

Lewiston City Council
Special Council Meeting Minutes
September 23, 2020
Lewiston City Hall – 6:30 P.M.

1. Call to Order

Electronic City Council Meeting called to order by Mayor Beth Carlson at 7:07 pm September 23, 2020.

2. Roll Call

Present (5): Mayor Beth Carlson, Councilor Dan Robertson, Councilor Carol Boynton, Councilor Niles Lavey and Councilor Larry Rupprecht. Not Present (0).

Others present: City Administrator/Clerk Cheryl Knight, Fire Chief Tim Dahl, Police Chief Scott Yeiter, Public Works Director Curt Benter, and Polly Calhoun (reporter).

3. Discussion topic: Budget

Bryan Holtz, in the City Council meeting immediately preceding this one, had suggested the City Council leave \$100,000 in the 2021 proposed budget in the sewer fund for WWTP repairs.

City Administrator/Clerk Cheryl Knight asked if Council wanted to go forward with the \$3,000 external wage study comparison with the City of Lewiston peers? Councilman Robertson stated that if we could get the same data from the League of Minnesota Cities ourselves, why pay for it?

Knight also stated she sent a version of the budget workbook out, labeled Flaherty, for Council review. This workbook contained employee raises as recommended by the Flaherty & Hood wage study and showed a 12% increase to the tax levy. A \$21,000 increase in wages is approximately a 2% levy increase.

Councilor Rupprecht asked if the manager of beautification was getting an increase, and the emerald ash tree program for City removal of diseased trees on private property (and assessed to property taxes) was not mentioned. Knight stated there is a stipend amount in the beautification department, and that Council can certainly agree to add funds in the next year's budget for the tree removal program. Discussion continued on the ash tree removal process and expense. \$30,000 will be added to the Street department budget for this program.

Discussion continued about employee's wages, the COVID-19 situation, and the overall tax levy as compared to Winona County and the City of St. Charles.

Mayor Carlson commented that our preliminary tax levy is like our total wish list, and then we need to start prioritizing the budget by determining what has to be included (debt service, other

contracts), and then what is needed, and finally what is wanted, in order to determine cuts for the final budget. Discussion continued. Police Chief Yeiter requested access to the nonpublic data contained within the Flaherty & Hood proposed wage study. Knight stated it was nonpublic, and she was unable to release the data. Right now, the budget document showing the worst-case scenario is the preliminary levy amount of 16.04%, which had the \$3 probationary raises and 10% across the board wages included in it. \$1,111,916 is the preliminary levy amount with the 16.04% levy.

Councilor Rupprecht motioned to adopt the City of Lewiston’s 2021 preliminary tax levy in the amount of \$1,111,916, a 16.04% levy increase. Seconded by Mayor Carlson. Approved 5-0.

Mayor Carlson stated that questions needing to be answered by Flaherty & Hood included: 1. Can the nonpublic document be shared with the department heads? Is it all or nothing? Action items include: an 11-step grid instead of a 7-step grid, and a “no” decision on the external wage study, along with an external review by the Administrator of the League of Minnesota Cities wage information. Question of what is legal to do with this study? How to get the wage numbers in the hands of the department heads? How do residents get informed? Bottom line: what does it take to get this information released?

Councilor Rupprecht stated his target final levy is 5%. Mayor Carlson asked the Council members and all employees to be thinking about what are the priorities for the City?

Councilor Rupprecht motioned to adjourn the special City Council meeting. Seconded by Councilor Lavey. Approved 5-0.

The Council Meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:23 pm on September 17, 2020.

Submitted By:
Cheryl A. Knight
City Administrator/Clerk