

The Houston City Council met in regular session on March 10, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. in Houston City Hall, opening with the Pledge of Allegiance. Present were: Mayor Connie Edwards, Matt Schutte Kevin Knutson, Cheryl Sanden and Tony Schultz. Also present were: Larry Jerviss, Chris Peterson, Randy Thesing, Ed Jacobs, Audrey Hegland, Marlene Schultz, Sheryl Sherry, Carol Meeks, Josh Norlien and Tom Wenthe, of Smith Schaefer Associates.

Mayor Edwards called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance; no corrections or additions to the agenda.

Public Comment: Marlene Schultz questioned what's been accomplished about houses in town that have either been vacant for a long time and are run down, or others that are very poor condition. Peterson said CMS has performed an exterior curb-side inspection and by the next Council meeting, she will have contacted the owners of the properties and have a plan regarding the houses, hopefully with the owners' cooperation. If not, then the City will proceed to the next step.

Another question was asked regarding the salt and sand stored outside the City by the river. Thesing said it is sand only and belongs to the County as does the pile of mixed sand/salt that is stored by the County Shop. If someone occasionally needed a pail of sand, he didn't think the County would mind them taking that, but the mixed salt/sand is strictly the County's and cannot be taken.

2013 Audit Review: Tom Wenthe, of Smith Schaefer Associates, presented the 2013 Audit Report, stating that it was a clean audit and that no exceptions had been noted. He said that there has been no increase in the levy for the last five years, so very little has been going into the capital improvements fund that could support major projects. He stated that the LGA revenues will increase in 2014 which may help. Wenthe summarized general expenditures, stating the largest increase in spending overall was for increased health care costs and the hiring of a second full-time police officer. All special revenue funds have positive fund balances with the exception of the Nature Center. He commended the City for the unreserved fund balance, which is at 64% of general fund expenditures, above the recommended state average of 50%. Ballfield Fund: Remains in the black, with no levy dollars being applied. The complete Audit Report is available for review at City Hall.

Public Hearing (6:30): Ordinance to amend §31.45 and §31.46 pertaining to the Planning Commission: The amendment is proposed as follows:

SECTION 1: City Code §31.45 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION is hereby amended to read as follows:

"If, at the time this code is adopted, the City has a Planning Commission, the Planning Commission for the City is hereby continued and abide by and be subject to the provisions contained herein. If the City did not have a Planning Commission at the time of the adoption of this code, the City Council may at any time determine to establish a Planning Commission by appointing members to the Planning Commission as provided in §31.46 of this code. To the extent that any provisions of §§ 31.45 to 31.48 of this code are inconsistent with any provisions of Titles XV or XVII, the provisions of those titles shall prevail. The Planning Commission shall be the City planning agency authorized by MS §462.354(1), as it may be amended from time to time."

SECTION 2: City Code § COMPOSITION is hereby amended to read as follows:

"(A) The Planning Commission shall consist of five members all of which are residents of the Houston School District, with a minimum of three from the resident population of the City, to be appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the City Council. The appointees shall serve staggered terms of six years except as noted below, commencing on the first day of January in the year of appointment. Upon expiration of a term, the appointee shall continue until reappointed or a successor is appointed. Absences from any three meetings in a year, unless excused in advance by the Chair, constitute a vacancy. In the event of any vacancy, the Mayor, with the approval of the City Council, shall appoint a person to complete the unexpired term.

(B) Two members may be Council members, to be appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the City Council. The Council members shall serve a term to coincide with their term of office as members of the City Council.

(C) Other persons may serve in an ex officio capacity as the City Council may, in its discretion, deem appropriate.

(D) Each of the five regular Planning Commission members shall have equal voting privileges. Any member may be removed for cause by majority vote of the City Council upon written charge and after a public hearing.

SECTION 3: This Ordinance shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage and publication.

SECTION 4: This Ordinance shall be codified as § 171.03 of Title XVII of the City Code.

Adopted this 10th day of March, 2014 by the City Council of the City of Houston.

CITY OF HOUSTON

Connie Edwards, Mayor

ATTEST:

Christina Peterson, City Administrator

MOTION MADE BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY KNUTSON, TO APPROVE THE AMENDED ORDINANCE PERTAINING TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION COMPOSITION AS PRESENTED; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Public Hearing (6:30) Amendments to the EDA Enabling Resolution:

RESOLUTION NO. 2014-1

AMENDING THE ENABLING RESOLUTION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF HOUSTON, MN.

The resolution would authorize the EDA to exercise powers granted to such authorities pursuant to MN Statutes, Sections 469.090 through 469.1082 with noted limitations and would designate that the EDA would be governed by a five-member Board of Commissioners.

