

**BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL
WORKSHOP MINUTES**

FEBRUARY 8, 2023

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Knier called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Council Members present: Ken Halverson, Sam Hanson, Paul Knier, Kim Noding, and Paul Seefeld. Also present: City Administrator Hanna Klimmek, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Finance Director Deb Wegeleben, Community Development Director Therese Haffner, City Engineer Layne Otteson, Police Chief John Kaczmarek, Liquor Store Manager Greg Zurbey, Streets/Parks/Fleet Superintendent Norm Michels, and Big Lake Student Liaisons Allie Cross.

3. PROPOSED AGENDA

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

4. BUSINESS

4A. Water Meter Discussion – Presentation from Certified Building Biology Environmental Consultant/Electromagnetic Radiation Specialist Damon Coyne

Mayor Knier reviewed the City's conversion to smart water meters, noting that the industry is moving away from the old technology, and we want to make sure that the Council and citizens are informed. Knier introduced Damon Coyne from Intentional Environment to present information on man-made EMR (Electromagnetic Radiation) which can interfere with the body's healthy communication, create internal stress and illness. Coyne reviewed that the use of cell phones, Wi-Fi and higher frequency electric fields from building wiring increase rates of disease and disorders including memory loss, attention issues, headaches, insomnia, anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue, allergy stress responses, cancers, and chemical and electro-sensitivities. Coyne noted that while it is impossible to completely avoid EMFs in society, we can reduce exposures in critical spaces, especially where we sleep and work. The BioInitiative Report provides a deeper dive into the health effects of EMR. This international initiative examines the research of over 3800 studies on EMR, reviews the current exposure standards and finds that they are far from adequate to protect public health. Its findings and recommendations have led to reductions of exposure guidelines for many countries in Europe, Austria, New Zealand, Israel and others. The report has also inspired the removal of Wi-Fi networks in public buildings, schools, libraries, businesses and homes.

Council Member Halverson discussed the number of times gas and electric smart meters ping. Norm Michels responded that in Big Lake, electric meters ping every 15 minutes, and gas meters ping every hour. Michels also noted that all utility companies have indicated that they are considering less time pinging closer together, and it is all based on their means of support if they have a break. Michels also discussed that another important factor to know is that they ping house by house until they reach their destination, whereas the new City water meters will ping directly to the tower randomly.

Halverson asked if the EMF from gas and electric meters are comparable to our water meters as far strength. Coyne responded that the electric meters vary a lot, some are much stronger than others, and there is a piggy-backing of signals to the one that is the collector. He noted that he has received many calls from households that are near the collector where they had ringing in their ears and sleep issues in the household after those were installed. They vary between brands and how they are set up and how often they ping. There isn't an industry standard but the gas meters seem to be less strong and are easier to shield with foil tape. The City can also program the setting to not ping during the night when people are trying to sleep, but more during mid-day.

Halverson stated that based on discussion, water meters seem to be less of a concern as they aren't as strong and will ping less. Coyle responded that the water meter would be in the house and the gas and electric meters are usually boxed on the outside, noting that proximity is a big thing. Halverson reviewed discussion on private industries having different opinions than the public industries have. Coyne noted that independent studies have been done by universities and other unaffiliated organizations who don't have an interest in the telecommunications companies, noting that with studies that are funded, there is often manipulation. Coyne discussed that the people with the FCC have been tied to the cell phone companies so it's been a revolving door between those executives. The FCC is not a health organization so they don't review health at all, they sell bandwidth on different frequencies to different companies and regulate the electronics from that standpoint, not from a health standpoint. While federal laws restrict local jurisdictions from making health claim concerns about the location of any transmitter, we do have some choice with our local government in terms of how it gets set up at a residence. Coyne noted that unfortunately, it's a big money game. Halverson responded that there is money being made on both sides, noting that Coyne is being paid to be here to do this presentation so both groups are making money.

Mayor Knier discussed the 20,000 independent studies that have been conducted. Coyne noted there are over 20,000 peer review papers on the subject of non-ionizing radiation, non-thermal effects of the fields.

