

**BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL
EMERGENCY MEETING MINUTES**

MARCH 18, 2020

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Wallen called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Council Members present: Seth Hansen, Rose Johnson via teleconference, Paul Knier, Mike Wallen, and Scott Zettervall. Also present: City Administrator Clay Wilfahrt, Finance Director Deb Wegeleben, City Engineer Layne Otteson, Police Chief Joel Scharf, Deputy Chief Matt Hayen, Community Development Director Hanna Klimmek, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, and Liquor Store Manager Greg Zurbey.

3. PROPOSED AGENDA

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

4. BUSINESS – COVID 19 Update and Proposed Plan

Clay Wilfahrt reviewed the memo drafted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the COVID-19 pandemic has swept the nation, there have been health concerns and government intervention that have dramatically changed our way of life. City staff has been closely monitoring this situation and has been developing and implementing plans. Wilfahrt noted that until this point, everything has been done administratively, but we are at a point that we need Council support to implement the next phase of changes. Wilfahrt provided a summary of the plan that staff would like Council to consider.

1. Building Inspections – currently, our Building Official has been given discretion to postpone building inspections that he is not comfortable conducting, specifically, situations where he would be required to enter an existing residence are of concern. We are working to do some inspections via virtual means where possible. Action requested included directing staff to proceed with Building Inspections at the discretion of the Building Official.

2. Public Access to City Hall – We would like to restrict public access to City Hall. People will still be able to drop things off, call, or email staff; however, interacting with staff will only be available by appointment and for things that can only be conducted in person and not electronically. Due to possible health concerns, and the concern that a COVID-19 case among City staff could potentially compromise provision of services due to quarantine, we are exercising caution in public interaction. This restriction can be removed when the Council or the City Administrator deems it prudent to remove. This or similar restrictions are being employed by a number of

municipalities and additionally, staff is aware of several other local cities that will be considering restricted access in the next few days. Another option would be to encourage residents and businesses to limit interaction with City staff, and sanitize the front counter frequently. This is a method currently being employed by some municipalities, and other Cities are continuing to operate without restrictions. We are aware that several of the cities currently open are likely going to restrict access within the next few days. Action requested included directing staff to immediately restrict access to City Hall until further notice.

3. Public Access to the Police Department – The police department receives little foot traffic normally, however, residents will now be required to submit things like data requests and other forms online. Staff plans to have a computer in the public area for submission of these types of items. Similar to City Hall, appointments could be made for meetings required face-to-face. This restriction can be removed when the Council or the City Administrator deems it prudent to remove. Action requested included direction to staff to immediately restrict access to the Police Department until further notice.

4. Liquor Store Hours – The Liquor store has been spending an extensive amount of time cleaning and restocking. They sold over \$34,000 worth of product on March 16, which is similar to a holiday weekend day. Because of the extra time spent on restocking and cleaning, we are recommending that we move towards different hours. We will be moving to a 9am to 5pm schedule for all days except Sunday which will be 11am to 4pm. We are also going to be posting signs asking people to use credit cards vs. cash to limit employee exposure. This change can be reversed when the Council or the City Administrator deems it prudent to reverse. Action requested included approval to modify the Liquor Store hours to 9am to 5pm every day except Sunday which will have hours of 11am to 4pm until further notice.

5. Telecommuting – We will be requiring about half of City Hall staff to work from home effective immediately. Our major concern is that if someone at City Hall contracts COVID-19, everyone may end up in mandatory quarantine and it would shut down City Hall. Because of that we want to have two teams of staff, each capable of maintaining the mandatory functions of the City. Then if someone contracts the virus, we maintain continuity of services until the first team is out of quarantine. Those working from home will do whatever work they are able to from home, and they will continue to be paid at their normal rate for 40 hours per week. Some staff may not be able to conduct a full 40 hours of work from home, but staff believes that it will be close to that many hours. Staff will also be able to stagger shifts and come in during non-core hours to make up any hours missed. This change can be removed when the Council or the City Administrator deems it prudent to remove. Action requested included permitting staff to adopt the above telecommuting plan until further notice.

