CITY OF HASTINGS, NEBRASKA
MINUTES OF CITY COUNCIL WORKSESSION
Monday, March 20, 2023

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a Worksession Meeting of the City Council of the City of Hastings, Nebraska was conducted in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 220 N. Hastings Avenue, on March 20, 2023.

The Worksession Meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Council President Matt Fong with the following members present: Shawn Hartmann, Marc Rowan, Joy Huffaker, Steve Huntley, Butch Eley, Brad Consbruck. Absent: Jeniffer Beahm.

City Officials Present: Mayor Corey Stutte, Jesse Oswald, Shawn Metcalf, Lori Vorderstrasse, Brad Starling, Erik Nielsen, Kevin Johnson, Roger Nash, Jeff Hassenstab, Lee Vrooman, Teresa Kreutzer-Hodson, Marty Stange, Tony Hermann.

Others Present: Marcy Luth, AMGL CPAs & Advisors, Mick Syslo, Nebraska Department of Transportation.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Moved by Butch Eley seconded by Shawn Hartmann to adopt the current agenda for the March 20, 2023 City Council Worksession minus item two, Library Annual Report. Roll Call: Ayes: Matt Fong, Shawn Hartmann, Marc Rowan, Joy Huffaker, Butch Eley, Brad Consbruck, Steve Huntley. Nays: None. Absent: Jeniffer Beahm. The motion carried.

Official Notice of the Worksession was published in the Hastings Tribune on Friday, March 17, 2023. 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.

Presentation of Financial Audit for the City of Hastings and Utility Department ending September 30, 2022 - Almquist, Maltzahn, Galloway & Luth, P.C.

Roger Nash, Finance Director, introduced Marcy Luth, AMGL CPAs & Advisors, and explained that the audit can be found on the City's website. Ms. Luth indicated that the City received an unmodified opinion, which is what you want. She began reviewing a benchmarking spreadsheet provided to Council in their audit report which compares the City to a dozen cities across the state of Nebraska in close population range. She touched on unrestricted net position compared to total net position, sources of revenues, state allocations, expenses, outstanding debt, expenditures, cash reserve, levy rates, depreciable capital assets, operating income, debt coverage ratio and cash and investments. Ms. Luth then reviewed briefly with Council the Financial Statements ending September 30, 2022 and touched on assets, liabilities and net position comparison, revenues and expenses, capital assets, outstanding debt and fund balances. She reviewed with Council the TIF projects that are outstanding and indicated they focused this year on review of the Airport Improvement Program and all came out well. Ms. Luth told Council that segregation of duties is the only deficiency finding reported and that is due to the limited number of accounting personnel. She touched on the letter of recommendation and a recommendation from the auditors regarding a Landfill receivable on some demolition done at the mall/theater development site and whether the City will pay it or will it just get written off. Another recommendation was to get a little more sophisticated in the tracking of TIF projects, getting more formal on the amortization of those projects.

Council President Fong questioned if the recommendations on the benchmarking spreadsheet changed. Ms. Luth indicated they stay pretty constant, ratios stay static.

Landfill Fund receivable was discussed. Councilmember Huntley questioned why fees were waived on the Landfill receivable and why it didn't go to a demolition or construction landfill. Councilmember Hartmann stated that he knows in the past, construction debris has also been dumped in the Landfill, so he wasn't sure if that was a precedent that has been set in the past. Mayor Stutte indicated this receivable stems from problems with the contractor. Councilmembers Rowan and Huntley requested the City Administrator look into the Landfill receivable.

Councilmember Rowan asked for a recommendation on how to spot discrepancies. Ms. Luth suggested looking with professional skepticism, looking at financial results from year to year, remain aware and ask questions.

Presentation of Library Annual Report.

This item was postponed and will be heard at an upcoming City Council work session.

Discussion on Hastings Southeast Project roundabout.

Lee Vrooman, City Engineer, introduced Mick Syslo from the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). Mr. Syslo was there to provide an update to City Council on the Hastings Southeast Project. Mr. Vrooman hit the high points of this project beginning with discussion in the 1980s, on August 8, 2016 Council approved an agreement with NDOT for a 5-lane project with 80/20 cost split, 5-lane design would have affected property owners along the project and the funding was not there, state approached the City with a 3-lane concept in 2021 with a roundabout, state presented the 3-lane design with the roundabout at a 2021 work session, staff attended a walk-through of the project in September, 2022, state came back in November, 2022 with traffic flow simulations and answered questions. Mr. Vrooman indicated that a question that came up was regarding the roundabout vs. a traditional intersection. He indicated that the impacts on property owners and costs are relatively the same and with that being equal, the state determined the roundabout to be the safest, most efficient way of moving traffic through the intersection. He touched on some benefits of the project, like fixing poor drainage, new roadway, stormwater improvements, replacement of an electric line, 80/20 cost share, with a roundabout no long term signal maintenance and it greatly improved the ascetics to this entrance into town. Mr. Vrooman said he saw challenges as the large impact to the City budget and impacts to property owners.

He indicated that the next step is to bring a resolution of support to Council hopefully on next Monday's agenda, City staff are in support and there will be a public meeting after the resolution of support passes.

Mr. Syslo confirmed that the next step after approval of the resolution is stakeholder meetings, laying out of the timeline, by the end of the year final design, right-of-way phasing at the beginning of next year, letting of bids in fall of 2024, begin construction in 2025.

