

Minutes
Regular Meeting of the Hoyt Lakes City Council
Hoyt Lakes City Hall Council Chambers
Monday, May 13, 2024
5:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Zins, Councilors Grams, Beauregard, Scott

ABSENT: Councilor Kramar

ALSO PRESENT: City Administrator Becky Lammi, City Attorney Mitch Brunfelt, Public Utilities Director Jake Berndt, Library Director Sue Sowers, Public Works Director Ken Snetsinger, Fire Chief Tony House, EMS Director Melanie Olmstead.

Meeting was called to order by Mayor Zins at 5:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Grams supported by Beauregard to approve the following consent agenda items:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES-

- 4.1 Regular City Council Meeting – April 22, 2024.
- 4.2 Local Board of Appeal & Equalization Meeting – April 18, 2024

CORRESPONDENCE –

- 5.1 Hoyt Lakes Fire Department Meeting Minutes – April 2024.
- 5.2 Minnesota Department of Health – Plan Review Approval.
- 5.3 Minnesota Power – Notice of Rate Increase.
- 5.4 Minnesota Department of Revenue – Annual Mineral Hearing Notice.
- 5.5 Minnesota Pollution Control Agency – Wastewater Compliance Evaluation Inspection.

APPROVAL FOR PAYMENT – CLAIMS

- 6.1 Disbursements - \$343,143.39
- 6.2 Payroll - \$76,247.18
 - 6.2.1 Payroll - \$66,355.23
 - 6.2.2 Benefits - \$9,891.95
 - 6.2.3 Insurance - \$35,694.14

Motion carried unanimously.

APPEARANCES/PUBLIC FORUM

James McGualey discussed coming to the May 28th meeting regarding Hoyt Lakes 70th Anniversary.

Ron Hoechst spoke regarding a land sale on Leeds and why he doesn't yet have ownership. Attorney Brunfelt explained the Benchmark survey and how St. Louis County rejected the process to deed them. The county is requiring RLS for transferring of these titles, then they can be conveyed.

Karen McNulty asked about the new basketball court. Public Works Director Snetsinger shared he had spoken with Mesabi Bituminous today and they will be installed in designated spots this summer.

Steve House questioned reasoning on not hiring family members. He stated limiting family members in the fire department would be detrimental to the department and that he supervised his son and wife for many years. Dave Jarvela asked where this new policy came from? Mayor Zins stated it came about from the East Range Police Department. Linda Stoks stated this policy would hurt the fire department if adopted. She was supervised by her spouse for 15 years with no problems or issues. Kevin Eckman said "stop laughing Dave" and "wipe that smirk off your face." Ed Casey said they are short on members as it is and there are no benefits. He thought it was coming from someone higher up. Roxi Jensen asked if this would apply to all city employees? She also asked what authority the chief and administrator have over the firefighters? Patti Baudhuin asked if there is a problem with someone you're related to supervisor and asked how many it applies to and if there is a big problem or a just 1 or 2 members.

REPORTS FROM STAFF

Library Director Sowers shared the 3rd grade classes are coming tomorrow. Chat with the Chief and the K9 unit will be at the library on Wednesday. There will also be bracelet making. HelloRange will be here on May 28 and the summer reading program will begin June 3rd.

Public Works Director Snetsinger stated that Fisherman's Point is open for the season though they are still cleaning up from last year's storm. Midway area work will be completed soon and there will also be a disc golf course in that area. The community garden water will be turned on this week.

Public Utilities Director Berndt shared that the MN DNR says no longer in drought phase. A chlorine line blew at the Wastewater Treatment Facility. The Clean water report is done. A pilot study is being done at the Water Treatment Facility about reducing chemical costs. Things went well with the MN Dept. of Health. Looking for opportunities for improvement and need to do inventory of system. Bolton and Menk will be taking over the Lead Service Line inventory. MPCA inspections found 3 minor violations, but they were easy fixes. JR WW are cleaning sewer lines. Quality Flo is inspecting lift stations and will also be doing the one at the golf course. Hydrant flushing will begin May 20 for 1 to 2 weeks.

