

The Houston City Council met to hold a public hearing regarding the variance request from the Houston School District for the extension of their bus garage roof. Mayor Edwards called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance. Present were: Mayor Connie Edwards, Matt Schutte, Kevin Knutson, Tony Schultz and Cheryl Sanden. Also present were: Chris Peterson, Audrey Hegland, Randy Thesing, Ed Jacobs, Chief David Breault, Marlene Schultz, Ron Hewuse, Beth McManimon of the Fillmore County Journal, Mary Breault, Ellyn Baumann, Brent Stampka.

Mayor Edwards stated that the school district has applied for a variance to expand the roof of the bus garage in order to cover the back of the buses housed there. During discussion, several questions were raised and while the Planning Commission has recommended the Council approve this variance request, and the Council is not opposed to it, more information is needed. Further information be provided, including a diagram on how many feet will be added to the roof and how far it will extend into the street. Another suggestion was that stakes be driven to provide a better visual of what is being proposed. Peterson will notify the school that further information is needed.

The Public Hearing was closed at 6:12 p.m. and Mayor Edwards called the Council meeting to order.

Additions to the Agenda: (G) Water Locate Problem.

Public Comment: Ron Hewuse, 306 East Cedar St. was present regarding the City maintenance department cutting down bushes and trees in the alley by his house; he did not think it was necessary and should not have been done. Thesing stated that while Hewuse had made some attempt to clear the brush away, it was not sufficient to keep the alley as clear as it needs to be. This type of work has been done on other alleys within the City, as they must remain clear of any obstruction.

Marlene Schultz commented that she was pleased that three of the houses identified as needing extensive repair or hazardous had been dealt with; she hoped the others on the list would soon follow.

A local business owner, Craig Stanislawski of Wild Exhibits, would like to develop a plan to promote tourism and commerce for the community based on the white-tailed deer that are so plentiful in this area. He said that businesses in town benefit from the many hunters who come to the area and suggested the City could promote itself as a white-tail deer capitol. He said the project would blend well with what Houston already promotes – the Bike Trail, Nature Center and the International Owl Center. Mike Sieve, local wildlife artist, is interested in permitting rights to his Wild Wings art work which could allow Stanislawski to create murals and other corresponding art work. He said financial support from large sporting companies would be likely, and the concept would be very popular with local residents and bring in many visitors. Chief Breault agreed, saying it would pay to develop and market the plan; that hunters would make Houston a destination, and having the Wild Wings art work would be an added bonus.

Stanislawski volunteered to lead the project. He brought in a large deer head mount and skull he recently purchased from Mike Sieve to show the Council. He feels strongly that Houston could become known throughout the state as being unique in having these quality deer, with the project beginning on a small scale and growing from there. The Council thanked him for his idea, which will be placed on the EDA and Chamber agendas for further discussion. The Public Comment Period was closed.

Business Retention & Expansion Report: Peterson summarized the Report, which was conducted by CEDA and sponsored by the City and AcenTek. It was accomplished by written surveys and personal interviews with local businesses for the purpose of assessing the current business climate and making recommendations for expanding and sustaining the City's local businesses. The survey had a response rate of 34% which is a very good return, and it is apparent that people like living in this community. A complete hard copy of the Study is available at City Hall. The

survey listed the major points identified and recommendations for improving the business climate as follows:

1. *Maintain and Promote Area Businesses* (Expand marketing footprint; seek supporting funds from MnDEED to market nationally/internationally. Assist businesses to develop their own marketing plan)
2. *Reconnect with Area Businesses* (City and Chamber were not rated very well by the businesses; lack of communication; should make concerted effort to contact the businesses on 1-1 basis and also host joint meetings of all businesses.)
3. *Address Business Cost Factors* (needed is better water supply and snow removal system; not enough skilled labor available; work with school as to how students can stay and work in this community; lack of adequate child care)
4. *Appoint Dedicated EDA "Point Person"*

Peterson stressed the importance of the Chamber position to the overall future of Houston and its businesses. The City has set aside \$4,000 toward a part-time marketing position and other funding will be sought to cover the Chamber position. Mayor Edwards called upon those business owners present to ask that they be willing to become involved with the Chamber, saying that it takes the cooperation of all businesses working together to be successful. The Friends of the Nature Center may be invited to attend the next EDA meeting to discuss Stanislawski's proposal and how it could work with the mission of the Nature Center. Peterson stated the main focus now must be to:

1. Get the part-time Marketing/Chamber Director in place.
2. Establish a framework of what the Chamber can and should do.
3. Hold meetings at a time that businesses can attend.

