

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL

AMES, IOWA

FEBRUARY 8, 2023

The special meeting of the Ames City Council was called to order by Mayor John Haila at 5:15 p.m. on the 8th day of February, 2023, in the City Council Chambers in City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue, pursuant to law. Present were Council Members Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Gloria Betcher, Amber Corrieri, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and Anita Rollins.

FY 2023/24 BUDGET PROPOSALS:

Culture and Recreation Program: Parks and Recreation Director Keith Abraham introduced Joshua Thompson, Parks and Facilities Superintendent, and Courtney Kort, Recreation Superintendent who were in attendance at the meeting. Director Abraham began the overview of the programs offered by Parks and Recreation, noting that the Covid-19 pandemic had continuing impacts on participation, revenue, and part-time staffing. The increases in fees recommended by staff for FY 2023/24 were discussed, with Director Abraham praising staff for working on grant applications to generate additional funding for programming. He discussed the potential for fundraising to expand the scholarship program, which offers activities scholarships and discounted Furman Aquatic Center passes.

After presenting the timeline for the construction of the Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center, Director Abraham shared updates on a number of programs, including Miracle League, gymnastics, tennis, summer camps, adult sports, swimming lessons, taekwondo, virtual and in-person fitness classes, the City Auditorium, and Movies in the Park. He also noted future collaboration with Sixty Forward. An additional maintenance worker for the park system was added in FY 2022/23, and another would be hired in FY 2023/24 to increase weekend service level and reduce overtime.

Director Abraham addressed the Ames/ISU Ice Arena, discussing programs and noting that Iowa State University Men's Club Hockey would be returning after serving a temporary suspension. He also explained that Homewood Golf Course saw increased numbers of rounds played. The pavilion added to the Ames Municipal Cemetery in the fall is already popular. Director Abraham expressed gratitude for the many Parks and Recreation volunteers making a difference.

Regarding limited availability of Ames Community School District (ACSD) gym space, Council Member Gartin inquired whether the City Council could assist in working out a better arrangement. City Manager Steve Schainker volunteered to address the problem at the quarterly meeting he and the Mayor have with the Superintendent and the School Board. Council Member Gartin also raised the possibility of introducing occasional fare-free days for drop-in use of the Community Center Gymnasium. Director Abraham recommended adjusting the idea to offer vouchers or free passes to members of disadvantaged populations. Council Member Betcher asked whether there was an update on returning water aerobics to the Green Hills pool facility. Director Abraham explained that Green Hills would have to do construction to get the facility up to code to host programs like water aerobics, which did not fall under their current therapy exemption. Green Hills staff has not indicated interest in such a project.

Council Member Rollins asked about the work to make recreation facilities accessible and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Director Abraham explained that accessibility is a priority with all new construction and playground replacement, highlighting the accessible kayak launch at Ada Hayden Heritage Park. He also looked ahead to the Special Meeting of the Ames City Council on February 21st, 2023, where the results and draft transition plan from the ADA audit will be presented. Mayor Haila raised the topic of connecting the scholarships to the people who need them. Director Abraham discussed current strategies. Mayor Haila suggested partnering with ACSO to distribute information, and Council Member Betcher suggested working with managers of low-income apartment complexes.

Transportation Program: Director Abraham noted that Parks and Recreation is responsible for Right-of-Way Maintenance, sharing the accomplishments in clearing paths, and addressing risk trees in the right-of-way. He also showed that the City is ahead of schedule on its 10-year Emerald Ash Borer Response Plan, clarifying for Council Member Beatty-Hansen that the City plants a new tree for each tree that is removed, increasing the diversity of the local tree population.

Utilities Program: Electric Services Director Donald Kom introduced Power Plant Manager and Acting Assistant Electric Director Curtis Spence, Acting Distribution Manager Curt Zierke, and Technical Services Supervisor Ken Tiarks, who were in attendance at the meeting. Director Kom highlighted the operations budgets for each Division: Administration, Production, Fuel and Purchases, Distribution, Technical Services, and Engineering.

For the Electric Administration division, Director Kom observed that a new all-time winter peak was set in December 2022. August 2022 had a period which came close to the all-time peak from 2012. Annual energy sales are climbing, and rates are an average of 11% lower than neighboring providers. The Climate Action Plan (CAP) will determine much of the future of the Department, as well as action taken based on the Waste-to-Energy study. Director Kom explained that Electric Production has black start capability for derecho-type events.

The City's contract for natural gas expires in December 2023, which could increase costs for the Fuel and Purchased Power Division. Unit #8 is operational again, allowing for more generation and less purchased power. Director Kom explained for Mayor Haila the comparative costs for solar and wind energy, noting that wind and solar energy is still more expensive, but costs go down with the volume of production or purchase. Council Member Gartin queried whether solar packs for the solar farm were still selling. Director Kom replied that 80% of the packs had sold. There was discussion about electric vehicle (EV) chargers, which are being added each year through Capital Improvement Projects.

