



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
Public Safety Bldg—Training Room, 825 41st Ave NE
Monday, January 03, 2022
7:00 PM

Mayor
Amada Márquez Simula
Councilmembers
John Murzyn, Jr.
Connie Buesgens
Nick Novitsky
Kt Jacobs
City Manager
Kelli Bourgeois

MINUTES

The following are the minutes for the City Council Work Session held at 7:00 pm on Monday, January 3, 2022 at the Public Safety Building, Training Room, 825 41st Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this hybrid meeting was held both virtually and in-person.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Mayor Marquez Simula called the meeting to order at 6:55 pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula; Councilmember Buesgens (via Zoom); Councilmember Jacobs; Councilmember Murzyn Jr. Councilmember Novitsky.

Also Present: Kelli Bourgeois, City Manager; Trisha Conway, Library Board; Renee Dougherty, Library Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary; Joseph Kloiber, Finance Director; Carrie Mesrobian, Library Board; Chris Polley, Library Board; Ben Sandell, Communications Coordinator; Charlie Thompson, Fire Chief.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. Purchase of a Zodiac Boat and Misc. Equipment for the Fire Department.

Chief Thompson presented information related to the need for the purchase of the new Zodiac boat. It is primarily used for summer water rescue, and also when there is thin ice for human and animal rescue. The current boat is not able to be repaired. The Fire Department is hoping to replace the boat, motor and trailer. The boat has the ability to be equipped with LED lights as needed. The price quote went up \$2,000 since the original quote in spring of 2021. This increase can be covered by the Fire Department budget, and he is hoping to have this purchase approved at the January 10, 2021 meeting.

Mayor Márquez Simula thanked Chief Thompson for the presentation and looks forward to the acquisition of the boat.

Councilmember Novitsky stated that it is great that we are prepared and also prepared for mutual aid situations.

2. Library Board Recommendation to Eliminate Overdue Fines for Library Customers in 2022.

Library Director Dougherty presented the information related to eliminating the fine for the late return of materials for adults and children. The Library Board has worked diligently on this topic and wants to encourage and promote the library and its usage in the

community. The board wants the elimination of fines to be a positive for people using the library. Director Dougherty stated that Columbia Heights is not an outlier in eliminating fines; we are currently in the middle of the pack.

Director Dougherty clarified how the tracking of the fines would occur and the review of the software to make sure that this was something that could be completed.

Councilmember Jacobs questioned the drop in fines during 2020 and was curious if it is fair to assume that this was related to Covid based reduction in the use of the library. She also wanted follow up information related to only having a fines eliminated for children and not adults.

Councilmember Novitsky asked for clarification regarding the timelines for check out and fines.

Director Dougherty explained the late fee process and the fine for not returning the book. The replacement of a book is monitored separate from the fine for late fee. She also stated that it is hard to not charge a child a late fee because adults are also using their card for their family and children.

Councilmember Jacobs asked a follow up question regarding the \$10 fine for a lost item, and not being able to use library until balance is paid. She has concerns that these fines that are not paid are not tracked and it is not known how much the City is owed. She has concerns about eliminating fees and feels that Columbia Heights should wait a year to make this happen.

Director Kloiber stated that the delinquent account is sent to collection at \$75.00. The customer account exists in a delinquent status, the account is not lost, and can be reactivated when the payment is made. Library users are not allowed to check out materials when their account has a balance of \$10 or more.

Councilmember Novitsky clarified that there is not a replacement fee, processing fee or fine if the item is returned.

Councilmember Novitsky and Jacobs requested that this item not be placed on the consent agenda.

City Manager Bourgeois asked about if there is a hold on the materials, can the library user request another extension of the materials. Director Dougherty stated that items cannot be renewed online if there is a hold on the materials by another library member. Director Dougherty stated that there is also a 100 item check out maximum and this is very standard.

Councilmember Novitsky thanked the Library Board for their commitment to researching and presenting the information for the Council.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that she feels that this is a situation to help teach responsibility. She understands other libraries are eliminating fines and feels that if we are still charging the cost for replacement she is ok with eliminating late fines.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated as a reminder that the fines component is ½ of 1% of the library budget. She thanked the Library Board members for attending and asked them to introduce themselves to Council.

3. Updates to the Solid Waste Operating Policy (SWOP).

City Manager Bourgeois presented the information related to SWOP. This information is a precursor to a more formal discussion with Council, and all questions and concerns should be sent to her in anticipation for the February work session.

4. Discuss Potential Acquisition of 5229 University Ave NE.

Director Kloiber presented information related to Hartland Tire approaching the City to sell the property next to Liquor Store 3. For the purposes of the work session Director Kloiber presented the reasons why this property should be acquired related to the benefit of Store 3 (additional information can be found in the council letter). There will be a closed session for review of the appraisal and environmental assessment.

