

**JOINT MEETING OF THE
CITY OF BIG LAKE, BIG LAKE TOWNSHIP, ORROCK TOWNSHIP, BIG LAKE SCHOOL DISTRICT,
AND THE SHERBURNE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

JANUARY 19, 2023

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. ROLL CALL

Big Lake City Council Members present: Mayor Paul Knier, Council Members Ken Halverson, and Kim Noding.

Big Lake Township Board Members present: Dean Brenteson, Mark Hedstrom, and Norm Leslie.

Orrock Township Board Members present: Supervisors Paul Ellinger and Anne Felber.

Big Lake School Board Members present: Chair Tonya Reasoner, Tony Scales, and Ashley Schabillon.

Sherburne County Commissioners present: Commissioners Raeanne Danielowski and Gregg Felber.

Staff present: City Administrator Hanna Klimmek, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Finance Director Deb Wegeleben, Captain Sam Olson, Sherburne County Administrator Bruce Messelt, Big Lake Township Treasurer Ken Warneke and Clerk Brenda Kimberly-Maas, and Big Lake School Superintendent Tim Truebenbach.

4. PROPOSED AGENDA

Commissioner Danielowski motioned to adopt the proposed Agenda. Seconded by Council Member Noding, unanimous ayes, Agenda adopted.

5. BUSINESS

5A. Sherburne County Topics

Bruce Messelt discussed County drivers including population, tax base, and housing. Messelt reviewed the 2023 budget and levy, broadband initiatives and upgrades, and the Sherco transition. Messelt also reviewed transportation plans and land use topics, business and community assistance programs, the 2020 Census and resulting 2022 redistricting, recapped the 2022 elections, and reviewed public and community health issues including THC, legal cannabis, opioids, and COVID.

Commissioner Raeanne Danielowski reviewed union contract negotiations which culminated in a 2.5% increase for 3-year terms. Danielowski also reviewed that the CMRP group has been working on a future bridge crossing for a number of years, but that we most likely won't see a bridge crossing for many years.

Messelt further discussed the future Hwy 25/CR 11 road swap which is now being planned as a road name change instead of a swap. CR 11 functions well until it meets Hwy 10, where improvements are needed at the intersection. Council Member Halverson discussed safety concerns with commercial vehicles, noting that the intersection needs to be widened. Messelt explained that from an engineering standpoint when we deal with MNDOT they look at safety, capacity, and future expansion for economic development criteria. Right now, while there are safety issues, they don't reach the threshold of other projects in the State. From a County perspective, right now their biggest issue is the safety issue at CR 11 and Hwy 10 as there is too much traffic for that light system, as well as the railroad tracks at this intersection. They are proposing that they do a Grade Separated Interchange which would be an overpass. Danielowski reviewed that the plan would be to put the road back into the hands of where it belongs, as it currently functions as a state highway not a county road, and noted that MNDOT agrees with that. Messelt reviewed concerns with turn backs as we would be obligated to maintain or improve the road. If the State just assumes it, there might not be an obligation to maintain it; however, if the State continues to use Hwy 25 in the City and there are improvements done there, that is something we will need to deal with because intersections cost real money. Messelt agreed that CR 11 is no longer a county road, it is a regional highway that connects two state highways, one of which is also a US highway, noting that it needs to be operated by someone who has the capacity to treat it as a regional highway as the County does not have that capacity. Gregg Felber reviewed that the MN House has introduced legislation to try to get us some money to start working on those intersections. There seemed to be interest from both parties to give out infrastructure dollars for these types of improvements, noting that it's going to have to be some sort of overpass with entrance and exit lanes as that is the only way to deal with that level of traffic. Halverson

discussed that the problem with MNDOT is their study warrants are based on deaths and injuries. Messelt discussed that locally led projects are prioritized at the Legislature.

Ashley Schabilon asked for an update on improvements to CR 43. Danielowski responded that the project is slated to start this summer.

