

**APPROVED MINUTES
OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2024 – 5:00 PM**

CALL TO ORDER:

The Work Session of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, September 24, 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, and Karen Peterson.

Staff Present: Karla Anderson, Finance Director; Jeff Boushee, Fire Chief; Ron Galstad, City Attorney; Paul Gorte, Economic Development Director; Michael Hedlund, Police Chief, Charlotte Helgeson, Library Director; Jeremy King, Parks and Recreation Superintendent; Megan Nelson, City Clerk; and Jason Stordahl, Public Works Director.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:

The Council President Determined a Quorum was present.

1. Consider Solar Energy System Ordinance – Ron Galstad

Mr. Galstad stated an application was received for solar energy system installation, it was withdrawn, but staff was bringing forward an ordinance to address it. He explained the different departments had reviewed the proposed ordinance, the proposed ordinance was different than the model ordinance, ground installed systems were limited to the commercial or industrial zones, and residential zones allowed roof top installations. Council member Helms asked if there had been many inquiries. Mr. Galstad there were some over time, but this was the first time an application had been received. Discussion followed about how the solar systems were allowed on rooftops in residential areas and the ground mounted systems were restricted.

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

2. Consider Updates to Business Regulations in City Code – Megan Nelson

Ms. Nelson told the Council it had been some time since the business regulations had been reviewed, some of the requirements were not needed for all city licenses and she had made some suggestions for changes. She added she wanted to update the online applications and try to allow for online payments to help streamline the process. She asked if there were any questions. Council Vice-President Riopelle said he had met with Ms. Nelson to discuss this, there was a lot of work put into this already, and suggested letting staff review and make proposed changes for the Council to consider. Council member Pokrzywinski asked about online payments and who paid the fee. Ms. Nelson said the City paid the fee. Council member

Pokrzywinski asked to change that because if the transactions were 3% up to 5% of the transaction, that could really add up in costs for the City. Mr. Galstad requested to be a part of the process. Mayor Gander said the proposed changes would make the process more customer friendly to help remove what was not needed. There were no other comments.

This item will be brought back to a future meeting.

3. Request for Approval to Purchase Two Police Interceptor SUVs – Michael Hedlund

Chief Hedlund told the Council the time to order police vehicles was going to be closing, he was unsure when it would be opening back up again, the price was remaining the same, and there was still a delay in getting the vehicles because the outfitters had so many to complete. He requested to get the vehicles ordered because he was not sure when they would be able to use the vehicles and how the vehicles that would be replacing would both be over 100,000 miles. He added the budget had not been finalized at this time, currently there were two police SUVs included in the budget, and requested to order two police SUVs. Mayor Gander asked if the request was for two and ended up at one the previous year. Chief Hedlund said yes. Mayor Gander said it was important to move ahead with this. There were no other comments.

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

4. Request to Hire Recreation Coordinator – Jeremy King

Mr. King informed the Council he had received the retirement papers from Mr. Mark Dragich who would be retiring in January of 2025. He stated the importance of the position and requested the Council to authorize the hiring process to fill the position. There were no questions.

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

5. Presentation on Recreation Facility Improvement & Sales Tax Vote – Jeremy King

Mr. King started by reviewing how this had been a long process, the conversation for this had started some time ago, and the request for the feasibility study was approved in 2019. He reminded everyone how COVID has stopped the process because the State did not allow for any sales tax to move forward and finally in 2023 the State Legislature approved the city to bring the questions to the vote at a general election which was taking place in November. He reviewed the general overview of the projects at both locations, how the proposed sales tax would be up to 20 years, there were two questions on the ballot that were site specific, and that was required by State Statute. He continued saying the reason why a sales tax was being requested was because it would be paid for by both residents and visitors and a survey showed how visitors would help pay for 30% up to 50% of the projects. He added how the rehab of the pool was a great example of a project utilizing sales tax and how they have over 20,000 visitors per year. He stated some of the reasons for the proposed projects included it would help the youth, local pride, and there would be an economic impact.

Mr. King listed the project goals that included transforming the experience and updating systems, he reviewed the project budget, showed the breakdown of the costs for the different items, how there were shortfalls, and they were planning on fundraising for the additional funds needed for the baseball field. He said they would fundraise for extra amenities and the building committee had spent a lot of time

reviewing the projects to get things to this point and how the budget information was in 2025 costs. He showed before and after pictures of an arena in White Bear Lake after it had been updated and it could be similar to what could happen with the proposed projects. He added the baseball field portion would be completed in two phases, the first being the field, and if enough funds were raised, they would continue with the addition to the Civic Center.

Mr. King stated if the sales tax was approved, from November to March would be the design and planning phase, April they would request bids, May would be preparing for the project, and in June or July the construction would start. He told the Council if the sales tax was not approved there were three projects that should be completed in the next three to five year which included the replacement of the VFW Arena ice plant, the replacement of the Civic Center ice floor, and the other item was the replacement of the VFW Arena roof. He said all three projects were estimated to cost \$5.2 million and could be funded through property tax, the building maintenance fund, or by using reserves. He added if the sales tax did not pass, the items would be put on the residents, with the sales tax, the visitors would help pay for the repairs. He asked for questions.

Council member Helms said there was a company that could help pinpoint where the leaks were in the Civic Center floor. Discussion followed about how the floor at the Civic Center was close to the end of its life, what the makeup of the ice floor was, how pressuring testing lines could cause more of an issue, and the company could help fix leaks instead of having to replace the floor. Council member Helms said the sales tax would be on everything including a cell phone bill, groceries, and on campers. Mr. King said there was tax on processed foods at the grocery store. Council member Helms said the ballfield was included in the information, but it was not listed in the referendum, and he had gotten questions about the wording of the sales tax questions. He asked for an explanation of the questions. Mr. King said the questions had been approved by the State and Council before the questions were sent into the County. He stated the verbiage was as such that if the sales tax was approved, if they were able to complete a simple repair to the floor at the Civic Center, they would be able to utilize the funding that had been set aside for the floor on a different aspect of the project, so it did not tie the funding to a specific item of the project. He reminded the Council the funding for each specific location could only be spent on those specific projects and not used anywhere else. Council member Helms asked about the ballfield. Mr. King said it would be done if additional funds were raised.

Mayor Gander commented how he had been visiting with residents and had also received the question about the language of the questions. He stated the project had been scaled down, any added features would come through fundraising efforts, and this was taking care of maintenance and setting the buildings up for the future. Council member Peterson said they never thought twice about crossing the river and spending money in Grand Forks which raises sales tax on the same items they were going to be asking of the city, it was something she would also have to pay, she did see it as a reinvestment into the community, not just for youth, but the programs help build the community and drew families back to the city. She added how the programs and facilities put the kids to work so it was for more than just sports. Council Vice-President Riopelle said he agreed with Council member Peterson and how the teams that came to town for events would be spending money in a variety of ways that would be taxed, so not all the funding would be coming from the residents. He stated it was a win/win with a sales tax. Council member Helms said he wasn't trying to be negative and just wanted to make people aware of what would all be taxed.

ADJOURN:

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER HELMS, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER RIOPELLE, TO ADJOURN THE SEPTEMBER 24, 2024 WORK SESSION OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 5:39 P.M.

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

Voting Nay: None.

Absent: Larson.

Megan Nelson, City Clerk