One of the benefits of the City purchasing the property would be that we are able to control who our neighbor is. Additional positive would be that this allows for some flexible storage space, parking and placement of snow in the parking lot in the winter. This purchase would allow for the City to utilize the basement of Store 3 for storage of miscellaneous equipment like election supplies.

Mayor Márquez Simula requested that the property if purchased, she does not want it to look vacant or be a blight.

Councilmember Murzyn was curious about the use of the property and what the retail space would look like.

Director Kloiber stated that generally there could be a “beer cave” walk in type cooler to utilize the space. This would be a nice option because then the cooler would be added on without interrupting the existing cooler / store down.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired about the cost of the property per the appraisal. She would like to have a display windows for the liquor store when the property is purchased.

Councilmember Novitsky inquired as to where the deliveries are being made. He thinks not using the basement as storage increases productivity and safety for Store Employees.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that she supports the acquisition of the property. She likes the ability to add on to our existing store as well as to control who the neighbor is. She stated that there is a new dentist in the business in the blue house nearby. The previous owner tried to sell the property to the City at an elevated cost.

Councilmember Murzyn stated that he is surprised that the roller is still functional to the basement. He wants to see the building be more user friendly and safe for employees.

5. Designation of Legal Newspaper for 2022.

City Clerk Ion presented the bid from Life Newspaper, and indicated that the cost for services has not increased since a more in-depth analysis was completed in 2021. There have not been concerns with Life Newspaper and overall staff has been pleased with quality and responsiveness to issues that need correction.

6. Select Date for 2022 Local Board of Appeal & Equalization Meeting.

City Clerk Ion presented information regarding recommended LBAE dates of April 11, 25, and May 9. Overall Council agreed with asking for these dates as a first, second and third choice and that all trained members would be available.

7. City Council Liaison and Council President Appointments for 2022.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that Council responded with preferences for appointments and overall there were not many changes from 2021.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she has requested to be added to the Youth Commission, Councilmember Novitsky has asked to serve as the liaison to the School Board, and Councilmember Buesgens to MWMO. She asked if Councilmember Novitsky would be willing to be President, and he confirmed.

Councilmember Novitsky stated that everything looks good and he is excited to be a part of the School Board as he has kids in the school and has good connections there.

8. Appointments to Fire Relief Association Board of Trustees.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that this assignment would remain the same, and Councilmember Murzyn and City Manager Bourgeois would be reappointed.

9. Hometown Hero Proposal.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that there is an overview of the program in the packet, and the idea was brought to her by a community member. She has worked with Councilmember Buesgens and City Manager on the proposal. She is partnering with the VFW, and they are offering approximately \$3,000 and a volunteer to assist. There will also be two community members volunteering to help review applications.

Donation of \$3,000 from the VFW would help towards the cost of the city putting up the banners prior to Memorial Day and after Veterans Day (when holiday decorations go up). People purchasing a banner are offered the banner to keep when not being used, and they must store for themselves for the next year. Banner costs would be about \$75, and there would be a reduced cost for using the same banner the following year. City Staff maintains the ability to monitor the quality and costs (and would use the same vendor as the 100 Year Anniversary banners). City Staff would assist with marketing and promotion.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked about what other banners are used during the summer.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that the city has a limited number of hangers. There are 60 available, and if all are not utilized then we can devote them all to this event. The City can intermix some of the banners up to 4 times a year, but we will want to make sure we can continue the business banners. The City does not have the staff to manage the ordering of the banners, reviewing applications. The City does have the staff for putting up and taking down the banners and assisting with some of the marketing for the program.

Councilmember Jacobs states that this program is available for current and previous residents to support military members past and present. She would like to do this as a yearly event as it has a reduced cost to reapply because the banner is already purchased.

Councilmember Novitsky was glad that the city is providing open hanger spaces and the ability to put them up and take them down. He wanted to clarify that this is a partnership between City, VFW and Community Volunteer Members. He also wanted to clarify what is needed from the City as far as handling the incoming money.

City Manager Bourgeois confirmed the availability to help hang the banners and to help with marketing. The City cannot hold the profit on the banners themselves.

Councilmember Murzyn clarified that the VFW can make a check to the City, but cannot hold onto the money for the banners.

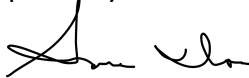
Councilmember Jacobs clarified that she is going to need to resolve who holds the funds.

Councilmember Novitsky recommended reaching out to Randy with Military MN for additional assistance.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Márquez Simula adjourned the meeting at 8pm

Respectfully Submitted,



Sara Ion, City Clerk