



Workshop – NPPD Recruitment & Retention: 5:45 PM
Committee of the Whole – 6:30 P.M.
Regular City Council Meeting – 7:00 P.M.

A regular meeting of the North Pole City Council was held on Monday, March 6, 2023, in the North Pole City Hall Chambers.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Mayor Welch called the regular City Council meeting of Monday, March 6, 2023, to order at 7:00 p.m.

Present:

Jeffrey Jacobson – Mayor Pro Tem
DeJohn Cromer – Deputy Mayor Pro Tem
Anton Keller -Alt. Deputy Mayor Pro Tem
Chandra Clack
Aino Welch
David Skipp

Absent/Excused:

None

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE U.S. FLAG

Led by Melissa Dionne

INVOCATION

Given by Ms. Welch

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Welch *moved to* approve the agenda of March 6, 2023

Seconded *by* Mr. Skipp

On the agenda

DISCUSSION

None

PASSED

Yes: 7 – A. Welch, Clack, Skipp, Jacobson, Cromer, Keller, Welch

No: 0

Absent: 0

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Jacobson *moved to* approve the minutes from the 2/27/2023 meeting

Seconded by Ms. Welch

DISCUSSION

None

PASSED

Yes: 7 – A. Welch, Clack, Skipp, Jacobson, Cromer, Keller, Welch

No: 0

Absent: 0

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE MAYOR

- The Mayor spoke about his time in Juneau and Anchorage with Councilwoman Welch and Director of City Services Mr. Wallace. They talked to people with HMH and 2 Bears Environmental consultations after the Juneau AML conference. Coming up tomorrow is a climate action committee where you can give public testimony regarding the EPA's plan for the non-attainment region, he will be there to give testimony. Starting the 27th he will be with soldiers at Fort Wainwright participating in an active exercise. He and Mr. Wallace will be working on a grant application for the water project that is due the 17th of March.

COUNCIL MEMBER QUESTIONS OF THE MAYOR

- None

CITIZENS COMMENTS – (Limited to Five (5) minutes per Citizen)

- Tom Philips, Facilities Director with Gavora Inc., was with us to talk to the Council about Gavoras' proposal to move the sewer lines on the NP property.
- Howard Rixie was here to talk about the NPCCC luncheon this month and to request someone attend the NPCCC luncheon in April to talk elections. Mr. Rixie also spoke in support of the sewer line move by Gavora Inc.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM DEPARTMENT HEADS, BOROUGH REPRESENTATIVE AND THE CITY CLERK

Police Department, Chief Dutra

- He taught a DT class this weekend for a girl's soccer team. He said that despite many of the girls dreading it, they ended up having a good time with lots of giggles and learned a lot about personal safety.
- The governor just reappointed him to the Alaska Police Standards Council and he said that he is an honor and a privilege to be doing that again. He said that the board does tremendous work and that they have a lot of work ahead of them on modifying police standards across the state. He thanked Governor Dunleavy for that appointment. He also thanked the Mayor for allowing him to sit on that board as well.
- They just completed the first active shooter course for the department. It was part of the professional development plan for the officers. This course will be completed at the beginning of new officers training from now. They will also be hosting some of the fire department personnel doing some initial briefings and discussions on RTF, Rescue Task Force. The eventual outcome after more training and equipment will

be that the fire department personnel will be able to assist in an active shooter situation, allowing them access to the 'warm zone' after the shooter has been disarmed to attend to the wounded. He thanked Lt. Smith for getting the program up and running and the fire department for their participation.

- The new addition to the police department building is having sewer back ups again. He has been working with Mr. Wallace and the contractor to get the problem solved. It will be dug up this summer and hopefully dealt with once and for all.

The Mayor asked if Stanton is aware and cooperative to the sewage situation that they are having.

- Chief Dutra said yes, they are aware and the department is just trying to mitigate the situation until it can be resolved this summer.

Mr. Jacobson recommended to the Chief the company that the City of Fairbanks uses to pump their waste oil separator tanks.

