

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Tuesday, November 1, 2022

6:30 PM

Common Council Chambers

I. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by Mayor Steve Hass with the following attending:

Paul Russell – District 1
Michael “Gus” Caylor – District 2
Rick Blake – District 3
LaDonna Fermanich – District 4
Dick Lupton – District 5
Mike Rick – District 6
Mark Weix – District 7
Steve Sabatke – District 8

Other’s present: Mayor Steve Hass, Finance Director Unertl, City Attorney Hayden, City Clerk Anderson-Malm, Fire Chief Klug, Park & Recreation Director Wendorf, Police Chief Bennett, Street Superintendent Bonack, Enrichment Center Director Mrachek, Facilities Maintenance Manager Wszalek, Utility Operations Steinagel, Transit Director Brummond (remote), Marketing Specialist Kuczmarski, Merrill Productions and John Greenwood, Mike Ravn, Kyle Gulke, Police Captain Bacher, Attorney Gerald Hersil, Todd Fredrick, Rick Bjorklund, Sarah Sturm, Dave Graveen and Channel 9 camera person.

II. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

III. Public Comment

Mike Ravn - W4397 Eagle Ridge Lane, Pine River. He spoke regarding the reconsideration of the Social Media position and urged the Council to keep the Marketing & Communications budget in full.

Sarah Sturm – 712 Tee Lane Drive, Merrill. She is the Marketing Director of the Merrill Chamber and spoke about the importance of a social media position.

Haley Savall – N2934 Hwy 107, Merrill. She spoke in favor of the social position. She expressed an interest in having a page with activities on a single page. She and her family use social media to find things to do in Merrill.

Todd Fredrick – 1600 Logan Ave, Merrill. He spoke as a business owner regarding the social media position. He stated the position is essential and needed for Merrill to

complete with other communities. He also stated this is not an expense but an investment.

Kyle Gulke – 1504 Jackson St, Merrill. He spoke in favor of the social media position.

Steve Sabatke – 2801 Thiel man St, Merrill. He made a statement regarding the budget and urged the council to reduce debt and be responsible to the citizens of Merrill.

IV. Consider placing the minutes from September 13, October 3, October 11 and October 17 on file:

Aldersperson Russell motioned to place the September 13, October 3, October 11 and October 17 minutes on file. Aldersperson Weix seconded and the motion carried.

V. 2023 Budget – General Operations:

1. Presentation of Attorney Hersil proposal for legal services

Attorney Hersil was asked to provide a presentation for legal services by Aldersperson Caylor. He answered questions from Aldersperson's and the Mayor.

It was decided a succession plan would be put in place for positions. This process will start in January.

a. Discuss outside counsel expenses

Mayor Hass discussed the information that was presented in the agenda packet.

City Attorney Hayden stated there is an Ordinance regarding legal counsel would be retained for union negotiations. He agreed a succession plan, for a number of positions, is a good idea and is willing to work with the Mayor and Council.

2. Presentation on Social Media position

Aldersperson Blake started the discussion and referred the presentation to Scott Steele who had a pre-recorded video regarding the Social Media position, since he was unable to attend the meeting in person.

After discussion, Aldersperson Russell made a motion to reinstate the Social Media position at \$26,000. Aldersperson Sabatke seconded and the motion carried on a 9-0 roll call vote.

3. Update on preliminary 2023 tax rate projections

Additional information was handed out at the meeting with three options for 2023 tax rate projections.

Public Works Director/City Engineer Akey informed the Committee of the Whole of suggestions that were made at the Department Head meeting on October 31st. There

was discussion regarding how much of the ARPA funds can/could be used for a “one-time” fix.

Following discussion, Mayor Hass made a motion to use up to 50% of ARPA money. Alderperson Blake seconded and the motion carried on a 6-3 roll call vote. Alderperson’s Russell, Caylor and Sabatke voted no.

4. Review and consider 2023 Capital and Infrastructure Investments, including preliminary borrowing plan.

After discussion, Alderperson Fermanich made a motion to remove the docks and ramps at Ott’s and Riverside Parks from ARPA funds. Alderperson Sabatke seconded and the motion carried on a 9-0 roll call vote.

Mayor Hass made a motion to remove the Firefighter Turnout Gear from the ARPA funds. Alderperson Blake seconded and the motion carried on a 9-0 roll call vote. Fire Chief Klug will look into grant opportunities for this gear.

Alderperson Caylor made a motion to remove, from ARPA funds, the 23rd Officer from the Police Department but allow \$30,000 for overtime. Alderperson Sabatke seconded and the motion carried on a 9-0 roll call vote.

Alderperson Fermanich made a motion to remove, from ARPA, the Fire Battalion Chief. Alderperson Blake seconded and the motion carried on a 9-0 roll call vote.

Alderperson Caylor motioned to remove \$17,500 from ARPA to the Enrichment Center’s non-lapsing account. Alderperson Sabatke seconded. The motion failed on a 2-7 roll call vote. Alderperson’s Russell, Blake, Fermanich, Lupton, Rick, Weix and Mayor Hass voted no.

Alderperson Rick motioned to reduce the \$17,500 for the Enrichment Center to \$12,500 from ARPA. Alderperson Lupton seconded and the motion carried on a 9-0 roll call vote.

Mayor Hass motioned to remove \$20,000 from the Festival Grounds livestock barn and camping budget request. Request from \$30,000 to \$10,000. Alderperson Rick seconded and the motion carried on an 8-1 roll call vote. Alderperson Sabatke voted no.

Mayor Hass motioned to reduce the amount to Haven from \$10,000 back to \$6,000. Alderperson Rick seconded and the motion carried on a 6-3 roll call vote. Alderperson’s Blake, Fermanich and Weix voted no.

Mayor Hass motioned to remove Team Startup from the Police request; \$20,000 to zero. Alderperson Caylor seconded and the motion carried on a 9-0 roll call vote.

Aldersperson Caylor motioned to remove \$3,000 from the Airport budget for Airport Days, which has not been held for 3 years. Aldersperson Sabatke seconded and the motion carried on an 8-1 roll call vote. Aldersperson Weix voted no.

Aldersperson Fermanich motioned to remove the \$50,000 from the Parks & Recreation budget for connecting the River Bend Trail to the Prairie Trail. Aldersperson Caylor seconded and the motion failed on a 3-6 roll call vote. Aldersperson's Russell, Blake, Rick, Weix, Sabatke and Mayor Hass voted no.

Aldersperson Sabatke motioned to remove \$380,000 for the Spruce St. extension from 2023 and defer it to 2024. The motion died due to a lack of a second.

Aldersperson Sabatke motioned to remove the Fire Department Administrative Assistant position from the 2023 budget. The motion died due to a lack of a second.

5. Review and consider 2023 Budget and Tax Levy Ordinance, Appendix A and non-union wages

This was not discussed due to lack of time.

VI. Next meeting date and time

It was decided the next Committee of the Whole Budget meeting would be, Thursday, November 3rd at 7:00 PM

VII. Adjournment

Aldersperson Russell motioned to adjourn. Aldersperson Rick seconded and the motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori L. Anderson-Malm – City Clerk