Director Kom explained that the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) failed to recertify as union representatives for the employees in Electric Distribution, so the City developed a division-specific policy to meet their needs without union representation. Priorities for Electric Distribution include system maintenance, extensions, improvements, and substation security. The Technical Services Division faced challenges with supply chain delays for meters and parts. This budget increased to catch up on transformer maintenance that was delayed during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Electrical Engineering, priorities included replacing failing

underground and overhead lines, servicing new subdivisions, designing for CyTown electric service, and approving retail solar permits. Director Kom concluded that no rate increases were requested for FY 2023/24, reporting the estimated fund balance.

Public Safety Program: Director Kom explained that the Storm Warning System was a collaboration between the Police Department and Electric Services; installation and maintenance for the devices comes from the Electric Services budget, with operation by the Police Department. City Manager Schainker commented that as the City grows, more outdoor warning sirens may be added.

Transitioning to the Fire Department portion of the Public Safety Program, Fire Chief Rich Higgins introduced Deputy Fire Chief Tom Hackett and Building Official Sara VanMeeteren, who were present at the meeting. Chief Higgins expressed appreciation for the ongoing partnership with Iowa State University (ISU), which contributes 25% of the operating budget and 25% of debt service for apparatus purchases.

In regards to Fire Administration and Support, Chief Higgins highlighted the family appreciation event, where new firefighters are sworn in and challenge coins are awarded. The testing system for new firefighters was overhauled to more accurately assess the skills in the job description. Chief Higgins also shared a number of community outreach and education events before providing an overview of the new Instant Command Center at the Water Treatment Plant for emergency management.

Chief Higgins next covered Fire Suppression and Emergency Action, noting that at least one Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) goes with the apparatus on every call. Additionally, every member of the Department takes a mental health first aid course, and the Department works with Alternative Response for Community Health (ARCH). There was an 18% increase in call volume over the past year, with 2% of calls being for fires. There were 47 structure fires, and crews excelled at putting them out before conditions became dangerous, preventing property value loss at a rate of 98.26%. Chief Higgins expressed gratitude for having the City of Ames Training Site (COATS), commending the work Training Officer AJ Plach has done to create training facilities and programs. Firefighters are trained for swift water rescues, hazmat situations, extrications, and entering different kinds of structures.

Addressing Building Safety, Chief Higgins stated that no increases for permit or rental fees were recommended. The total number of permits issued was down, reflecting uncertainty in the economy. However, the total number of rental units continued rising. Chief Higgins also recognized the importance of fire inspectors enforcing building codes. Mayor Haila invited Building Official Sara VanMeeteren to comment on state legislation under consideration that would implement a statewide building code. She noted that the design guidelines being considered would not significantly impact the City, but a statewide building code would prevent the City from setting its own fee schedules and code modification request process. Mayor Haila noted that the CAP could be undercut if the statewide building code prevented localities from setting more stringent requirements than the state.

Finance (Various Programs): Finance Director Corey Goodenow introduced Budget Manager

Nancy Masteller and Information Technology (IT) Manager Brent Moore, who were present at the meeting, before offering an overview of the budget request for the Divisions within the Finance Department.

Director Goodenow noted that Utilities Customer Service and Parking Violation Collection recently introduced additional payment options through a third-party vendor, including PayPal, Venmo, and AmazonPay. Further investigation will be conducted into the feasibility of offering an in-person credit card payment option. In the category of Economic Development, an additional Tax-Increment Financing (TIF) district was finalized, and staff are working to draft a development agreement for the Linc Development Project. Director Goodenow reported for Financial Services that the City maintained its Aa1 General Obligation bond rating and was awarded the Government Finance Officers Association Distinguished Budget Award. The IT Division implemented several improvements, including ServiceNow to manage user requests, OneDrive to manage Windows client computer data, Intune to manage Windows client computers, and a redundant internet connection for the City network with automated failover. Lastly, Director Goodenow shared that the Purchasing Division continues to expand electronic document management as well as bid goods and services through an electronic bidding system, AmesBids. Print Shop Services were down, but the demand for graphic design services increased.

Before wrapping up, City Manager Schainker noted that streetlights are paid for in part out of the General Fund. Director Goodenow explained that the action taken on February 14th, 2023, would be setting the public hearing for the maximum amount of collection.

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS TO COUNCIL: Mayor Haila stated that there were no new communications to the City Council.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: Council Member Betcher thanked staff and the Mayor for working hard on the budget even though the outlook was depressing.

Council Member Gartin warned the City Council that they would have to make hard decisions.

Council Member Rollins concurred with Council Member Betcher's thanks to staff. Lastly, Mayor Haila wished Council Member Gartin a happy birthday.

ADJOURNMENT: Moved by Gartin, seconded by Beatty-Hansen, to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.