Councilmember Huntley indicated that it seemed like they were doing things backwards and shouldn't they have public meetings then pass a resolution. Mr. Syslo indicated this is no different than they would do with any other city and that he would have no different information for the public than he was presenting right now and they would like to get City buy in on the concept because there is a cost share. He indicated as they move through the design process they are explaining their design and its safety, functionality and operational features. He indicated they need to get to a higher level of design before stakeholder meetings. Mr. Syslo indicated they don't want to get heavily invested and then major issues arise on the local level. Councilmember Huntley indicated he is for participating in the project with the stumbling block being the roundabout. Councilmember Consbruck stated he didn't think there was a traffic flow problem at this intersection, no major recurring of accidents, same impact for property owners, so why not use traffic lights. Mr. Syslo stated they are investing $35 million and are looking down the road, most of the current movement is through movement at the intersection. Councilmember Fong asked about other communities that have utilized roundabouts. Mr. Syslo mentioned Wahoo, Ashland, Pleasantdale, Blair and stated there were many others.

Councilmember Huntley mentioned pedestrian traffic concerns. Mr. Syslo indicated the roundabout allows for crossing one lane of traffic at a time and that the roundabout is off set, so you have to go slow when going around. Mr. Syslo indicated that the right-of-way taking on the roundabout vs. the T intersection is about the same.

Mayor Stutte asked if there was a consensus that there is a need for improvements on Highway 6 as far as infrastructure projects. Councilmember Huntley indicated that the stumbling block is the intersection with the roundabout.

Council discussed moving of the roundabout but it was indicated that the impact to property owners would be greater and the state was trying to minimize the impact on Duncan field as a historical site. Trains stopping on the tracks and causing cars to backup was discussed. It was stated that that was more of an enforcement problem with the railroad.

Mr. Syslo explained the right of way acquisition process and how it starts with an impact assessment presented to the property owner, if it is not agreeable to the property owner, they continue negotiating but if they don't come to an agreement, it could come down to condemnation or eminent domain. Councilmember Consbruck asked why the stakeholder meeting couldn't be done prior to approval of the resolution. Mr. Syslo stated that to be honest, in most other communities, it is a formality and he indicated that they won't move forward until a resolution is passed in support, it is just part of the process. Councilmember Hartmann indicated he was concerned about traffic issues with the roundabout and didn't trust that it is going to work. He said he is a fan of roundabouts but not 100% confident that this will work with the train stoppage being a big problem. Mr. Vrooman stated that there is an extra lane so traffic can continue through the roundabout. Mr. Syslo talked about the timeline and that it is getting tight. He said the process does take time but they don't try to draw things out.

Mr. Vrooman questioned if the Council wished to place this on the next agenda and told them that the project would be on hold until the resolution was passed. Councilmember Huntley asked how soon they could set up a public information meeting. Mr. Syslo indicated two months, however, they would only have the same information as they have now and a delay could mean losing a construction season and they really wouldn't be able to give any more information to the public.

Mr. Vrooman mentioned to the Council that any impacts to utilities as this project is done would receive the benefit from the 80/20 cost share. No project, no cost share. Mayor Stutte stated that it sounds to him like the concept is set and what people need to understand is that if there is going to be a project, there is going to be a roundabout. He said that it sounds to him like there is a consensus that the project should move forward, but just disagreement regarding the roundabout. He said this is a state project that was approved in 2016 so a decision needs to be made or the project will walk away. Shawn Metcalf, City Administrator, asked if they voted no, when would it come up again. Mr. Syslo indicated the condition of the road will be the driver. Mayor Stutte told the Council this is the deal right now. It is a state project, the Council can either agree or not agree to the project.

Discussion on City/County EMS Billing Contract.

Brad Starling, Fire Chief, reviewed with Council the proposed contract between the City of Hastings and Adams County to provide Emergency Ambulance Service (EAS). He went through the history with the first contract with Adams County being signed in 2012 when the City took over ambulance services. $62000 was paid to the City of Hastings each year for ambulance and personnel response. That contract expired in December of 2022 and negotiations have been ongoing since then. Chief Starling provided to Council the original contract, proposed contract and sheet listing changes. He reviewed the following changes: the effective date will change, requests for 911 services will not include non-emergency services, the word "free" will be struck from Section 7, Section 11 will contain an explanation of how the County's fee is arrived at and Section 12 will contain the formula used for figuring the fee.

Council President Fong asked if there was any feedback from the councilmembers on the committee. Councilmember Eley stated that they were sending a lot of taxpayer money into the county and it isn't fair for taxpayers and he felt what the Fire Chief has come up with is the way to go. Councilmember Hartmann agreed, it is a significant cost to the City to go into the county.

Chief Starling explained to Council some other issues that have come to light. EMS has become a burden not just to the City and Adams County but nationally as well due to lack of EMT availability in rural areas and that impacts Hastings. Chief Starling explained that if one of the rural agencies has no EMTs, they are going to call the City of Hastings and that would fall back on the mutual aid agreement, and if we have resources we will send them to assist, but if we are busy we may not be able to supply the mutual aid and that is a concern. He also indicated that paramedic availability is an issue and filling those roles. He talked about the increase volume in non-emergent requests for service. Chief Starling also indicated the increase in use of 911 for primary care and home health services. Council President Fong asked the Chief's timeline for getting this approved. Chief Starling indicated he would like to have it done within 60 days.

Steve Huntley seconded by Shawn Hartmann here being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m. Roll Call: Ayes: Matt Fong, Shawn Hartmann, Marc Rowan, Joy Huffaker, Butch Eley, Brad Consbruck, Steve Huntley. Nays: None. Absent: Jeniffer Beahm. The motion carried.