

**BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL
WORKSHOP MINUTES
JANUARY 13, 2021**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Knier called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Council Members present: Ken Halverson, Sam Hanson, Paul Knier, and Paul Seefeld. Also present: City Administrator Clay Wilfahrt, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Finance Director Deb Wegeleben, Community Development Director Hanna Klimmek, City Planner Lucinda Meyers, City Engineer Layne Otteson, Deputy Police Chief Matt Hayen, Liquor Store Manager Greg Zurbey, and Big Lake Student Liaison Ella Dotzler.

3. PROPOSED AGENDA

Council Member Seefeld motioned to adopt the proposed Agenda as presented. Seconded by Council Member Hanson, unanimous ayes, Agenda adopted.

4. BUSINESS

4A. Discuss 2021 Designation of Newspaper for City Publications

Gina Wolbeck reviewed the City's options for 2021 designated newspaper choices including the Patriot Newspaper located in Becker, and the Elk River Star News/Monticello Times newspaper. Wolbeck reviewed quotes that were submitted by each newspaper and circulation requirements/commitments. The Patriot Newspaper is a free weekly publication that gets mailed to all Big Lake addresses (7,902 newspapers weekly). The Patriot currently covers City Council Meetings and school/community events, and has provided a commitment to continue this coverage for 2021. Their quoted 2021 publication rate for City notices is \$15.30 per column inch. The Elk River Star News (ERSN) and the Monticello Times newspaper are both owned and operated by ECM Publishers (APG East Central MN). The ERSN is a free weekly publication and the Monticello Times is a paid weekly subscription. The ERSN has committed to deliver 400 free copies of their newspaper at City Hall and Coborn's, which would meet the State of MN circulation requirements. The ERSN is unable to cover City Council Meetings, or Big Lake happenings. The Monticello Times has committed to cover Council Meetings and school/community events, but cannot meet the circulation requirements. ECM Publishing submitted a quote for 2021 publication rates for City notices at \$9.00 per column inch and will publish the City's notices in both the ERSN and the Monticello Times. Wolbeck also reviewed that the City is estimating to spend approximately \$7,000 in publication costs for 2021 which is

based on the \$9.00 per column inch pricing. If the Council chooses to designate the Patriot Newspaper, we should anticipate doubling that cost for 2021. Wolbeck explained that designation of the City's newspaper is done at the first meeting of the year so whichever paper the Council wishes to designate should be identified when approving the Council Appointments resolution at the regular meeting.

Council Member Halverson stated he prefers we use the Patriot as it reaches more residents.

Council Member Hanson stated that he likes that the Patriot is delivered free to all Big Lake addresses, noting the need to be transparent.

Council Member Seefeld stated he agrees getting notices to homes is a positive.

Mayor Knier stated that he favors the lower rate submitted by the ERSN/Monticello Times.

Wolbeck noted that all City public notices are also posted on the City's website. It was a unanimous consensus of the Council to move forward with designating the Elk River Star News as the newspaper for publishing City notices as long as all notices are also posted to the City Website.

4B. Big Lake Police Department Towing Contract Discussion

Matt Hayen reviewed the three-year towing contract the Police Department had with Bob's Towing, which expired in January 2020. Hayen provided a history of towing services the Department has used noting that prior to 2017, the Department had no formal towing contract or arrangement and reviewed draw backs of the prior system. In 2017, the City requested quotes from both towing companies that serviced Big Lake and one bid was received, which was from Bob's Towing. The contract was drafted by the City Attorney's Office and their office has provided an opinion that the contract can be extended as written at the 2017 rates. Hayen noted that a second tow company has inquired on the status of the contract. Clay Wilfahrt reviewed benefits of continuing the contract as well as potential drawbacks to bidding a new contract. Wilfahrt stressed that at the current time, there is no benefit to opening this contract up for bidding, but that there are significant potential impacts in terms of hard costs to the Department's budget if we do go out for bid on a new contract.

Council Member Halverson questioned why extending this contract is being discussed without going out for bid, expressing that he feels we should be doing an RFP for towing services, and accepting the low bid as long as the services are the same. Halverson stressed that we need to be transparent and give everyone a fair shot at it. Wilfahrt explained bid requirements, noting that the City does not have a legal obligation to bid for this service. If Council wishes to solicit quotes for towing services, Staff is willing to facilitate that. Wilfahrt noted that Staff is recommending the City avoid the system where we are using two towing companies. Hayen agreed that the Department would not operate efficiently using two tow companies. Halverson stated that he feels it gives an unfair advantage to Bob's Towing by having the information in the packet.