EMS Director Olmstead said the 3rd grade classes will be touring the Public Safety building tomorrow. They attended the job fair last week. Both she and Cody have one last clinical for community paramedic. They are at 323 runs for 2024.

Fire Chief House stated there were 4 fire calls in April. USFS is burning 91 acres on the Mooseline. They currently have 1 applicant.

City Attorney Brunfelt provided an update on the lease for the Snowmobile Club.

REPORTS FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS

Councilor Beauregard thanked the community members who helped with the community clean up last week.

Mayor Zins had discussions with Ida & Whitney at the DIRRR regarding projects in town and resources available.

OLD BUSINESS

Moved by Beauregard supported by Scott to investigate funding options for the Birchwood Terrace Park. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion on Administrative Clerk position.

Moved by Grams supported by Beauregard to approve Midway Area renovation. Motion carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Moved by Scott supported by Beauregard to approve Hoyt Lakes Water Carnival Committee special event permit. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Beauregard supported by Zins to approve Hoyt Lakes Water Carnival Committee temporary liquor license application. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Scott supported by Zins to approve Hoyt Lakes Water Carnival Committee request for in-kind services. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion with Sarah Ciochetto regarding the Mesabi Trail connection between Aurora and Hoyt Lakes. She will email routes. Maps to be provided for the May 28, 2024 regular meeting.

The following statement was read by Councilor Scott, and at his requested entered into minutes in full: While I understand the reasoning for anti-nepotism policies, I don't think the way in which this current policy is written is acceptable as it is far too broad. Additionally, it doesn't provide any sort of workarounds for current employees and future employees who have or will have relatives working for the City. No policy should be blanket across all cities and municipalities. I ran for council to do what is best for Hoyt Lakes and its residents. Having a policy that might work in other larger cities may not be what is best for Hoyt Lakes. This current policy doesn't help the City and its citizens, it hurts them. If the council would like to implement some sort of anti-nepotism policy in the future, changes will need to be made. At this point in time, Hoyt Lakes has about 2000 residents. Many people do not want to work within the City Departments and others may not qualify for certain positions. This leaves the City with a very small pool in which to pull from. This does not occur in larger cities or smaller towns that have a vibrant economy and tax base. Because of this, a one size fits all anti-nepotism policy does not fit within our City. This is especially true for our part-time positions that require significant training and ongoing education. Like for our EMTs and firefighters. The people in these positions do it because they care deeply about people's safety and wellbeing. They provide a significant amount of time and energy to the City while getting minimal compensation for it. We need to keep every current dedicated employee while keeping the door open for future employees. The fire department has a very limited number of firefighters and EMTs as it is. By terminating current employees of the fire department, which is what this current policy will do according to the City Administrator, and putting even more restrictions on who can be on the fire department, we are putting ourselves in a bad spot. I'm sure there will be a time in the future when we will be in desperate need of more firefighters and EMTs. This has happened before, but relatives of current department members have stepped up. The Hoyt Lakes Fire Department has a long and proud history of family members who have served on the Fire Department together. Had a blanket anti-nepotism policy been in effect in the past, Tony House would have never been able to be on the Fire Department and then eventually become our current chief. Linda Stokes would not have been allowed to be on the Fire Department because her husband, Steve Stoks, was the chief. I'm sure there are countless other examples going back to the formation of our City. These people have served our City with honor and have saved the

