

**BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP MINUTES**

**JANUARY 23, 2019**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Wallen called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Council Members present: Dick Backlund, Seth Hansen, Rose Johnson, Paul Knier, and Mike Wallen. Also present: City Administrator Clay Wilfahrt, Finance Director Deb Wegeleben, City Planner Michael Healy, Police Corporal Joe Kalla, Public Works Director Mike Goebel, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Liquor Store Manager Greg Zurbey, Deputy City Clerk Janette Rust, and Consultant City Engineer Jared Voge from Bolton and Menk, Inc.

**3. PROPOSED AGENDA**

Council Member Hansen motioned to adopt the proposed agenda as presented. Seconded by Council Member Knier, unanimous ayes, agenda adopted.

**4. BUSINESS**

**4A. IT Services Discussion**

Clay Wilfahrt reviewed discussions with the Sherburne County Sheriff's Department regarding IT services. Wilfahrt noted that the Big Lake Police Department has been sending some of their more specialized law enforcement IT needs to the County and has been very satisfied with the service they have received from the Sheriff's Department. Wilfahrt explained that the Sheriff's IT Department manages IT for their staff as well as the county jail. The working relationship has been excellent between the Sheriff's Department and the Big Lake Police Department, and recently the City has been presented with an opportunity to partner with the Sheriff's Department for IT services. The proposed agreement would allow for up to 13 hours per week in IT services at an annual cost set at \$34,000. Wilfahrt reviewed past expenses the City incurred using a local IT consultant compared to the number of hours the City would receive through the proposed agreement. The move would provide a slight cost savings, as well as providing additional IT service hours. Wilfahrt noted that currently, City staff performs a lot of basic IT functions in order to avoid calling and incurring charges through our IT service provider. With the new agreement in place, these tasks would now be completed by IT staff, allowing staff to focus on their core duties. Wilfahrt also noted that the Sheriff's Department will be hiring an additional IT staff person, who will have time to dedicate to the City. This arrangement has been reviewed by the Finance Committee who agreed that it should move forward for Council consideration. The City

Attorney has also reviewed the agreement and has recommended no changes. Wilfahrt stated that our current consultant has been performing well for the City, noting this change is based on the need for more designated IT hours.

Council inquired if this would be an annual contract and noted the unsuccessful use of County IT a couple years ago. Wilfahrt stated the agreement would be continuous until terminated and explained the Sheriff's IT department is more specialized in the services the City requires compared to the County's general IT department used a couple years ago. Council directed staff to proceed with bringing the agreement forward for approval.

#### **4B. Code Enforcement Task Force Discussion**

Michael Healy discussed the City's code enforcement efforts and how complaints are prioritized. Enforcement has been an ongoing challenge since the Community Development Department rebuilt its staff in late 2015. Non-compliance issues the City generally addresses include junk/blight, property maintenance, work without a permit, tall grass/weeds, illegal parking, commercial vehicles parked illegally, signage/zoning violations, and snow removal complaints. Healy noted that the most reasonable practice for enforcement has been to act on a complaint based system, stressing that staff believes that a complaint based system is realistic for the capacity currently in place. Healy reviewed code enforcement staffing throughout the year and asked for Council feedback on how they believe code enforcement should be handled and how it should be prioritized. Staff suggested establishing a task force to include two members from the Council to meet to develop a plan for enforcing the City Code.

Council asked for the number of complaints staff addresses per week. Healy noted 10 to 15 complaints mainly regarding weeds in the summer months and the lack of snow and ice removal during the winter months. Council discussed appointing Council Members Hansen and Backlund to the code enforcement task force.

#### **5. OTHER**

Michael Healy discussed the City's Ordinance that requires property owners with public sidewalks to clear snow and loose ice from the sidewalk within a specific period of time. Healy noted that the Public Works Department administered violations up until 2015, and due to staff capacity issues they discontinued their enforcement of the snow removal ordinance in 2016. There has been minimal enforcement for the past couple years. The Community Development Department has been fielding a large number of complaints since last winter. As there is no dedicated code enforcement position during the winter months, staff was not in a position to respond to this high volume of complaints. Non-compliance with the ordinance was extremely widespread and much of the sidewalk system was covered in snow all winter. Healy explained that for this year, the Community Development Department has been assigned the task of overseeing the enforcement of this ordinance. Sharpline Lawn Care, LLC has been hired to take on oversight of sidewalk areas, with administrative support from the City. In November 2018 a letter was sent out to all properties with adjacent sidewalk areas informing them that the ordinance would be proactively enforced. The new enforcement program was advertised on social media, the City website, and in the City newsletter. Recently, a text and email notification system has been launched on the City website

that allows residents to sign up to receive an alert the day before Sharpline will be doing sidewalk inspections. Sharpline will only be conducting a sweep of the sidewalk system following a 2+ inch snow event. The first sweep was done at the beginning of January. Sharpline found 38 properties that were out of compliance. These sidewalk areas were documented, cleared, and invoiced for the snow removal.

Several owners have expressed confusion regarding the ordinance, stating that they thought their sidewalks were being cleared by the Public Works Department. Some property owners hired contractors who failed to clear the entire sidewalk or part of the sidewalk. All property owners who have spoken with staff have offered assurances that they will be more diligent in clearing these areas in the future. Staff has received requests for leniency during this first sweep due to this being a major policy change. The fines are almost \$200 per property which can result in a significant financial impact. Healy expressed that staff does not have the authority to extend fine forgiveness and asked for Council feedback. If Council chooses to waive the fees, a formal warning will be sent to affected properties with a notice that all future violations will result in a fine with no additional leniency.

Council discussed recovering the cost the City incurred from Sharpline from the affected 38 properties. Wegeleben noted that there wouldn't be much difference from the cost to reclaim the fees charged to the City by Sharpline and the actual cost incurred. Council discussed the importance of maintaining a clear sidewalk system, but also recognized the need to offer a grace period for the first snow event of the year due to the new program. Council stressed that future violations will not receive this leniency. Council directed staff to waive the fines for the first snow event of this season and to send out formal warning notices to affected property owners.

## 6. ADJOURN

Council Member Hansen motioned to adjourn at 5:57 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Knier, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck  
City Clerk

02/13/19  
Date Approved By Council