

CITY OF HASTINGS, NEBRASKA
MINUTES OF CITY COUNCIL WORKSESSION
Thursday, February 18, 2021

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a Worksession of the City Council of the City of Hastings, Nebraska was conducted in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 220 N. Hastings Avenue, on February 18, 2021.

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Council President Ginny Skutnik with the following members present: Ginny Skutnik, Butch Eley, Shawn Hartmann, Chuck Rosenberg, Joy Huffaker, Jeniffer Beahm, Matt Fong. Absent: Ted Schroeder.

City Officials Present: Mayor Corey Stutte, David Ptak, Clint Schukei, Adam Story, Brad Starling, Erik Nielsen, Lisa Parnell-Rowe, Kevin Johnson, Roger Nash, Jeff Hassenstab.

Others Present: Dr. James Lawler (virtual), Michele Bever, Keith Marvin, Aaron Sorrell (virtual).

Moved by Butch Eley seconded by Jeniffer Beahm to adopt the current agenda for the February 18, 2021 Worksession. Roll Call: Ayes: Matt Fong, Shawn Hartmann, Chuck Rosenberg, Joy Huffaker, Butch Eley, Ginny Skutnik, Jeniffer Beahm. Nays: None. Absent: Ted Schroeder. The motion carried.

Official Notice of the Worksession was published in the Hastings Tribune on Wednesday, February 17, 2021. Pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statute Section 84-1412, the public is advised that a copy of today's agenda and all reproducible written material which will be discussed at today's meeting is available. Also, a current copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act is posted and accessible to members of the public.

Discussion of mask mandate extension.

Michele Bever, Executive Director of South Heartland District Health Department, provided a statement (Attached and made part of original minutes.) regarding the following: the then and now from when the mask mandate began, the vaccine, the non-pharmaceutical interventions, variants, the effectiveness of mask policies and recommendation to Council. She talked about the trends last November and the overwhelming impact on the public health system with hospitalizations rapidly increasing. She reviewed with Council the South Heartland District Health Department (SHDHD) fact sheet. (Attached and made part of original minutes.) She indicated that we are in much better shape at this point. Ms. Bever indicated that it could take two and a half months to complete the first doses for the priority group of 65+. She spoke about the non-pharmaceutical interventions and their continued use. She shared with Council information on the three variants of the virus that are moving quickly into our area. She said the thing that is concerning about the variants is that they are more able to spread quickly and the vaccine may not be as good on the variants. She indicated that it is important that we keep our virus spread low with the risk of variants taking hold and the virus having a resurgence. She said the community has not hit low community spread yet and the SHDHD recommends extending the mask policy.

Dr. James Lawler, Executive Director of International Programs and Innovation of UNMC Global Center for Health Security, indicated trends are good for the state and the level of community transmission is improved but we are still above what would be our target community transmission rate of less than 5. He said that it is great vaccines are being distributed but we are not vaccinating the part of the population that are mainly responsible for the spread and won't be vaccinating those responsible for the transmission for several months. He spoke of the rise of new variants being concerning and that the new UK variant is 40% - 50% more

transmissible and is doubling every nine to ten days in the United States. He indicated that by that projection we are several weeks away from it becoming the dominate strain in the United States. He stated it is time to hold the line on the non-pharmaceutical interventions and that by late summer we should be in a much better position.

Councilmember Beahm indicated she had a concern with the 70% vaccination rate and can it be reached with those wanting to be vaccinated. Ms. Bever stated that they hadn't done a survey for that particular part of the population regarding vaccination.

Councilmember Hartmann questioned if the vaccine worked on the new variants. Dr. Lawler stated that data they have indicates that the vaccine is effective against the new strains. He stated that in terms of the timeline of vaccine and vaccine availability, it will continue to increase over the next several months but by June or July, acceptance of the vaccine will be the problem. He said that it is estimated by the end of July we will have enough vaccine to vaccinate the entire United States. He told Council the 70% will depend on the community acceptance rate.

Councilmember Eley asked how long the vaccine would be good for. Dr. Lawler indicated many months and beyond that would be a guess but will probably last years with the need for boosters every one to three years.

It was indicated that there was a 60% vaccine acceptance rate for Fire Department and Police Department employees and a 50% rate for Utility Department employees. Council discussed education of community members and the continued resources SHDHD provides. They talked about voluntary compliance and the education provided with non-compliance complaints.

Dr. Lawler commented that 70% compliance on a mask policy will be effective and give good community control.

Councilmembers discussed businesses enforcing of the mask policy for employees as well as customers.

Dave Ptak, City Administrator, stated there is nothing on the agenda regarding the mask policy for Monday night and asked Council for direction on whether they wanted something placed on the agenda to vote on.

They discussed the option recommended by the SHDHD to tie the mask policy to a seven day rolling average greater than 8 cases per 100,000 per day and not including the 70% community vaccination rate requirement. The requirement to wear a mask would go away or come back on in relation to the metrics for community spread.

Councilmember Eley stated he would rather request community support to wear masks and not mandate. He said he didn't like telling people what to do.