lives of Hoyt Lakes residents in the process. Many fire departments are made up of people who are related to each other, which is a point of pride for the families and the communities, as it should be. I feel that if someone is wanting to serve the City and is qualified in doing so, I think they should be hired, no matter who they are or are not related to. At this point, the policy seems to be punishing families and tradition rather than stopping favoritism. I could see a policy like this working in a large city, but in a small city where lots of people are friends with each other and related, it makes keeping positions filled by people who don't know each other difficult, if not impossible. Regarding nearby cities implementing anti-nepotism policies, we have reached out to Aurora's fire chief who has spoken to Aurora's city administrator. Their city administrator had not considered their fire department and how their future anti-nepotism policy may affect their city as there are various family members that have and are currently serving on Aurora's fire department. According to them, they will be consulting with their city attorney to make changes to their policy. It sounds like they're going to exclude part-time employees, which includes people on the fire department. I think our part-time employees should be excluded from our policy too. In this way the fire department is not affected as it will allow the continued tradition of family members serving the city together as firefighters and EMTs. Additionally, there are hiring practices in place already that address the issue of nepotism. In the Fire Department, we have several people who do the hiring, it's not left to the EMS Director or the fire chief alone. Additionally, our City has a personnel committee that deals with things like hiring employees. Again, that prevents a single person from making decisions regarding employees. In this way, I think the city is already addressing nepotism in the hiring process. Furthermore, I haven't heard any issues about systemic nepotism occurring in this city inside or outside of the fire department that has caused major issues now or in the past. The city has been able to operate for the past 70 years without having this policy in place. Regarding the Fire Department, everyone went through the exact same hiring process as all of the other EMTs and firefighters. Everyone had to take all of the same classes and pass all of the same tests to get their certifications. Everyone performs all of the same job duties, gets paid the same, and are all required to work the same minimum amount of hours. This is all to say that I don't think there is anyone that has gotten or is getting preferential treatment in the fire department. I'm sure if you polled the members of the fire department, they would say the same. Although I first and foremost am arguing for what is best for our City and its people, I also take this very personally. If I'm terminated as an EMT and firefighter, which are two positions that I care deeply about and take great pride in, solely because I'm related to the EMS Director and not due to having a poor work ethic or making some sort of mistake, I will be profoundly offended and view this as a targeted, personal attack. If any employee with the City is terminated due to this policy I think we put the City at risk of being sued. Like I said earlier, I understand the reasoning for anti-nepotism policies. We just need to be strategic about how we approve and implement one. For example, most employers will allow related employees to work within the same department even if one is the department supervisor. They simply report to a different supervisor that may or may not be within that exact department. Using me for an example, I would no longer report to Director Olmstead, but instead would report directly to Assistant Director Hanson or Chief House. That's just an idea. In closing, It is a standard of practice for most employers to not prevent potential new hires and advancement opportunities to people that are the most qualified regardless of their blood relations. Again, this is especially true in small cities that have positions that require advanced qualifications. To pick on Chief House one more time, are you prepared to tell his children that they are not welcome to be future firefighters in Hoyt Lakes, even if we desperately need them to serve the city just because their father is the chief? If the policy is passed as is, then we will not only need to turn those children away, but many other children in the future, and risk not having a fire department.

Moved by Zins supported by Grams to table Anti-Nepotism Policy. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Beauregard supported by Scott to approve Hoyt Lakes Fire Department request to utilize fire truck for Hoyt Lakes Public Library Summer Reading Program prize. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion regarding Hoyt Lakes Ladie's Golf League request to waive green fees for the 2024 Care Partners Tournament.

Moved by Beauregard supported by Scott to approve LG230 Application to conduct off-site gambling by the Hoyt Lakes Chamber of Commerce at Fisherman's Point Campground between 06/15/2024 and 08/10/2024. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Scott supported by Grams to approve LG555 Lawful Gambling donation from VFW Post #8144 to be utilized by the Garden Club. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Zins supported by Beauregard to approve Ranger ATV Snowmobile Club pay request no. 2 for the Moose Seven Beavers Trail from Biwabik to Skibo in the amount of \$76,785.15. Motion approved unanimously.

Moved by Grams supported by Zins to approve recommendation to hire Jill Eckman for the Arts & Crafts instructor. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Beauregard supported by Grams to approve recommendation to hire Alexee Jaskolaski for the Arts & Crafts assistant. Motion carried unanimously.

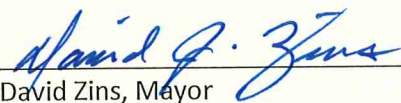
Moved by Scott supported by Beauregard to approve recommendations to hire summer seasonal students in Public Works, Public Utilities, Recreation, and Golf Course. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Grams supported by Scott to approve recommendation to hire Golf Course Assistant Greenskeeper and fall mower. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Beauregard supported by Grams to approve Arts & Crafts program for summer of 2024. Motion carried unanimously.


ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Grams supported by Scott to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.
Meeting adjourned at 6:56 p.m.



David Zins, Mayor

ATTEST:



Becky Lammi, City Administrator