Knier discussed he has seen some varying statistics on that the effect of the radiation drops off dramatically with distance, but he has also heard comparisons to cell phones EMF, and asked how strong a cell phone is compared to a smart meter. Coyle responded that cell phones are for sure stronger than these smart meters. If you are close to it, kids especially are more sensitive due to having much thinner skulls so they absorb radiation at a much higher rate and especially in the head. The concern is the closeness to the transmitter as it can really impact neurological development and cause other issues. Coyne reiterated that relatively, the cell phone is significantly stronger and he commended the company the City is using in that they are at least considering these things and not sending as many signals as

some of the other companies. The strength is fairly similar, but noted that a cell phone can go to half a million watts per square meter at times when it is initially connecting. Knier noted that is why he has a special case on his cell phone. Knier also noted that he is glad the discussion was brought up on research done in Europe. Some consider this as weird, but it is becoming more and more in the know, and we are becoming more aware of the health impacts, noting that there have been protests in the world regarding these concerns.

Council Member Hanson motioned to recess the February 8, 2023 Council Workshop at 5:48 p.m. until immediately after adjournment of the February 8, 2023 Regular Council meeting. Seconded by Council Member Seefeld, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Council Member Halverson motioned to reconvene the February 8, 2023 Council Workshop at 6:47 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Seefeld, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

4B. Police Department Staffing Discussion

John Kaczmarek reviewed the results of the Baker Tilly Staffing Analysis Report done in October 2022, which resulted in a recommendation that the City should increase Sworn Staff in the Police Department by adding one full-time position in 2023, and that future staffing should be increased based on actual growth and development. The recommendation also included that if the Police Department increases its level of service to provide two patrols at all times, two additional positions will need to be added. Kaczmarek provided information on the current staffing levels in the Department as well as duties of each position, and overtime that has been paid out dating back to 2010. Kaczmarek compared projected overtime costs to the cost of adding a new officer. Kaczmarek also discussed examples of staffing shortages the Department has experienced and how this has negatively impacted scheduling options and officer use of PTO/Flex Time. Kaczmarek asked for Council to consider what their expectations are regarding staffing at the Police Department, including number of cars on, whether they feel supervision is needed on all shifts, whether local law enforcement responds to calls versus another agency, and what their goals are for the Department and how it relates to public safety, community involvement, and overall employee/staff health and wellness. Kaczmarek noted that the City's budget is primarily personnel costs. We are paying top dollar for minimum service and in doing so neglecting the wellness of our staff, stating that this is not sustainable financially or mentally for our officers. Kaczmarek reviewed Priority Bid Vacations as required by the LELS Patrol Union Contract, which affects overtime for shifts that need to be filled. Discussion was held that multiple officers needed to carry-over time due to not being able to take their vacation/personal time off. Kaczmarek reviewed that the Department's golden number of staff would be 17 which would allow for all four shifts to have three cars on, and the K9 Officer additional rotating car being shared between all four shifts. This would allow for one officer to have the option to take vacation, use sick time, injury, etc. and still have a two car minimum for that shift without the City having to pay overtime costs. Kaczmarek discussed recent incidents nationwide that have affected recruitment, retention, and willingness to do the job. There is a lack of interest to join the law enforcement profession, and many have retired early or moved out of metro agencies. Kaczmarek stressed that POST licenses are down over the last two years, noting that there are significantly more jobs available than students licensed coming out of skills programs. Many agencies are having to offer sign on bonuses, upfront vacation and sick banks, top lateral pay, etc. Kaczmarek

reviewed that we must supersede POST Board training expectations, noting that there are new Police Reform Bills coming that we need to prepare for. Kaczmarek reviewed the need to have a contingency plan in place for critical incidents, noting the increase in these types of cases locally. Kaczmarek provided statements submitted by Big Lake Police Staff during the Baker Tilly report that reflect significant concerns with officer health and wellness due to staffing shortages within the Department.

Kaczmarek provided his recommendation for addressing staffing levels within the Police Department; 1) advertise and hire a 15th Officer immediately (2023), 2) advertise in September 2023 and hire a 16th Officer in January 2024, 3) advertise in September 2024 and hire a 17th Officer in January 2025. Kaczmarek reiterated that the Baker Tilly Staffing Analysis recommended one additional staff in 2023, with two more based on need. Kaczmarek stressed that supervision and 3 cars on is a must, noting that adjusting the staffing levels to 17 officers needs to be entertained to alleviate overtime, support our staff, alleviate burnout, help with retention, supervision, training and accountability.