New Signs – Trailhead, South Park, Bluffview, City Park: Stanislawski presented two signs he's completed for South Park and the Nature Center/Trailhead. He will also create similar signs for the Bluffview and City Parks, using SHIP funds that have been awarded to the City. The signs are colorful, easily read and will be easily updated. The Council approved the signage projects as described.

2016 Street Project(s): Davy Engineering submitted a budget for preliminary steps for reconstruction of two streets and utilities projects (Ellsworth and Lincoln) in 2016 plus the Water Treatment Plant Site survey. The budget for the Ellsworth project is \$10,000 for an onsite review of existing conditions and preparing plans and specifications for bidding the project. A topographic survey of Lincoln St. is needed to prepare plans and specifications for reconstruction of utilities and street components; the amount for the survey is \$2,500. Davy requests authorization to complete the topographic survey of the new water treatment plant site, to be conducted and completed this fall. The work was included in the Search Grant. MOTION BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE TO AUTHORIZE PETERSON TO CONTRACT WITH DAVY ENGINEERING TO CONDUCT THE ONSITE REVIEW AND TOPOGRAPHIC SURVEYS; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

MN Building Code – Permit Program: A CMS representative will be coming down to further explain the State Building Code to office staff and will also attend the October 28 contractors meeting. Discussed was a change in the permit fee schedule: if a permit is necessary for work being done and is not applied for before the work begins, then the fee will be double.

Awareness Ribbon Policy – Streets: Peterson requested direction from the Council regarding ribbons being placed on City streets as a public awareness effort, stating that the City has no official policy on this. After discussion, including the potential political effect, MOTION MADE BY SCHUTTE, SECONDED BY SANDEN, TO DEVELOP A POLICY NOT TO ALLOW THE PLACEMENT OF AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS ON CITY STREETS; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Water Locate Problem: An unidentified water line turned up after an initial locate was done at a construction site; it was damaged by the contractor digging the sewer and water lines to a new home. The contractor's charge to fix the

problem is \$947. Peterson proposed splitting the expense three ways with the contractor and homeowner. After much discussion, MOTION WAS MADE BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY KNUTSON THAT DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE CITY HAD ORIGINALLY AGREED TO PAY HALF OF THE COST, THEY WILL CONTRIBUTE \$500 TOWARD THE EXPENSE; MOTION FAILED, WITH SANDEN, EDWARDS AND SCHUTTE VOTING NAY.

In further discussion, including that the City did have the responsibility to do the locate and did not find the stray line, MOTION WAS MADE BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE THAT THE CITY PAY THE BILL IN ENTIRETY AND THAT THE HOMEOWNER BEAR NO RESPONSIBILITY IN THE COST; MOTION PASSED BY MAJORITY VOTE WITH SCHULTZ AND KNUTSON VOTING NAY. Mayor Edwards stated she would support the motion provided Peterson negotiates the amount with the contractor.

Minutes: MOTION BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHULTZ, TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 14 COUNCIL MINUTES; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Financial Report: MOTION BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE TO PAY THE BILLS; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Minutes from the EDA, Fire Department and Park and Rec were included in the packet for Council review.

Department Reports:

Maintenance: The mains and sewers have been flushed. Summer help has been concluded for the year, and worked out well. The bathrooms in the City Park have been shut down for the season; a sign will be made to post on the doors to this effect and placed on the City’s Facebook page.

MOTION BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY SANDEN, TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:15 PM; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.