Fire Department, Chief Heineken

- Chief Heineken apologized to the Council for missing last week's meeting.
- He shared that the new fire engine that is being built for the city is coming along very rapidly now. He said it is exciting to see it looking like a truck now and not just piles of metal like it did in the initial pictures. He and Cpt. Hamlin will be traveling the last week in March to check it out and do the pre final inspection before they button it all up. It is on target to be finished the last week in April and he will make another trip down there then to do the final testing. The completed truck should make it here the beginning of the summer. The timing is ideal, taking possession of a new truck and having to deal with the training in the middle of winter is very difficult, so this works out well. The process will have taken 2 years from start to finish.
- They have made conditional job offers to fill the 2 positions that are open. Annabelle Austin and Krystel Marino. They are finishing the conditions of the offer and both should be coming on board this month. They will be at full staff with these 2 new people. He said that the numbers of the people applying for their positions is a lot lower than it used to be, but he is happy that they are still able to keep the numbers up and aren't having the staffing issues that the police department is.
- Chief Heineken met with Carl Johansson, of Johansson, Wing architects about the plan for the prospective new facility. He was able to give Mr. Johansson a tour of the current facility and really walk him through the department's needs for the new one. The lots that they have planned to use, behind Taco King and where the department annex is currently located are going to be a good fit with plenty of room for the new facility.

Mr. Keller shared that he will be representing the city at the FNSB assembly meeting on Thursday and asked the Chief if he has anything that he would like to share regarding the Two Rivers fire department.

- Chief Heineken said that their position is that there are going to remain completely neutral on some of the controversy that is going on. He said that they fully support any fire department and would support them when they get up and running. He said the community is very torn about the department and people who are both for and against having a fire department. Chief said that he has let Two Rivers and the borough Mayor know that he will remain neutral on this topic and that he and the department will support whichever decision is made.

Mr. Keller also asked about the engine that the department will be retiring soon and if the process for donating it has been started yet.

- Chief Heineken said that the process has not been started yet, that the Council can expect to see a request to them to approve the donation plan of the engine soon. He has developed a process that would be used and a committee that would receive and review applications and to choose a city/organization that would be receiving the engine. Although he will be a part of the committee, he will not have a vote in who receives the engine. The city code currently requires that we send our retired assets to auction, so the Council can expect that request to them to use this avenue instead. The last truck that we sold at an auction we received only \$4200 for, a new engine is approximately \$1.8 million, so he feels that we should do the best thing and give this engine, that still has life left in it, to a small community fire department.

Ms. Clack asked how many people will be on the committee.

- Chief Heineken said to not quote him on this, but it will consist of: a Council Member, a few personnel from the fire department, a fire chief from a neighboring department, a citizen from the City and a few others. He would like there to be at least 5 individuals.

Finance, Tricia Fogarty

- Ms. Fogarty was not with us tonight.

Director of City Services, Danny Wallace

Special Topics

- **Request for City Assumption of Sewer Line on Gavora Property**
 - We reviewed and discussed this request with Matt Gavora a few weeks ago. From our perspective, we do not recommend assuming control of that line, regardless of the condition. This is on private property and will result in additional maintenance burden on the City. Our sewer utilities operate at a deficit each year and this would add additional costs (and no revenue) to our requirements.
 - **We do not support this request.**
- **Grant Writer Master Services Agreement with Two Bears Consulting (TBEC)**
 - The Mayor and I have met with TBEC on several occasions, reviewed their proposal, and have determined that this is the best solution to gain assistance with grant research. This support will include monthly scanning and discussions on opportunities and North Pole input on which opportunities to pursue (TBEC will begin research only if we request). Given that we do not have the depth/expertise to constantly scan emerging grant options and this will provide needed help to address our priorities.
 - The cost (~\$8k per month) is consistent with other firms and this is a month to month agreement that can be discontinued when needed.
 - We plan to use this organization to seek funding for the City's priorities to include the Fire Station (\$20M), Interior Training Facility (\$6M), Water Main Replacement (\$28M), Brookside Park Utilities (up to \$5M), and the Combined Heat and Power Plant (\$110M). We are actively

pursuing options for funding for those priorities (at the state and federal level) and last week, I personally submitted two applications to fund the Water Main to the State Revolving Fund and Federal RAISE grant program.

