

COUNCIL WORK SESSION March 6, 2023

Under due call and notice thereof, a Council Work Session of the North Mankato City Council was held in the Council Chambers on March 6, 2023. Mayor Carlson called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. The following were present for roll call: Council Members Peterson, Whitlock, Steiner, Oachs, City Administrator McCann, Finance Director Ryan, Public Works Director Arnold, and City Clerk Van Genderen.

Receive Region Nine Development Commission Update

City Administrator McCann introduced Nicole Griensewic, Executive Director, and Kristian Braekkan, Ph.D, Economic Development Director, to the dais to provide background information on Region Nine and review regional trends in economic development.

Executive Director Nicole Griensewic appeared before Council and stated that in 1969 the Minnesota Legislature's Regional Development Act authorized the creation of regional economic development commissions. In 1972 local elected officials organized the Region Nine Development Commission. The commission includes elected officials representing nine counties, 72 cities, 147 townships, 33 school districts, the Minnesota Valley Council of Governments, and public interest groups, including Health & Human Welfare, Minority Populations, and Youth Commissioners. Executive Director Griensewic reported that residents' property taxes includes a levy for the commission. Total levy funds are \$688,000, which are used to match federal and state grants. She reported that the commission can connect cities, counties, and townships with funding for specific projects with regional impact. RNDC also operates several Revolving Loan Funds (RLF), which can be used as gap financing to help businesses meet capital goals where they may not otherwise be able to. The primary purpose of the RLF is to create jobs within the nine-county area. Executive Director Griensewic reported that RNDC also participated in a delegation exchange with the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The partnership aims to share best practices, successes, and challenges surrounding clean energy for rural communities.

Economic Development Director Kristian Braekken appeared before Council and showed the integration of the local and regional economies. He stated that households are drivers and outcomes of prosperity, and the region is seeing socio-economic and demographic changes. The available industries are drivers of prosperity. Economic Development Director Braekken reviewed a map of the Region Nine Census Tracts. The color-coded map showed distressed areas and areas above the regional average. Several distressed tracts were noted in the region. Nicollet County was above average and not in economic distress. He suggested that innovation and economic variability help to create a strong and competitive region. Innovation provides more niches to compete in international markets, creates new solutions, and adds value to existing activities and opportunities to move up in the value chain. He reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of the region. Strengths included general economic well-being and human capital. Weaknesses included the business profile, which needed more foreign investment and attractiveness. Another area for improvement is employment productivity due to a lack of diversity in the region. Business dynamics is also a weakness with a lack of new businesses. Overall he stated that the region is an innovative and resilient regional economy.

Council Member Whitlock requested clarification on why the medical field was not included. Economic Development Director Braekken reported that the report only pulled for regional clusters of products sold elsewhere.

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North Mankato Police Department Annual Report

Police Chief Ross Gullickson appeared before Council to review the 2022 Police Annual Report. He noted that criminal offenses in Group A offenses decreased slightly from 2021-2022. It went from 454 reported in 2021 down to 440 reported in 2022. Group A offenses are the more serious criminal offenses, including assault, burglary, theft, etc. Group B offenses increased slightly from 44 in 2021 to 56 in 2022. He noted that the department made 26 DUI arrests in 2022. Police Chief Gullickson reported that the department made over 1,000 more traffic stops in 2022 compared to 2021. The Police Department had the goal of increasing visibility and address resident complaints.

Police Chief Gullickson reported that North Mankato remains a safe City with a low crime rate with a 3.1% chance of being a victim of a crime. He noted that the numbers in the reports may not match exactly due to some cases still being open.

Police Chief Gullickson reported that the North Mankato Police Department is committed to being transparent in all aspects of police service, including incidents where officers use force in performing their duties. In 2022, the department had 9,063 calls for service, with 35 incidents presenting a level of resistance requiring the use of force. These incidents represent 0.386% of the department's calls for service. He noted there had been an increase in assaults on police officers. Police Chief Gullickson stated that the report includes both racial demographics and the use of force. He thanked the Council for their support.

Council Member Whitlock noted the staffing increase to 16 officers, with one more coming on board in the next few months.

North Mankato Fire Department Report

Fire Chief Jim Zwaschka appeared before Council to review the 2022 Fire Department Report. He noted that the current volunteer fire department has 30 members with five probationary firefighters. The department's mission is to "protect the lives and property of the community through dedication to training, public education, and emergency preparedness." The department addresses that mission by engaging in public education. He noted that fire calls have decreased, indicating that the education program efforts are paying off.

Fire Chief Zwaschka reported that the department fielded 140 calls, with 35 calls involving fire, 33 involving gas leaks, and 49 false alarm calls. Areas of most significant risks for the City of North Mankato are cooking, the aging population, and economic stressors, which sometimes lead to hoarding.

Fire Chief Zwaschka reviewed the current apparatus and support vehicles and looked at proposed replacement dates for those items. In 2023 the department will be purchasing a support van to replace one that is 32 years old. The next device scheduled for replacement is a pumper truck that is 26 years old, with an anticipated replacement in 2025. He also noted that the department is working on replacing radios which costs \$15,000 for three radios. Fire Chief Zwaschka reported he has applied for an AFG Grant for \$186,000 to replace the current radios. The City is also working with Nicollet County on a County-wide grant for thermal imaging and accountability.

Fire Chief Zwaschka reported that the staff continues annual training with 1317.50 hours in 2022. The Minnesota Board of Fire Training and Education reimburses the City \$200 per firefighter to a maximum of \$9,900.

Fire Chief Zwaschka stated that the department's strengths include a well-trained staff, the ability to train and support members, strong community support, and mutual aid support.

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Future issues include the recruitment of new firefighters, the cost to maintain and update equipment, the accumulating cost of replacement and maintenance, training requirements, and the ability of the department to support members.

Fire Chief Zwaschka reported that 2022 goals included adding new staff members, improving truck technology, and increasing the firefighter's hourly wage to match the local job market.

Continue Water Meter Discussion

Due to a lack of time, the discussion was postponed.

Council Member Oach moved, seconded by Council Member Peterson, to adjourn the Council Work Session at 7:04 pm.

Mayor

City Clerk