

May 7, 2014

A Work Session meeting of the City Council was held on the above date. Mayor Simonson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The following were present: Mayor Randall Simonson, Council members Dan Lee, Chris Ness, Jim Schneider and Sally Swanson. Staff present: City Administrator Kristina Handt, Director of Public Works Tim Kieffer, Fire Chief Mike Hinz and Deputy Clerk Brenda Eklund.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Ness, seconded by Lee, moved to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried 5-0.

DISCUSSION ON PROPERTY VALUATIONS WITH WASHINGTON COUNTY

Washington County Commissioner Fran Miron, Washington County Assessor Bruce Munneke, Director of Property Records and Taxpayer Services Jennifer Wagenius, City of Scandia Assessor Frank Langer and his assistant Chase Peloquin were in attendance to discuss Scandia's property valuations. Mayor Simonson explained that many residents at this year's Board of Appeal were angered and frustrated over the 20-25% increases to their property valuations, after a decrease in 2013, and the Council is looking for some reasoning behind the fluctuations.

Munneke described the manner in which market values are determined, and the state laws which define the process. The estimated market values for the 2014 assessment are based upon actual real estate market trends of Washington County properties taking place from October 2012 through September 2013. From these trends, the appraisal system is used to determine individual property values. He said that the bottom line is the limited number of sales that occur in Scandia in a one-year period, and that the valuations react to the market. This resulted in a 19% increase to property values, the highest in the county. He noted that other communities also had 15% and up increases this year, but predicted that things should smooth out in the coming years as the number of real estate transactions appear to be on the rise.

Wagenius explained the state property tax refund program that provides relief for property owners who have experienced property tax increases over 12%.

Miron stated that he understands the effects rising property values have on a person's finances, but the system reacts to the market. He explained that the market value approach is fair and must follow state law. There is a system in place for residents to appeal their valuations which the County has the authority to do. He offered to bring this issue to a legislative agenda for possible action on providing more stability in valuations.

Langer explained the new ratio used for valuations, and that if residents looked back over a two year spread, the current figures are in line overall. He considered that values should not have gone down 10% last year, but agreed that trends should smooth out in the coming years.

The Council thanked the County staff for attending the meeting and appreciated their input.

COMMUNITY CENTER ROOF REPAIRS

Public Works Director Kieffer presented a proposal from Midwest Exteriors to continue repairs to the Community Center roof. They had replaced the roof last fall but could not complete a system for proper ventilation due to structural problems. Kieffer explained the need to install vent chutes, a wind wash barrier and additional insulation to prevent the formation of ice dams. The contractor will perform the work for the cost of materials only, with a quote of \$4,278.35, to be paid out of the Capital Improvement Fund.

Council member Schneider agreed on the approach to correct the loss of heat through the roof, but was concerned that the contractors did not act on the ventilation problem last year. Kieffer explained that their contract allowed for them to cut in venting as needed, at an additional hourly rate. Once the structural concerns were discovered, they did not proceed.

Swanson, seconded by Lee, moved to award the Community Center roof repair project to Midwest Exteriors Plus for \$4,278.35. The motion carried 5-0.

City Administrator Handt noted that the City is holding a retainage on last year's contract, and will review the billing for work completed.

GREEN STEP CITIES

Council member Swanson presented additional information on becoming a Green Step City, as was introduced at the March 5th Council Work Session. Swanson explained that the City is already meeting much of the criteria of the voluntary program sponsored by the League of Cities, such as Log House Landing improvements to water quality. Administrator Handt agreed to be appointed as the coordinator of the program, and would work with volunteers such as the Friends group to promote and plan environmental best practices. A draft resolution authorizing the city to participate in the program was presented.

Council member Schneider asked to confirm that there would be no fiscal outlay or any mandatory regulations put on businesses. Handt explained that there would not be, but any decisions such as that would come before the Council.

Ness, seconded by Lee, moved to direct staff to place the resolution on the May 20th Consent Agenda. The motion carried 5-0.

ADDITIONAL CABLE COVERAGE OF CITY MEETINGS

Council member Swanson explained that Forest Lake has requested that the Cable Commission provide coverage for two additional meetings each month at no cost. In order to do that, the Commission must also offer additional coverage to Scandia and Columbus. Swanson proposed that the monthly Parks Committee and EDA meetings be added to the filming schedule.

The Council was in consensus to request this coverage and directed staff to draft a letter to the Cable Commission. Mayor Simonson explained that the Commission has only one dedicated camera for government meetings, and there may be conflicts in covering all the meetings

requested by the cities. If only one meeting could be accommodated, it was decided to request coverage of the EDA meetings.

**DRAFT PERSONNEL POLICY ADDITION: USE OF CITY VEHICLES,
EQUIPMENTS, SUPPLIES, TOOLS, UNIFORMS AND FACILITIES**

At the April Work Session, the Council tabled taking action on a policy for use of city equipment. Mayor Simonson stated that it is very important to have a document that addresses what employees are allowed and not allowed to do. He felt that washing and doing light maintenance on personal vehicles shouldn't be cut off, but taking equipment home should never be allowed. He explained that doing repairs and maintenance gives employees a chance to gain experience on doing tasks for the city as part of their job.

Council member Lee stated that there is too much of a gray area, and there should be a cut and dried policy such as the one offered to them in the packet, which allows for no use of city equipment for private purposes.

Lee, seconded by Chris, moved to adopt the addition to the Personnel Policy as offered by staff. The motion was on the floor for discussion.

Council member Schneider said that he was in agreement with Lee; where do you draw the line on use, and what if the equipment breaks.

Council member Swanson said she could also agree, but was not sure about the policy as written.

Simonson stated that the department heads have the responsibility to oversee the policy. Schneider offered that violations of the policy would be documented and part of the employee's performance review. He countered that things could be left as is and the supervisor could use their judgment if use of equipment should be allowed or not.

Council member Ness stated that it does build camaraderie to have the firefighters in the building during their off-time, but in no circumstances should equipment leave the building.

Administrator Handt explained that there should be equity amongst the employees in using facilities and equipment; leaving it up to the department heads to design a policy for their practices may not be equitable.

Fire Chief Hinz repeated his view that allowing the firefighters to be in the building to wash their vehicles and do light repairs has many benefits to the department and to recruitment. He said if this were banned, any in-kind work they perform while there would go away and have repercussions. Hinz offered that rather than listing allowed and not allowed actions, it would be easier to let the supervisors decide what an allowable use is.

Schneider stated that this is a tough issue. Swanson noted the legal concerns that were addressed at the last meeting. Simonson suggested having the City Attorney at the next meeting for his perspective.

Simonson called for a roll call vote on the Lee/Ness motion. Lee – yes; Ness – no; Swanson – no; Schneider – no; Simonson – no. The motion was defeated 1-4.

Simonson, seconded by Swanson, moved to table the issue to the June 4th Work Session and invite the City Attorney to provide input. The motion carried 5-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Ness, seconded by Swanson, moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Eklund
Deputy Clerk