member Larson said he would also amend the second of the motion and asked if it would stand. Mayor Gander said the 8% would not stand. Council President Olstad said if the resolution was vetoed there would not be enough time because the next regular meeting was in October. Mr. Huttunen said \$69,300 was 1% so a 7% levy would total \$7,415,188.00. Council President Olstad asked if there were any comments.

**AN AMENDED MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-09-69 APPROVING THE PRELIMINARY 2024 TAX LEVY COLLECTABLE IN 2025 FOR A TOTAL OF \$7,415,188 AND SET THE PUBLIC BUDGET MEETING FOR DECEMBER 3, 2024 AT 6PM WITH A CONTINUANCE HEARING, IF NECESSARY, FOR DECEMBER 17, 2024.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

**CLAIMS:**

14. Consider adopting Resolution No. 24-09-70 authorizing the City of East Grand Forks to approve purchases from Border States Trophy the goods referenced in check number 43148 for a total of \$42.00 whereas Council member Riopelle is personally interested financially in the contract.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, TO ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 24-09-70 AUTHORIZING THE CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS TO APPROVE PURCHASES FROM BORDER STATES TROPHY THE GOODS REFERENCED IN CHECK NUMBER 43148 FOR A TOTAL OF \$42.00 WHEREAS COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE IS PERSONALLY INTERESTED FINANCIALLY IN THE CONTRACT.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

*Abstain: Riopelle.*

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

**COUNCIL/STAFF REPORTS:**

Mayor Gander thanked everyone involved with the city showcase, how it reminded him of the taste of

Chicago, and would welcome more participation from the businesses and different organizations in the city.

Council Vice-President Riopelle reminded the mayor he would need to appoint a Water & Light Commissioner. Mr. Mykleseth stated he had been sent some names. Mayor Gander said they could discuss things and find someone who would work well with the team.

Council Member Helms thanked the Council for approving a 7% preliminary levy showing where they wanted to be, how it sent a good message, and introduced Mr. Don Casmey who was in attendance and running for the Ward 5 position.

Mr. Huttunen stated anyone who was interested in serving on one of the boards or commissions could complete the interest form that was available on the city website. He added that he would be out of the office the following week at an economic development conference.

Mr. Emery told the Council the signage for the quiet zone project was going to be completed the following day and the fencing was going to be put up the following week. He stated the contractor was focusing on the boat ramp replacement for the LaFave Park project, they would also be working on the park shelter, and the mill and overlay. He added the signal poles for the intersection at 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Demers Avenue should be getting set this week and the project should be wrapped up by the end of September. He also informed the Council the gas main project should be wrapping in a couple weeks. Council member Helms said he was asked about the railroad project and why the horns were still blowing. Mr. Emery said BNSF still had to replace some gates before the quiet zone could take affect so it would be next spring before the horns would stop.

**ADJOURN:**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER LARSON, TO ADJOURN THE SEPTEMBER 17, 2024 COUNCIL MEETING OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 5:35 P.M.**

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

*Voting Nay: None.*

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Megan Nelson, City Clerk