

The Houston City Council met in regular session on September 8, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. in Houston City Hall. Mayor Edwards called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance. Present were: Mayor Connie Edwards, Kevin Knutson, Matt Schutte, Tony Schultz and Cheryl Sanden. Also present were: Chris Peterson, Larry Jerviss, Ed Jacobs, Audrey Hegland, Chief David Breault, Marlene Schultz, Ellyn Baumann, Karla and Hein Bloem, Randy White, Liz Gibson-Gasset, Frank Daniels, Mitch Bublitz, Jeri Virock, Mary Walker, Marilyn Erickson, Margaret Carlson, Beth George, Sheriff Doug Ely, Margie Kurtz, Mary Ihrke, Katie Nelton and Dan Larson of MN4WDA, Angie Rodenburg of the Fillmore County Journal. There were no additions or corrections to the agenda.

Public Comment: Margaret Carlson, representing the Hometown Pride group, said they will be having three bake sales at Eastwood Bank this fall to raise money for their activities. They will be held during Homecoming week, and would appreciate donations of food and baked goods. The donations can be brought to the Bank before 2 p.m, ready to sell. Regarding the flower planters, the group will be replacing the current display with decorations for Christmas.

Marlene Schultz reminded everyone of the Taste of the Trail event on September 13, 10-3 p.m. Various Houston businesses are participating, with live music throughout the event, followed by the Valley View Healthcare's fundraiser at the Festgrounds.

Golf Cart Permits: Knutson summarized the licensing process, and mentioned that the annual fee of \$50 was felt by some residents to be too high, given that golf carts are primarily seasonal vehicles. In addition, neighboring towns, if they do allow golf carts on the streets, charge less. He stated that State Statutes specify that the hours of operation are from sunrise to sunset on designated roadways unless the carts are equipped with original factory installed tail lights, headlights and brake lights. Currently the city ordinance restricts golf carts to be on designated roadways from sunrise to sunset. Chief Breault will order different license stickers that will adhere better to the carts. MOTION WAS MADE BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE TO CHARGE \$50 FOR A TWO-YEAR GOLF CART LICENSE FROM JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31, WITH NO PRO-RATING OF THE FEE, WITH HOURS OF OPERATION BEING FROM SUNRISE TO SUNSET OR FROM 8 A.M. TO 10 P.M. IF THE CART HAS FACTORY-INSTALLED HEADLIGHTS, TAIL LIGHTS, AND BRAKE LIGHTS; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Legacy Application for Off-Road Vehicle Master Plan: Lobbyist Dan Larson and member Kathy Nelton were present on behalf of the MN 4-Wheel Drive Association to request the City agree to serve as the local government sponsor for a grant application to develop a necessary to finance the statewide OHV Master Plan and map. The funding will be sought a DNR Parks and Trails Legacy grant. The Plan will include maps of existing trails, broken down by regions. Mayor Edwards commented that if the plan had been in place when the OHV project began, it may have shortened the process for the City.

The process will include ample opportunity for local input and also criteria pertaining to each area that has a project under way. Question was raised regarding the scope of city involvement in this grant. The process would require management of the grant funding, hiring of a contract to develop the regional plan, work with MN4WDA for request criteria, and possibly hire the contractor and ensure satisfactory progress of the project. Larson stated that the grant will be between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in size, and that most of the administrative duties could be given to the national organization (NOHVCC). Mayor Edwards reiterated that there will be no monies required from the City; that the City is being asked to be the fiscal intermediary, and as a sponsor, will not be responsible for the consultant or the plan or the maps. MOTION MADE BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHULTZ, TO SERVE AS THE LGU SPONSOR OF THE MN4WDA'S GRANT APPLICATION FOR LEGACY FUNDS TO PAY THE COST TO CREATE A STATEWIDE MASTER PLAN; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Mayor Edwards commented that it has been taking a long time to receive the reimbursement money from the DNR's Grant-in-Aid funds for the land the City purchased for the OHV; Edwards will check with the DNR personnel again regarding this.

Sheriff Doug Ely: Sheriff Ely was present to ask if the City had any concerns or questions of him, and thanked the City for participating in the new law enforcement system that will allow for more streamlined communication between police departments. He said the County has a good working relationship with the Houston Police Department that is mutually beneficial.

Residential Property Condition Review: Chris Peterson said CMS has conducted a curbside inspection of the six properties, most of which have been empty for a long time; letters have been sent and conversations have been held with all of the property owners. A status report was included in the Council packet. Peterson recommended that to keep progress moving forward, the Council consider declaring the properties a nuisance so the Council could order a deadline for necessary improvements. Short of a nuisance declaration, she recommended that each property owner be directed to submit a plan in writing within 25 days from this meeting, stating what they will be doing to bring their property into satisfactory condition within a specified timeframe. The plans and timeframe would be brought back to the Council at their next meeting for review and approval. If there is no action within the 25 days, then the City Council could declare the property a nuisance and order compliance.

