

**BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP MINUTES**

**MARCH 10, 2021**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Paul Knier called the meeting to order at 5:00 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, City Engineer Layne Otteson, Deputy Police Chief Matt Hayen, Liquor Store Manager Greg Zurbey, Streets/Parks/Fleet Superintendent Norm Michels, Water/Wastewater Superintendent Dan Childs, 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 Halverson, unanimous ayes, Agenda adopted.

**4. BUSINESS**

**4A. Red Oak Drive Street Width Update**

Layne Otteson provided an update on a lot split application the City received for the property located at the west end of Red Oak Drive. At that time, it was Staff's recommendation to revise the 2020 construction plans thereby extending street and utility infrastructure to the west property line of the lot and increase the road width from 20 feet to 26 feet to better accommodate through traffic and snow plowing operations. Otteson noted that residents on Red Oak Drive were notified of the lot split and were invited to attend an open house on March 2<sup>nd</sup> to discuss the proposed split. Prior to the open house being held, the Applicant withdrew his application and this information was shared with attendees at the open house. Otteson noted that most residents were not in favor of the wider street, and two property owners to the west of Red Oak Drive shared their support of the extension of street and utilities in this area. Otteson noted that the Applicant has indicated that he will not pursue the lot split in the future, and that he plans to sell the parcel and let the future owners determine what to do. As the future development of this lot is uncertain at this time, Staff is recommending the street be constructed as originally designed in 2020, which is a 20-foot wide street that will not extend further than what already exists, unless otherwise directed by Council.

Council Member Halverson asked for confirmation that Red Oak Drive is not a State Aid Route. Otteson conferred that it is not.

Council Member Hanson asked if it would make sense to increase Red Oak Drive up to a 22-foot wide street. Norm Michels discussed that we do struggle with plowing a 20-foot road, but the benefit for plowing would only be achieved by going to a street that is 26 feet wide.

Mayor Knier asked if plow drivers run into a lot of traffic on the stub streets. Michels noted that they don't run into a lot of traffic on the dead-end stub streets, but they do have some issues with traffic on regular through streets that aren't built to at least 26 feet wide.

Mayor Knier also discussed that curbing is planned for the stub streets for storm water management for the protection of our lakes. Halverson discussed potential future issues if the parcel to the west develops and Red Oak Drive is built as a smaller width street with a curb. Otteson reviewed erosion control measures that are needed in the lake cottage area to control storm water run-off into the lakes.

The general consensus of the Council was that they have no appetite to increase road width beyond 20 feet on Red Oak Drive at this time.

#### **4B. Public Works Restructure Plan Discussion**

Clay Wilfahrt discussed that the Public Works Department has undergone a number of changes over the past few years in the wake of the retirement of the Public Works Director. Wilfahrt reviewed the original structure of the Department, what currently exists, and proposed a restructure to address challenges facing the Department. Staff believes there will be a significant benefit to breaking these Departments out of Engineering and Community Development and making them stand-alone Departments managed by supervisors who would report directly to the City Administrator. Norm Michels discussed benefits of establishing a Working Foreman position for both the Streets/Parks/Fleet and Water/Wastewater divisions. Wilfahrt reviewed that costs associated with this restructure have been budgeted for in the 2021 City budget in anticipation of these changes, the Personnel Committee has recommended implementing this restructure, and the restructure has received Staff support as well.

Council Member Halverson discussed that every department has a second in command except Public Works. Halverson also stated that the pay seems a little high and asked if the increase will be stepped. Deb Wegeleben explained that the City's pay grade system is graded based on the job description of a position. Wilfahrt explained that the only way to lower the pay grade is to remove job responsibilities. Halverson stated that he thinks the restructure is a good idea and is o.k. with the plan.

Council Member Hanson reviewed discussions at the Personnel Committee Meeting and noted that he feels the job descriptions make sense, and noted that the recommended staff restructure is a budgeted change.

Council Member Seefeld discussed that the added responsibilities adds more value to the position.

Council directed Staff to proceed with implementing the Public Works Restructure Plan and to bring back job descriptions for Council consideration.

#### **4C. New Ideas Discussion**

Council Member Seefeld discussed that he would like to implement holding public hearings at City Commission Meetings as well as at Council Meetings to provide another avenue for public comment and to provide an opportunity for citizens to be heard in front of the Council as well. Wilfahrt asked for time for Staff to investigate how this would work and how notifications and public hearings would be structured. Seefeld noted that the City of Elk River handles their public hearings like this and he loves more opportunities for public input. Council Member Halverson noted that Council Members can attend Planning Commission Meetings. If someone feels strongly about an item on the Planning Commission, they can attend that meeting. Seefeld clarified that people speaking at the Planning Commission would not be addressing the City Council, and if we have two different groups, let's hear them. Halverson stated that we need to let the Commissions run their own meetings, and this type of change could be construed as micro-managing our Commissions. Council Member Hanson stated that he sees some redundancies with having the public hearings twice, noting that Council Members emails are public and citizens can contact Council Members that way, or could speak at Open Forum. Hanson also stated that he would be open for a Commission representative to speak at the Council Workshop to report their findings. Gina Wolbeck noted that draft Commission minutes are provided to Council on a regular basis. Seefeld stated that he is open to all input, all the time. Mayor Knier stated that he favors letting the public speak.

Council directed Staff to contact the City of Elk River to see what their process is for holding public hearings, and to review with our Community Development Staff.

#### **5. OTHER**

Council Member Halverson stated that he is bummed out that some stuff happened at an open board meeting that pertained to him. Every department in the City has been great and open to answering questions, but one department has had a speed bump of life. Halverson stated that he is not satisfied that now we want to figure out how to censor elected Council Members and feels that is not right. Department budgets come through Council, and he has followed communication guidelines that were asked of him. This particular Board is trying to come up with a policy to make it hard for elected officials to obtain information relating to the specific department. Halverson discussed this information is data that can be requested through a data request, and noted that he is concerned that the Department is trying to censor an elected official because they don't want to answer questions. There are processes in place to address issues between Council and Department Heads which would be processed through the City Administrator. Halverson stressed that before things get too out of hand, if you are a Department Head and you are asked for information, there is only one reason why you won't hand over that information. Halverson stated that his name was brought up during a public meeting and that is unacceptable, and encouraged other Council Members to contact Clay to get the background on the issue. His request was filtered through the City Administrator and he never once contacted the Department Head directly, which is the proper chain of command. Mayor Knier stated that he sat in the Fire Board Meeting and took information from the Department Heads. Knier noted that Ken's point is taken and thanked him for speaking up on his concerns. Knier also noted that he isn't sure if "censor" is the right word, but explained that the request that was presented to the Fire Board involved that if a time consuming request comes from a member of one of the

Boards, that the request come from the City Council/Town Board as a whole, and be presented through the members of the Council/Township that sit on the Fire Board. The entire Fire Board voted on the request and that was what was agreed to. Halverson stressed that we can do this one of two ways, we can do this very nicely, or by law, they can be handled through a data request. If we continue to censor people, we are going to have a problem. There is a problem if an Elected Official cannot ask a question about how money is being spent.

**6. ADJOURN**

Council Member Hanson motioned to adjourn at 5:33 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Seefeld unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck  
City Clerk

03/24/21  
Date Approved By Council