6. Divide Public Works Staff – We are going to either park all Public Works trucks outside, or allow Public Works to take their trucks home during the pandemic. Limiting contact among the workers reduces the impact of a potential positive test among staff. If we had a positive case right now, everyone would be required to be quarantined. If we separate them, we will be able to only have one or two quarantined, vs. the entire staff. Again this is a response to ensure that if a positive case is found among staff, we will be able to continue with our services. This change

can be removed when the Council or the City Administrator deems it prudent to remove. Action requested included authorization for staff to take the actions outlined above until further notice.

7. Water and sewer late fees and shut-offs – Due to this situation, and in response to the economic hardship this is creating for many of our residents, we will be waiving late fees for the next 30 days, and suspending shutoffs during that period as well. Action requested included authorizing staff to waive late fees and suspend shut-offs for one month.

8. Sick leave balances and home with pay – Staff will be able to use sick leave even if they have not accumulated it. They will be able to accrue a negative balance of up to 96 hours. Council was presented with a temporary leave policy change. Action requested included approval of the temporary leave policy amendment.

9. Community Gathering Spaces – Because of the President's recommendation to eliminate community gatherings greater than 10 people, the Senior Center and Community room will be closed until further notice. We will also not issue special events permits for gatherings greater than 10 people. This will continue until the CDC and MDH lift restriction of such gatherings. Action requested included authorizing the closing of the Senior Center and the Community Room, and denial of special events permits for events greater than 10 people until further notice.

10. Multi-family inspections – To protect the safety of our inspectors, the City's multi-family inspection program will be suspended until this situation stabilizes. This suspension can be removed when the Council or the City Administrator deems it prudent to remove. Action requested included authorization to suspend the multi-family inspection process until further notice.

Wilfahrt also discussed other measures staff is recommending the City implement that don't necessarily require Council action, but want to make Council aware of:

1. New hires on hold – We will be suspending the hiring of any new staff until after this situation stabilizes.

2. Meetings – We will be following the guidelines of the CDC and the President and recommending that no meetings occur that have more than 10 people.

3. Travel – No travel for the purpose of City business is recommended. The only travel allowed will be travel that is essential to critical City business.

4. Lost revenue, tracking of hours, etc. – We are working to track any items that may be reimbursable by the Federal Government as part of an emergency declaration.

5. City Meetings – The City has the option of hosting Public Meetings via a virtual service like skype, zoom, etc. or over telephone. All this takes is a determination by the City Attorney or Administrator that it makes more sense to hold meetings in a closed or virtual setting due to a health pandemic. Tonight Councilmember Johnson joined the meeting via telephone.

Mayor Wallen asked for feedback from each Council Member.

Council Member Johnson stated that she is in favor of all recommendations made by Staff.

Council Member Knier asked for clarification on allowing negative leave balances and how it would be handled if an employee resigns with a negative balance. Wegeleben explained that any negative leave accrual would be taken out of the last payroll issued to a staff person. Knier also discussed telecommuting and if there are concerns with allowing staff to enter City Hall after hours. Wilfahrt discussed that all staff will be required to follow CDC/MDH guidelines. If any staff person has cold or flu like symptoms, or a family member has symptoms, employees need to stay home. Discussion was held that the CDC/MDH recommendations are fluid and changing daily. Knier stated we need some symbolic gesture of normalcy and discussed the option to keep City Hall open to the public. Wilfahrt noted that Staff's preference would be to close City Hall to the public as there is less of a chance of infection with City Hall closed. Council Member Hansen reviewed how Wright County is operating, noting that we need to consider the City's liability if we leave public areas open. Council Member Knier stated the importance of not putting the City at risk financially.