Dr. Lawler reiterated that we are still at high levels and with the emergence of the new variants it is concerning and not a time to relax interventions that have been put in place.

Council discussed staying on the same page as Kearney and Grand Island, doing what is right for our community, about the community and businesses being tired of being told what to do and not wanting to lose business.

Mayor Corey Stutte questioned if it would make more sense to take the rolling average over a two week period instead of week to week which might make communication with public less difficult.

It was the consensus of the Council to place the item on the agenda for Monday night with Council stating they did not want to require the 70% community vaccination rate but liked the rolling average metric and asked that it be included.

Kevin Johnson, Utility Manager, discussed with Council the rolling blackout that took place earlier in the week. He stated that they started on Saturday and Sunday to strategize on how to respond if the blackout needed to occur. They were notified by OPPD that they needed to drop two megawatts within 30 minutes and with not enough time for commercial business notification, they went to southside feeders and shut them down for no longer than an hour. They were able to drop a total of four megawatts and with the cutbacks the commercial businesses were making, they had dropped down the four megawatts the OPPD was requiring and were able to stay at that level.

Presentation on final report for Housing Study - Marvin Consultants.

Keith Marvin, Marvin Planning Consultants, reviewed with Council the Housing Needs Assessment starting with the background, community-wide engagement, conditions analysis, housing demand and recommendations. He indicated the project started in 2019. They set up an on-line survey, hard copy surveys, focus groups and special interviews to receive data and had 759 people answer the survey. Mr. Marvin indicated that key focus groups were the Chamber of Commerce, the Young Professionals Group and Realtor Group.

Some of the key points touched on by Mr. Marvin and Mr. Aaron Sorrell, Community Planning Insights, LLC, were utility deposit of \$500 is unaffordable, homes are being bought up by landlords before anyone else can purchase, there are slumlords in Hastings, pet friendly rentals are in high demand, a lot of landlords do not except HUD, there are no houses available under \$100,000 and senior housing is a priority.

Mr. Sorrell went into Conditions Analysis starting with vacancy rates and explained "Other Vacant Units" which are largely abandoned houses with no active owner to market the house for rent or for sale. He stated that vacancy rates are concerning.

They discussed household incomes using the 3 to 1 ratio and indicated that most people in town can't afford a \$250,000 home. It was stated that almost 1600 single-family homes are rated very poor to below normal or 1 in 5 homes is below normal. City ward maps were reviewed showing residential building conditions with Ward 1 having more of the poorer condition housing stock in the city.

Mr. Sorrell went on to talk about rental vacancy rates needing to be from 7% to 10% to allow available units for those moving in and for those whose household situation has changed. He told Council about commuter capture and the individuals that come to Hastings every day to work that would make up the pool of potential renters or buyers if there were affordable units to buy or rent in Hastings.

They reviewed with Council the following recommendations: enforcement of residential property maintenance code, inclusive housing requirements for large projects, develop a local land bank, modular and manufactured housing and new comprehensive plan and zoning regulations to address the missing middle housing.

Councilmember Beahm stated she felt they needed to look at what they are calling affordable.

Councilmember Fong asked about the action plan and the next steps moving forward.

Mr. Marvin suggested not putting the study on a shelf and get active on it.

Mr. Ptak indicated that this should probably be an item on the Council's retreat agenda.

Discussion of ethics ordinance/code of conduct. (Closed Session Discussion)

Discussion on setting date for City Council Retreat.

Mr. Ptak indicated the Department Head retreat was set for March 1st and they were asked to turn in their goals and work plans for the next fiscal year. He would like the Council to give them at least two weeks before setting up their retreat. He stated Council retreats are generally on a Saturday or Sunday and generally start at 1:00 p.m. and vary in length. He said they have had their retreat at Lochland or the Library in the past and it can be anywhere the Council chooses. Two weeks after the Department Head retreat is around the last two weekends in March. Council asked that Michaela send out an email so Council can respond back as to dates that work for them with a deadline of Wednesday to get the information back to Michaela.

Moved by Chuck Rosenberg seconded by Shawn Hartmann to go into closed session at 7:45 p.m. for the discussion of ethics ordinance/code of conduct relating to personnel. Roll Call: Ayes: Matt Fong, Shawn Hartmann, Chuck Rosenberg, Joy Huffaker, Ginny Skutnik, Jeniffer Beahm. Nays: Butch Eley. Absent: Ted Schroeder. The motion carried.

Moved by Butch Eley seconded by Jeniffer Beahm to resume open session at 8:04 p.m. Roll Call: Ayes: Matt Fong, Shawn Hartmann, Chuck Rosenberg, Joy Huffaker, Butch Eley, Ginny Skutnik, Jeniffer Beahm. Absent: Ted Schroeder. The motion carried.

Moved by Butch Eley seconded by Jeniffer Beahm there being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting be adjourned at 8:04 p.m. Roll Call: Ayes: Matt Fong, Shawn Hartmann, Chuck Rosenberg, Joy Huffaker, Butch Eley, Ginny Skutnik, Jeniffer Beahm. Absent: Ted Schroeder. The motion carried.