Mayor Knier stated that he realizes that there isn't county control over large solar farms, but that there is control over smaller solar gardens. Knier asked if we have considered a moratorium on smaller solar projects since we have so much acreage going into solar. Messelt responded that the applications for smaller solar gardens have basically stopped in this area as the market has moved away from those due to saturation. The board will be discussing more aggressive solar decommissioning standards at an upcoming workshop. Danielowski reviewed that the State has approved these uses on private property so we need to be cautious so we don't end up in court over telling someone that they can't do something on their property. We did do a moratorium to look at various corridors in the county to try to protect those as much as possible, but a moratorium across the board would be difficult. Gregg Felber stated that whether we like it not, for people who own land these solar farm projects represent a retirement program for property owners who want to keep their land, but not farm it. Felber stated that he is terrified on how effective the power will be. Norm Leslie asked if anyone has seen efficiency payback data and asked if it has been seriously tested, noting that Cargill did research many years ago and the payback then was 30 years, and questioned where the research data is at. Knier noted that he raised a question at the Xcel Energy breakfast asking if any research has been done to show how much land can be taken out of food production without it affecting feeding America. Danielowski responded that we have had those discussions, but not with the policy makers making these decisions. Messelt reviewed that Stearns County is taking the lead as they are still seeing some of these smaller solar garden applications, noting that there is a loophole in Statute that allows them not to pay a Production Tax. With this new farm, all local agencies will make money, but the smaller facilities are exempt so it basically takes the land out of production for farming, but there isn't a benefit to the local taxpaying community. Stearns County is trying to close that loop hole so the progression of the conversation is going on, but there are many players and there is an industry on the other side heavily lobbying to get rid of the tax altogether. Knier also asked if Big Lake Schools has had issues with THC gummies being found in our local schools. Tim Truebenbach responded that it has been a problem and is mostly likely going to get worse.

5B. Big Lake Township Topics

Dean Brenteson discussed residential development and population statistics in the Township in 2022, reviewed the Township's 2022 estimated Net Tax Capacity and estimated Taxable Market Value, and the Township's certified 2022 Levy. Brenteson also reviewed Bailey Station Cemetery

improvements, 2022 road improvements, snow and ice control efforts, and spring sweeping costs. Brenteson discussed improvements at Lions Park, 2022 redistricting, new residential developments, the joint City/Township owned Fire Department, and community events the Township was involved in including the annual Dog Vaccination Clinic and Recycle Day.

Norm Leslie reviewed improvements to Lions Park that will include Pickle Ball courts.

5C. Orrock Township Topics

Paul Ellinger discussed new residential construction in Orrock Township noting that 27 new home building permits were issued in 2022. Ellinger reviewed the Township's 2022 Net Tax Capacity and Taxable Market Value. Ellinger recapped activities at the annual Recycling Day event held in May, discussed road improvements and snow/ice maintenance costs, and that the Annual Meeting Electorate approved and certified the 2023 levy in the amount of \$1,080,000. Ellinger also reviewed results from the 2022 Township election held in November.

Brenda Kimberly-Maas reviewed that at Township Annual Meetings, the electorate sets the levy, so the people who pay the taxes get to decide how much to give. Raeanne Danielowski encouraged citizens to attend their Township Annual Meetings to have their voices heard noting that this Township governance is grassroots participation and the majority rules.

Council Member Halverson asked if the Township is still putting 7-ton roads in their new developments, noting that fire vehicles will destroy these roads. Gregg Felber responded that the new standard is 9-ton to address damage that can be caused from heavier vehicles.

Mayor Knier asked what the appointment process was for their recent Supervisor vacancy. Anne Felber responded that applications were taken, but was a little disappointed that the vacancy wasn't sent out to residents like they usually do so she was very disappointed in that. Felber noted that they had three applicants, which were interviewed at a special Township meeting last night. During the public forum, there were multiple people who spoke up in favor of Darwin. Darwin presented letters from the community that were supporting him. One letter was in favor of Bob Hassett. At the end, she made a motion to appoint Darwin which didn't get a second. The board then voted to put Bob Hassett back in. Felber noted that the third candidate stepped out of the application process when he realized there was so much support for Darwin. Ellinger discussed that there was an interview process with questions and answers, and ultimately an appointment was approved by the board.