Council Member Scott Zettervall stated that he is a proponent of keeping City Hall open, stressing that we can implement precautions in place of closing. Deb Wegeleben discussed her concerns with the potential for Workers Compensation claims if we remain open. Zettervall stressed that we need to find a way to keep physically accessible to the public, and questioned how we can justify closing City Hall but keeping the municipal liquor store open. Wilfahrt clarified that City Hall can still function fully even if the building is inaccessible. With the liquor store, it is the opposite. With restricting City Hall, we can protect health without sacrificing functionality. Zettervall discussed the option of shifting store hours to be open later. Greg Zurbey discussed key store times, sales data, and noted that we have to consider availability of staff. Council Member Johnson stressed that we should be entrusting liquor store management to best determine how we can balance staff availability with demand. Council Member Hansen stated that he understands the need to be open for an 8-hour timeframe to meet demand, and stressed that we need to have a consistent message to the public. Zurbey discussed recent closings of some municipal stores and hopes that Big Lake can operate somewhere in the middle ground to provide service, while addressing the needs and concerns of Staff. Zettervall also questioned how working at home will be monitored and if the City has a policy in place. Wilfahrt outlined responsibilities of staff and managers, noting that the City has a fully functioning remote login system, and clarified that the City also has a telecommuting policy in place. Zettervall stated that over-reaction is sending the wrong message to the public.

Council Member Hansen reviewed procedures that Wright County has put into place during this Pandemic, and stated that he is in favor of City Hall having restricted access as long as we can still provide services. Hansen also discussed tax revenue generated through the Municipal Liquor Store, and stressed that the City needs to be receptive to staff's concerns. Hansen also discussed the need for the City to continue to revisit the situation regularly.

Mayor Wallen reviewed his experience with how other cities are handling building inspections, noting that most are attempting to operate “business as usual” when possible. Wallen stated that he is in favor of limiting access to City Hall as we can still conduct our daily business. Wallen also stated that he feels the liquor store hours should be determined by the managers, as they are best equipped to figure out what hours will work for the store and for Staff. Wallen noted that we are all experiencing changes in our normal lives, and that we need to trust our department heads and Staff to work their allotted hours. Council Member Zettervall stated that he just wanted assurance that we have a policy in place. Mayor Wallen also stressed that officials need to be in attendance at Council Meetings as long as they are not sick, to show the public that we are continuing to manage and govern.

Council Member Knier motioned to approve Staff’s recommendations as presented in the March 18, 2020 COVID-19 memo with the exception of item no. 2 to be voted on separately, and changes to the liquor store hours to be determined by management. Seconded by Council Member Zettervall. A Roll Call Vote was conducted with Council Member Knier voting aye, Council Member Johnson voting aye, Council Member Zettervall voting aye, Council Member Hansen voting aye, and Mayor Wallen voting aye. Vote passed unanimously. Motion carried.

Council Member Hansen motioned to approve Staff’s recommendation on item no. 2 in the March 18, 2020 COVID-19 memo as presented to restrict access to City Hall until further notice. Seconded Council Member Johnson. A Roll Call Vote was conducted with Council Member Knier voting nay, Council Member Johnson voting aye, Council Member Zettervall voting nay, Council Member Hansen voting aye, and Mayor Wallen voting aye. Vote passed with a 3:2 vote in favor of restricting access to City Hall until further notice. Motion carried.

Council Member Hansen excused himself from the meeting at 6:56 p.m.

Police Chief Scharf reviewed the department’s emergency operations protocol, on-going meetings with Sherburne County, and implementation of the CivicReady Alert System for Council, law enforcement staff, and department leads. Scharf also noted that his team is attending briefings at Sherburne County 3 days a week along with other law enforcement agencies. They will continue to regularly monitor the MDH web page for updates, will provide daily safe practices to officers, and noted that the police department conference room has been converted to a local EOC. Deputy Chief Matt Hayen reviewed safeguards put into place for our patrol officers during calls, noting that officers will no longer be responding to medicals for flu like symptoms. They have also implemented restrictions on future vacations and trainings, and Staff is adjusting to shift changes and overtime requirements. Chief Scharf also discussed areas of concern with an increase to disturbances, noting that closures of businesses can be targets for burglary. Our officers are heavily patrolling these areas. Scharf also discussed concerns with travel-through crime from other jurisdictions, an increase in mental health issues, and the potential for civil unrest if this draws on. Scharf stressed that the department will continue to have a “business as usual” approach.

Layne Otteson noted that the Public Works staff has been divided up into teams in response to COVID-19.

5. ADJOURN

Council Member Knier motioned to adjourn at 7:08 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Zettervall, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck
City Clerk

03/25/2020
Date Approved By Council