MOTION BY KNUTSON, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE TO APPROVE THE ENABLING RESOLUTION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF HOUSTON AS PRESENTED; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Resolution to defer taxes, Parcel 24.0408.000: A letter has been received from the County Auditor whether the City would consider deferring the special assessment on this property until it is sold, as can be done in cases where the owner has a hardship pertaining to age or disability. MOTION BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE TO TABLE THIS MATTER FOR FURTHER RESEARCH WITH THE MINNESOTA LEAGUE OF CITIES OR THE CITY ATTORNEY; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

City Road Sign Policy: The City is required by law to have a road sign policy on record that includes an inventory of all signs. Those that need to be replaced must be of suitable reflectivity. MOTION BY SCHUTTE, SECONDED BY SANDEN TO ADOPT THE CITY OF HOUSTON ROAD SIGN POLICY AS PRESENTED; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Delivery of Council Packets: Beginning in April, Council packets will be emailed to all members with a hard copy available at City Hall prior to, or at the meeting.

Elementary School Street Gates: Schutte expressed concern over the Elm Street gates by the Elementary School being opened after school, saying it represents a safety issue for the young children who are used to playing in that area during the day when the gates are closed, since they continue to play in the area after school is no longer in session. There has been concern expressed over this situation previously, with no solution as yet. The street itself

does not have to be vacated, as per the City Attorney, but the gates can be closed. There being no formal policy as to whether the gates are open or closed, the City does not have to officially take action but paramount to the situation is the safety of the children. Therefore, the Council would support the gates being left closed if the school so chooses. Discussion included closing the gates for a two-month trial basis, keeping track of comments received, and reevaluate after that time.

Minutes: MOTION MADE BY EDWARDS, SECONDED BY SANDEN TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER, 2013 TRUTH IN TAXATION HEARING WITH CHANGE NOTED THAT IT WAS A 3% LEVY INCREASE RATHER THAN 5% AS STATED; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. MOTION BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY KNUTSON TO APPROVE THE JANUARY, 2014 MINUTES WITH CORRECTIONS AS INDICATED; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. MOTION MADE BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE, TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY MINUTES WITH CHANGE THAT THE CITY WOULD PAY \$30 TOWARD THE REPLACEMENT (NOT REMOVAL) OF A BOULEVARD TREE WHEN NECESSARY DUE TO EMERALD ASH BORER; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Planning Commission: Minutes in packet for Council review. Mayor Edwards commended Peterson and the group for their good work in moving forward on behalf of the City.

Park & Rec Committee: Peterson attended the last P&R meeting to meet the group and become familiar with their mission and responsibilities. Minutes from the February 19 meeting were included in the Council packet.

Financial Report: Jerviss stated the Nature Center fund deficit needs to be dealt with either by an increase in the levy or a direct transfer. Cost for the OHV land is being carried over into this year and will be reimbursed from the State; Jerviss will remind them that it has yet to be received. The cause of the deficit is primarily health insurance costs. This matter will be tabled until the next Council meeting to give time for further discussion. MOTION BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHULTZ TO APPROVE THE FINANCIAL REPORT AND PAY THE BILLS; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Department Reports:

Library: A written report was distributed by Gibson-Gasset; including receipt of the payment of \$9,900 from Houston County via SELCO. A Collaboration Legacy grant submitted to SELCO was approved for \$7,000 which will pay for the commission of the owl sculptures that will be put up in the community in time for the 2015 International Festival of Owls. The overdue book fines that were donated to the Community Food Shelf were matched by the Rushford Masons; the overall February fundraiser raised significant monies for the Food Shelf. With the deadline coming soon for the mandatory health care coverage, the Library will be hosting a certified MNsure navigator on Thursday, March 13 from noon to 6 pm for patrons to get help in applying or having their questions answered. Circulation statistics were included in the report.

Maintenance: Getting a quote to scrape and paint the metal rails at the plant. The new truck has been ordered and will be outfitted in La Crosse when it arrives. The summer part-time worker from last year may not be available this year; the date of April 1 was the deadline given to decide whether he will return (part-temporary basis). If he does not return, the Maintenance Dept. still needs someone for 20 hours per week. Due to the cold, some of the street drains are frozen and cannot as yet be opened. The holiday decorations in Central Park are also frozen and cannot be removed until warmer weather. Over 90 residents have called in to say they are running their water to avoid it freezing up; of these, 29 used enough to warrant receiving the 3500 gallon credit.

City Administrator: The Board of Appeals will be held April 14 at 5:30 p.m. prior to the Council meeting. The Tourism Assessment Leadership Team will meet on Thursday, March 20, 5:00 p.m. to discuss the findings of the Team on their visit here, as well as hear the perceptions of Houston by the anonymous team who toured our city. A subsequent public meeting will be scheduled to present this report as well as discussion and recommendations from the Leadership Team. Coordinating all marketing efforts with the Chamber on behalf of the City was discussed.

MOTION BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHULTZ, TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 7:40 P.M.; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.