- We support this Agreement.

Building Department

- We recently received building permit/inspection requests for the following projects:
 - Wescott Pool Renovation - \$8.1M
 - The Church at North Pole – cost TBD
- Melanie Swanson completed a one-week training class, Utility Financial Management Training, sponsored by the Tanana Chiefs Conference. This training is focused on small utility policy/procedures for accounting and finance issues. This is part of our efforts to train and professionalize our Utility management efforts.

Public Works Department

- We continue to have problems with the NPPD annex – the sewer line has frozen three times this year. We are working with the builder (Rod Stanton) on a long term solution. In the interim, we've taken steps to keep the line open and have been able to call Big Foot Pumping and Thawing for support. The bill for all actions required (short and long-term) will be paid by Stanton.
- We continue to push snow away from the roads throughout City in anticipation of future snow falls. Things continue to go well and the weather continues to cooperate.
- We received the final paperwork for our Drainage Survey Grant (\$46k) and we will begin that project in the next few weeks. This will help support planning to address chronic flooding throughout the city. We anticipate actions to include redoing our culverts in low areas, drainage catch basins and other changes in the City as a result, but we're awaiting the results of the survey to make changes. We anticipate feedback and planning information by mid-summer 2023.

Utility Department

- No significant utilities issues over the last week.
- Our Master Services Agreement with Respec (approved during the last Council session) is in the process of being signed.

The Mayor asked what the possibility this year is with Hubbard (our current snow plowing contractor) to help mitigating the amount of snow stacked around in the city?

- Mr. Wallace that there is already a plan to remove snow from various sections of the city. Hubbard has a designated area to haul the snow to already. Mr. Wallace said that they will be looking at the idea again around mid-March and identify the areas that need snow removed.

Mr. Jacobson asked where those low areas in the city that are prone to flooding are.

- The clerk brought up a city map and Mr. Wallace identified a few areas of concern.

The Mayor shared that flooding seems to happen a lot along the old Holiday road, over off of 4th, 5th and 6th. Also area of Ford 2 subdivision and Stillmeyer. Everything flows toward Homestead then north from there.

Mr. Keller asked about the sewage problems in the police departments new wing. Asking if the problems were by design or the execution of that design.

- Mr. Wallace said yes, both. There was an initial Design Alaska design, but then made a last-minute change to the design of that sewer drainage and the pipe freezes up. They will know more when they dig it up this summer.

Ms. Welch asked about the Gavora proposal and if we were going to discuss it more.

- Mr. Wallace and the Mayor agreed that the proposal to take over the sewer pipes under the Gavora property was not something that the Public Works management/City wants to take on.

Human Resources, Ellen Glab

- Ms. Glab is out on maternity leave.

Borough Representative

- There has not been a borough meeting since our last meeting.

City Clerk's Office, Melissa Dionne

- The website is moving along, we are in the final migration stage and training should be scheduled soon along with the first look at the completed site.
- Ms. Dionne started a training hosted by the Rural Utility Business Advisory group through the State of Alaska last week, it will continue throughout this week. The training is called Elected Officials Management of Rural Utilities.

Mr. Jacobson had a question about the City code and where it can be found.

- Ms. Dionne walked through the steps that you would go through on the city website to find the code.

ON GOING PROJECTS

- None

New Business

- Ordinance 23-04, An Ordinance of the City of North Pole Amending the Harassment Policy for the City of North Pole Employees

Mr. Jacobson *moved* to amend the Ordinance with a substitute policy

Seconded *by* Ms. Clack

On the Ordinance with the substituted policy

DISCUSSION

None

PASSED

Yes: 7 – A. Welch, Clack, Skipps, Jacobson, Cromer, Keller, Welch

No: 0

Absent: 0

- Approval of Master Services Agreement with Two Bears Environmental Consulting, LLC.

Mr. Jacobson *moved* to approve the agreement.

