

City of Auburn
City Council Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 4, 2021

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Mayor Berola with the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance of all present.

Mayor Berola called for the roll. Present were Clerk Warwick, Mayor Berola, Treasurer Williams, Alderman Garrett, Alderman Johnson, Alderman Karhliker, Alderman Marquis, Alderman Powell, Alderman Royer. Absent was Alderman Hemmerle and Alderwoman Sheppard. Also present were Attorney Moredock, Chief Campbell, Superintendent Henson, and Office Manager Ponsler.

Mayor Berola announced that there is a new waste hauler in Auburn, Community Sanitation of Medora, Illinois.

Ron Ragan of Utility Gas Management presented an update on natural gas prices. He reported that there will be an increase in the rates in the coming months and he recommended that the city lock-in fifty percent of its natural gas early to avoid a spike that occurred last February 2020. Ron noted that more natural gas is being exported than in the past, he also noted that producers are not drilling as much as they were in the past. We are well within the five-year average on rates but trending towards the fourteen-year high that occurred during Hurricane Katrina. He said there will be some market volatility coming soon. The question was asked about buying all the gas upfront, Ron replied that we could get stuck paying for at a higher rate and being stuck paying a higher gas price we may not use. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has a current investigation on the price gouging during the February 2021 polar vortex. Ron noted that they have picked up another pipeline to contract with to avoid pricing spikes. They are also working on a separate gas storage option that would allow them to store extra gas to avoid pricing spikes. He asked that the city have someone on standby from the city to authorize the locking in of prices. The council felt that Mayor Berola would be the right person. Alderman Johnson made a motion to make Mayor Berola the point person to lock in natural gas rates in the next few weeks, second by Alderman Powell.

AYES: Garrett, Johnson, Karhliker, Marquis, Powell, Royer

NAYES: None

ABSENT: Hemmerle and Sheppard

Ron also noted that we should have a ruling on the FERC rate case in November which might provide refunds to the city. It was asked what the rate difference for Winter 2021 will be, Ron estimated it could be 40 – 50% higher. He did note that the Winter 2020 rates were as low as the rates in 1980, he also believed this will be a short-term issue.

Logan Clayton asked the council if there has been any consideration to allow leaf burning again or have another way to dispose of leaves. The only option other than mulching the leaves or using a lawn care service would be to bring them to Evans Recycling in Springfield. They charge \$1 per bag. It was asked if American Rescue Plan money could be used for a vacuum truck. All the solutions will cost money for remediation.

Chief Campbell presented Zach Pearce for the transition from part-time to a full-time officer. A motion was made by Alderman Royer to approve the transition to full-time, effective October 11, 2021; second by Alderman Marquis.

AYES: Garrett, Johnson, Karhliker, Marquis, Powell, Royer

NAYES: None

ABSENT: Hemmerle and Sheppard

Clerk Warwick presented the September 20, 2021, meeting minutes for the council's review and approval. Alderman Karhliker noted that on the meeting minutes, the electronic sign should be at 7th Street and North Street. Alderman Karhliker made a motion to approve the meeting minutes with the correction on the placement of the electronic sign for the Safe Routes to School Program, second by Alderman Powell.

AYES: Johnson, Karhliker, Marquis, Powell, Royer

NAYES: Garrett

ABSENT: Hemmerle and Sheppard

Treasurer Williams presented the bills list from September 21, 2021, to October 4, 2021, for the council's review and approval. Williams reported an entry for Mathis Kelly that is blank on the report is for an eight-foot drain coupling. There was a question about an expense for gasoline that was for \$75.00, it was an employee that accidentally used their personal card to fuel a work truck. The expense was reimbursed to the employee from three separate funds at \$25.00 per fund. A question came up about the charging of electricity for lighting charged to the Parks account. Superintendent Henson will investigate the street light IDs so a formula can be created to accurately break out the cost of streetlights between the appropriate funds. A motion was made by Alderman Royer to approve the Bills List, second by Alderman Marquis.

AYES: Johnson, Karhliker, Marquis, Powell, Royer

NAYES: Garrett

ABSENT: Hemmerle and Sheppard

Treasurer Williams presented the Video Gaming Terminal report for August 2021, the city's revenue was \$11,865.93. In August 2020 the city's revenue was \$9,008.00.

Attorney Moredock had no report.

Chief Campbell had no report.

Superintendent Henson had no report

Office Manager Ponsler had no report.

Alderman Johnson reported that there was an Administration meeting held earlier in the evening regarding group health insurance, KEB payroll transition, and part-time city office help. The committee decision for the group health was tabled to the next Administration meeting on October 18, 2021, at 6:00 PM in the council chambers. He indicated an executive session will be needed for the next council meeting regarding personnel. Regarding payroll services from KEB, it was recommended that a formal motion be made not to use KEB for payroll services, the Administration Committee was in favor of the decision. A motion was made by Alderman Johnson to not pursue additional services from KEB regarding payroll services, second by Alderman Garrett.

AYES: Garrett, Johnson, Karhliker, Marquis, Powell, Royer

NAYES: None

ABSENT: Hemmerle and Sheppard

The discussion of part-time office help will be held at the Administration meeting on October 18, 2021.

Alderman Karhliker had no report for Public Works.

Alderman Johnson had no report for Public Utilities. Superintendent Henson noted that a discussion is needed in the future about the lift station in the Western Acres subdivision. Alderman Garrett asked about the electricity on the Square. Superintendent Henson thought it was completed and the lights that were out were replaced near the square.

There was a question about ideas on spending the American Rescue Plan funds. Office Manager Ponsler and Superintendent Henson indicated that we have received half of our anticipated funds with the other half coming next year. It was noted that the American Rescue Plan funds can be spent on water, sewer, and broadband. The funds can also be used to replace lost city revenues due to the pandemic and needs to be spent by the end of 2024. A suggestion was made to purchase a multi-use vacuum truck for public health. The lift station could be a qualifying purchase.

Mayor Berola spoke with Alderwoman Sheppard and Alderman Hemmerle and there was no report for Health & Safety, Health & Housing, or Parks.

Clerk Warwick reported that NextSite a commercial development firm that is working with the Sangamon Growth Alliance will be in town next week and he will send out a meeting notice once he had an exact date.

It was asked if the city receives compensation from waste haulers. There is a \$200.00 yearly licensing fee. It was also asked if we had an ordinance on waste hauling in the alleys. Most haulers do not use the alleys because of damage to their trucks. It might be an ideal time to remind the haulers of the rules on alley use.

A question was raised about using the chronic nuisance ordinance for problematic properties, there is a mechanism in place.

Motion to adjourn was made at 8:09 PM by Alderman Garrett, second by Alderman Marquis. Taken by voice vote.

AYES: Garrett, Johnson, Karhliker, Marquis, Powell, Royer

NAYES: None

ABSENT: Hemmerle and Sheppard

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Warwick

City Clerk of Auburn