Council Member Hanson stated he would like to stay with Bob's Towing. The relationship is great and they are a good community partner. Hanson also stated that he is concerned that rates will increase if we bring it back for quoting.

Council Member Seefeld stated he prefers to have one tow company, and is open to take quotes for the service. Wilfahrt reiterated to Council that if we go out for quote, there is a possibility that quotes could potentially come in higher. Hanson stated that based on the possibility of rates increasing, he prefers we stay with the current contract.

Mayor Knier stated that the current contract is a public document. Knier also discussed that he prefers to keep the current Bob's Towing contract as we are not required to go out for quotes for towing services. Knier also suggested we look at a shorter term with the possibility to extend with an automatic renew.

Mayor Knier and Council Members Hanson and Seefeld were in favor of extending the Bob's Towing contract for the Police Department's Towing services as there is not a requirement to go out for quotes for the services, along with the potential for increased towing rates if we do go out for quote. Council Member Halverson stated that he is in favor of going through the quote process to show transparency with City contracting.

4C. 2021 Street and Utility Improvement Project No. ST2021-1 Introduction

Layne Otteson reviewed project initiation for the proposed 2021 Street and Utility Improvement Project. Otteson reviewed that street reconstruction for 2020 was identified in the Pavement Management Plan and the Capital Improvement Plan but was delayed to 2021. Otteson reviewed the major elements of the 2020 street project as previously approved by Council, resident feedback, costs, financing, special assessments, and a tentative schedule. Otteson explained that the scope of this project focuses on street rehabilitation and drainage improvements for 22 street segments that have been found in need of resurfacing or reconstruction. The streets have continued to deteriorate such that they are expending significant Public Works resources, noting that some sections of the streets are unraveling and appear beyond mill/overlay. Otteson also reviewed communications with affected residents noting that three open houses were held in 2019. In January 2020, a meeting for sidewalk discussion was held. Approximately 10 residents attended as well as several City officials to discuss need, costs, and impacts. The meeting provided guidance moving forward and Council directed Staff to include sidewalks in the final project design on Sherburne Avenue, Powell Street, and Will Street, but not on Euclid Avenue. Otteson also noted that the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) prepared for the 2020 Street and Utility project will be utilized to save costs and expedite the process. It will be updated and reflect comment from upcoming open houses. Otteson discussed infrastructure repair and replacement that occurred in 2020 that was deemed as an immediate need and will no longer be included in the 2021 project. Additional work needed may include manhole repairs, nonfunctional fire hydrants, curb replacement, sidewalk repair, and sidewalk installation. This type of work could be considered part of the overall project and the City could realize cost savings due to bidding a larger project. Otteson asked for Council feedback on the proposed plans.

Council Member Halverson questioned why we removed sidewalks from the original project. Halverson stated that he feels removing sidewalks is a safety issue and we need to follow our sidewalk and trail plan that is in place, noting that he feels sidewalks are necessary for the safety of children and residents. Halverson also stressed that we need to consider what is in the best interest of the entire City, not just 15 affected property owners. Halverson stressed that we claim that we are a walkable city and he finds it absurd that the Council would remove a sidewalk from a street project.

Council Member Hanson stated that he reviewed the traffic study as provided by the City Engineer, and that the Euclid Avenue neighborhood had substantially more residents who were against a sidewalk install than who were in favor of it, while the other sidewalk areas had more support for an install than those who were against it. Hanson also stated that he feels the price tag for this sidewalk doesn't justify the install when compared to the traffic counts.

Council Member Seefeld stated that he has a young child and he feels safe walking with his child on our streets. Seefeld also questioned if Powell Street would decrease in size if we install a sidewalk. Otteson discussed that Powell Street is a designated State Aid street so we can only go down to a certain street width. Wilfahrt explained what a PER is and noted that Council will have an opportunity to dissect the plans at a later date.

Council Members unanimously directed Staff to move forward with ordering a Preliminary Engineering Report for the 2021 Street and Utility Improvement Project ST2021-1.

4D. New Ideas Discussion – no new ideas were brought forward.

5. OTHER

Council Member Halverson discussed the possibility of combining fire inspection and code inspection duties into one position. Clay Wilfahrt noted that this can be discussed first at a Personnel Committee meeting when we discuss the Fire Chief position.

6. ADJOURN

Council Member Hanson motioned to adjourn at 5:56 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Seefeld unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck
City Clerk

01/27/21
Date Approved By Council