Mayor Knier asked if the new Reserve Program will impact staffing the Department. Kaczmarek reviewed that the Reserves will be a support service providing ears and eyes, noting that they are not POST certified, and could be a liability if we ask them to fulfill duties outside their training and/or certification. Kaczmarek discussed that they will significantly assist with community events.

Council Member Halverson asked if he will have a progressive scale for implementing additional positions, and if we will consider utilizing grant writers to secure grant funding to help offset some of the costs of bringing on additional law enforcement personnel. Council Member Noding noted that grants could bridge the financial gap. Kaczmarek responded that we can look into potential grant opportunities. Mayor Knier discussed possible grants and reminded Council that there could be strings attached to grants such as funding for 2-years of salary and then the City would be required to guarantee the position and salary for a certain amount of time after. Deb Wegeleben reviewed that most grants would have a match requirement and most likely will require a guaranteed position for a number of years. Hanna Klimmek also discussed that if the City does receive grant funding, there would be reporting requirements.

Kaczmarek stated that he would like the Council to seriously entertain 16 officers with an established timeline, and stressed that current officers have very clearly identified that they want more cops.

Council Member Noding discussed that she has heard from numerous staff about burnout concerns, vacation problems, and coverage for illnesses, stating that our current Police Department staffing is not sustainable. Our population is only increasing, we are a corridor city, and she feels the Chief's recommendation is reasonable.

Halverson discussed that staffing in the Department has not changed much since 2012, and since that time our population has blossomed, but we haven't kept tide with our police staffing. Halverson stated that he doesn't have a problem with the Chief's recommendation, but expressed that he feels it is important for staff to seek resources to bridge the financial gap.

Knier asked for feedback from staff on how the City will pay for these additional officers, noting that he would love to have 17 right now, but he needs to understand how the positions will be funded. Deb Wegeleben discussed that for the one position in 2023, we would utilize unreserved funds to pay for the position, and future years' hires would need to be budgeted each year. Halverson discussed that if we can get our overtime down to a reasonable level, we will save dollars in not having to pay that cost, so it shouldn't have a huge financial impact. Wegeleben reviewed that the City truly only budgets \$40,000 for overtime each budget cycle so we have been significantly going over budget for a number of years.

Council Member Seefeld discussed that various organizations and community members help fund the K9 program through donations, noting that we should continue to seek additional donations for the K9 unit, as this would free up some dollars to bring on more patrol staff.

Council Member Hanson reviewed that the Personnel Committee supported the Chief's recommendation, noting that he had always said he wants us to re-evaluate our staffing levels and that the officers haven't felt full support from the City. Hanson also stated that he would like to further discuss the proposed timeline, noting that he feels the timeline can be delayed a little more than what is being recommended. Hanson suggested we get the 15th officer hired, and then maybe spread out the other two additional positions to fill the gaps in. Halverson noted that spreading them out will be affected by the length of time it will take to get an officer hired, noting that he prefers the Chief's recommendation as is. Noding asked how long it took for the advertising/hiring process last time. Kaczmarek responded that the Department has been down an officer since he started employment with the City, noting that they just filled the spot that opened up in July 2022.

Knier discussed that K9 Ranger is not counted as an officer, and that he agrees that the City needs to look out for the mental health of the team, that they need to be allowed to take their time off, and that we need to continue to provide good service to our citizens.

Seefeld discussed that he can validate the need to have 2 officers on duty as in the Army, they always had 2 on duty at a minimum.

Wegeleben discussed funding for the new positions, noting that adding in the 16th and 17th positions will be budget decisions in those specific years.

Halverson reiterated that he feels we need to leave the Chief's recommendation as is, noting that our officers have shown their support to the City, and now we need to show support to the Department. Noding stated that she feels the same, and that it is important for them to know we hear them and we support them. Seefeld stated that he lands in the middle. Hanson noted that he was hoping to see the 16th position advertisement to be in 2024, but he can fall in line with the other Council Members and support the majority. Knier stated that we can always address the last two positions at a later date.

Council directed Staff to bring an item to next regular meeting to authorize advertising to hire a 15th Police Officer.

5. **OTHER** – No other.

6. ADJOURN

Council Member Halverson motioned to adjourn at 8:24 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Seefeld unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck
City Clerk

03.01.2023
Date Approved by Council