5D. Big Lake School District Topics

Tim Truebenbach reviewed snow issues at the schools and thanked all who help maintain the road system throughout the district, noting that we do the best we can for the safety of students, school employees, and the overall community. Truebenbach introduced school leadership noting that consistency is key. Truebenbach also encouraged various board members to come and visit the schools. Truebenbach reviewed that back in 2021, they were very fortunate to pass a bond referendum, and they have created a robust facility improvement page on their website for the district to provide transparency to the public. Truebenbach reviewed roofing projects done last summer, stressing that 85% of school facility roofs are now replaced. Other improvements include the High School gym and gymnastics cooling equipment, renovations at Independence Elementary as well as indoor air quality improvements, and improvements at the High School media center and weight room areas. Discussion was held on the CR 43 project improvements and the proposed roundabout on Glenwood that will help address some of the safety concerns in this area. Bruce Messelt indicated that he will put school officials in contact with County Engineering and Public Works staff to address their concerns. Danielowski discussed the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) study, noting that by working and talking together we can figure out a way to create some improvement on 205th Avenue to accommodate access to the school campuses.

Dean Brenteson asked if the district is planning improvements to the Liberty School parking lot. Truebenbach responded that parking lot improvements should be completed by 2025.

Kim Noding asked if 205th Avenue is a County or Township road. Danielowski responded that it is a Township road, and Noding asked if the County is eligible for SRTS grants. Danielowski responded that the County isn't eligible for this funding, but would be in support if another government entity applied. Halverson discussed that in instances like this, the City could apply for the funding with the township paying the 20% match.

5E. City of Big Lake Topics

Hanna Klimmek discussed newly appointed leadership staff at the City as well as staff changes at the Police Department. Klimmek also discussed the Big Lake Fire Department, activities in Community Development, Engineering, Finance, Public Works, and the Municipal Liquor Store. Klimmek discussed new businesses that came to Big Lake in 2022 including Ember Coffee, the Frozen Spoon, Cocoa Maas, True Value, Groom My Friend, Domino's Pizza, Willy's on the Water, Arrow Component and Premier Marine. Klimmek reviewed that the City is currently working on a code revision project, welcoming a new K9 to the Police Department, City sponsored community events, the water meter replacement project, and possible wastewater treatment upgrades.

Gregg Felber asked if the per day levy amount is per household or per citizen. Deb Wegeleben reviewed that the amount is based on general governmental functions, but doesn't include enterprise funds. Wegeleben also noted that the daily amount is based per citizen.

Tony Scales asked what the reasons are for the City's water meter replacement project. Klimmek reviewed that the City's current water meter equipment will soon be non-existent, and we won't have the ability to use the old equipment. The City's allocated ARPA funding will be used for this project which bid out at \$1.67M. Wegeleben explained that ARPA funds will be used to fund \$1.2M of project costs, with the remainder being paid through use of water. Wegeleben noted that the City's current equipment is obsolete, noting that this month is a prime example of this in that our meter reads were delayed due to weather and snow. Scales noted that he is concerned how residents will react to the project and potential water rate increases. Raeanne Danielowski reviewed the City's long time efforts to build quality water and sewer infrastructure, noting that area communities are looking at having to increase their rates as well to do improvements that Big Lake has already done. Council Member Halverson also noted that the City just spent a lot of money to fix infrastructure water leak issues, which will save us money in the long run.

Mayor Knier thanked everyone for their time and commitment in attending the joint meeting, and for their commitment to the Big Lake Community.

6. ADJOURN

Orrock Township Supervisor Felber motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:34 p.m. Seconded by Big Lake Township Supervisor Hedstrom, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck
Clerk

01.25.23
Date Approved by the Big Lake City Council