In response to a question from one of the property owners present, Peterson said the items cited in the letter from CMS are what must be repaired first, and if the property owner cannot afford to fix all of the items at this time, then it is important to show a plan of action and a timeframe to move forward with necessary repairs. MOTION MADE BY SANDEN BUT NOT SECONDED WAS THAT THE HOMEOWNERS WHO RECEIVED LETTERS FROM CMS RECOMMENDATIONS RESPOND IN WRITING TO THE CITY COUNCIL WITH A PLAN OF ACTION BEFORE OCTOBER 8, 2014.

After further discussion, Sanden rescinded her motion and made the following: MOTION MADE BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHULTZ, THAT THE PROPERTY OWNERS WHO RECEIVED LETTERS BASED ON CMS RECOMMENDATIONS SUBMIT A WRITTEN PLAN OF ACTION, WITH TIMEFRAME, TO THE CITY COUNCIL BY OCTOBER 8, 2014. A letter to this effect will be sent to each property owner.

Community Center: The Planning Commission stated there has been enough opportunity for public input about the existing community center, and they have received significant public feedback that the City consider a new building rather than spend money repairing the old one. The Planning Commission recommends to the City Council that they move forward to investigate options and funding. MOTION MADE BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE, THAT PETERSON AND THE PLANNING COMMISSION PURSUE OPTIONS AND FUNDING FOR A NEW COMMUNITY CENTER; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Community Center Floor: As part of the need to provide general maintenance of the building, MOTION WAS MADE BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY SCHUTTE TO REPAIR THE COMMUNITY CENTER UPSTAIRS FLOOR; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. Total cost, including labor, will be \$982.

Nature Center Staff Hours: The International Owl Center duties will be increasing as it develops, and ultimately plan to bring Karla Bloem on as a full-time employee but in the meantime, they can begin paying for a certain number of her work hours. MOTION MADE BY SCHUTTE, SECONDED BY KNUTSON, TO REDUCE KARLA BLOEM'S HOURS WITH THE CITY FROM 40 HOURS/WEEK TO 32 HOURS/WEEK WITH A CORRESPONDING 20% REDUCTION IN SALARY, AND THAT BLOEM WILL STILL MANAGE THE NATURE CENTER AND SEE IT IS STAFFED DURING REGULAR OPEN HOURS; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Property Tax Levy: MOTION MADE BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY SANDEN, THAT THE 2014 PROPOSED TAX LEVY, COLLECTABLE IN 2015, REMAIN THE SAME AS LAST YEAR; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Emerald Ash Borer: There is one confirmed tree that has emerald ash borer in the City and will have to be taken down. Jacobs requested permission to get the necessary applicator's license to treat infected trees as they occur; the chemicals are said to be 90-95% effective if used early. MOTION MADE BY KNUTSON, SECONDED BY SCHULTZ, THAT ED JACOBS PURCHASE THE NECESSARY STUDY MATERIALS FOR THE APPLICATOR'S LICENSE; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Minutes: MOTION BY SCHUTTE, SECONDED BY SCHULTZ TO ACCEPT THE AUGUST 11, 2014 MINUTES; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Financial Report: No reimbursement has been received as yet from the DNR for the OHV land purchase. MOTION BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY KNUTSON, TO PAY THE BILLS; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Department Reports:

Nature Center: The entire report was included in the Council packet. Bloem reported that the Natural Playground is bringing in many visitors from many places outside of town and the brochures have been updated and reprinted. She continues to train the younger owls and has a possibility of getting an albino barred owl that is currently in captivity in Iowa. The Owl Center is planning a Moonlight Hoot Scoot 5K fundraiser on October 24, and many in-kind donations are being received for the Center.

Library: Liz Gibson-Gasset said that the current President of the Library Board has resigned; Vice President Gene Lundak will be taking over for the remainder of her term. Marilyn Frauenkron Bayer will serve as Vice President. Barb Swenson has agreed to accept the vacant position on the Board which, as per Library by-laws, must be filled by a rural resident. In July, Gasset had requested the Council approve Swenson's return to the Library Board but they had instead appointed her to fill the vacant President's position. MOTION MADE BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY SANDEN, TO APPROVE BARB SWENSON'S RETURN TO THE LIBRARY BOARD; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. A correction will be made in the minutes.

The Library Assistant position was posted and interviews held; Beth Peterson Lee was hired to this position. Gibson suggested background checks be performed for all City employees or new hires. Since the City has no policy for this at this time, the City suggested the Library Board conduct this background check on the new employee.

Library Budget: Gibson said more time is needed for her to work with the new Library Assistant, which would mean two hours overlapping time per week which will have to be added to the budget. She requested the City increase their funding an additional \$4,585. To accomplish this, since the preliminary levy has already been approved and cannot be increased, the funds would have to be drawn from some other City fund.

Maintenance: Ed Jacobs reported that the new sludge pump has been installed. Vandalism is occurring regularly in the bathrooms of central park; the police will make sure the bathrooms are locked every evening.

MOTION BY SANDEN, SECONDED BY KNUTSON TO ADJOURN AT 8:20 PM; MOTION UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED.

The Rural Fire Association Board met at 8:25 p.m. for their quarterly meeting.