Seconded *by* Ms. Welch

On the Agreement

DISCUSSION

None

PASSED

Yes: 6 – A. Welch, Skipps, Jacobson, Cromer, Keller, Welch

No: 1 - Clack

Absent: 0

COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Ms. Welch asked that everyone continue to be safe out there and offered a thanks to the contractor in the city for the hard pack removal in her neighborhood. She also thanked the city workers and police and fire doing their darndest to keep everyone safe.
- Mr. Skipps reminded the Council that the APOC deadline for filling financial statements is coming up soon.
- Ms. Clack said that Mr. Skipps stole what she was going to say tonight.
- Mr. Keller offered his thanks to the department heads that we have with the city, not only for the thoroughness of the reports that they give but also for the enthusiasm that they bring. Both to the meetings and any time that he meets with them, the enthusiasm of not only where we are as a city, but where we can go as a city. He said that enthusiasm trickles down, to the employees under them, they feel that excitement too and it makes them want to be a part of something grander. Before the meeting Chief Dutra talked about what we can do to invite good officers to come and apply to work here and he feels that those ideas also include other departments for the city. He feels that some of the change that we have had lately, the new harassment policy and the coming together to oppose the Manh Cho mine project that we are trying to gather together people, a community, that is really about unity. We are hearing a lot of things about divisions and I think that here in North Pole we are trying to be unified. We are trying to get those pieces together and we have come along way since he has been with the Council. He said it is very interesting and an awesome experience, we are getting puzzles together here, now what else are we missing? His invitation to the residents is come help us be that part, help us with what we are missing. He loved that we had the citizens comments tonight, what can we do to better the environment for businesses to come in? The continued growth is something to look forward to, he is excited for it. He's excited for good change.
- Mr. Cromer thanked Mr. Skipps for the APOC reminder, he totally forgot about it.
- Mr. Jacobson shared a story about APOC. Years ago he forgot to put his address on his forms and ended up with a very large fine. He was able to plead his case, but still ended up paying a decent fine. He said that he was shocked it was that aggressive, so don't miss your deadline and make sure that everything is filled out correctly. He also thanked Mr. Skipps for the reminder. He said that he has heard a lot of talk

about police wages the last 6-7 years in Fairbanks. He said when he heard the police chief say that police officers start at \$28 an hour that he was really shocked, in this town you can go to work at Wal Mart or McDonalds for \$20 an hour and they require no skills or special training. He said that with that low of a wage that we really need to think hard about what we can do to raise that and to do things that will attract people to come and work here. It seems like yesterday that we were working on budgets but we are in a very cutthroat environment when it comes to recruiting workers at any level and usually it is a big win when you hire someone because the hiring pool is very small and difficult. He thanked everyone's support on the substitution ordinance tonight he asked everyone to please read it over and if there are any changes, we can make changes at the next meeting. He said that he is really excited that he has this policy in place. He said he is also very excited about the Wescott pool rehab that the borough is starting soon, it is an \$8 million dollar investment in our community. He said he is happy that they are going to fix the waterslide that has been out of commission, he helped get the initial federal funding for that slide years ago when he was the mayor. He said that he was not very popular down at the borough after that because of the additional money that had to be paid for upgrades to the facility before the slide could be installed. He shared that he has been getting emails from an individual that would like to paint a mural here in North Pole. This individual is looking for a place to install it and it would cost the city \$3000-5000 to sponsor the project. He said he is not sure if DOT would allow us to have a mural under the overpass on Santa Claus lane, he feels that would be a good canvas. He said he is just throwing that out there, that it can be worked on over the summer and that we can talk more about it at the next meeting.

- The Mayor reiterated that tomorrow night at the University there will be public testimony on the EPA air quality issue. He encouraged the public to attend if possible. He said that he has been getting emails about construction in the city for the summer season and what is coming up. In regard to other issues, Helping Alaska finished distributing the CARES act monies the city had given to them, they distributed all of the money before February 1 this year.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Welch *moved* to adjourn at 8:22 PM.

Seconded by Mr. Cromer

The regular meeting of Monday, March 6, 2023, adjourned at 8:23 PM.

These minutes passed and approved by a duly constituted quorum of the North Pole City Council on Monday, March 6, 2023.

ATTEST:

Melissa Dionne, City Clerk