

STREETS, BUILDINGS & GROUNDS MEETING MINUTES

February 8, 2021 @ 6pm via Zoom

In Attendance: **Vermilion City Council:** *Steve Herron, President of Council; Monica Stark, Council at Large; Emily Skahen, Ward One; Frank Loucka, Ward Two; Steve Holovacs, Ward Three; Barb Brady, Ward Four; Brian Holmes, Ward Five*

Administration: *Jim Forthofer, Mayor; Tony Valerius, Service Director; Chris Howard, City Engineer; Amy Hendricks, Finance Director; Chris Stempowski, Fire Chief*

Call to Order: Steve Holovacs, Chairman, RESOLVED THAT this Streets, Buildings, & Grounds Committee comprised of the committee of the whole does now come to order.

TOPIC ONE: Former Fire Station #1

T. Valerius said there has been discussion on what to do with the former fire station #1 now that the new fire station is basically done. He said they have discussed if the city should sell the building or retain it and he feels it should be converted to the Parks Department. Currently, the Parks Department is a pole barn with no heat, water, or restrooms. The old fire station would provide them with a heated area to work in. There are offices there and it would provide an area for the water trucks for the Vermilion in Bloom group to use. There is a water source and room for these trucks at the fire station. He thinks they have an opportunity and there is plenty of room for the tractor, trailer, and lawnmowers. The upstairs could be utilized by the Fireman's Social Club and for various meetings.

F. Loucka agreed as he thought it would be a great use of the building. M. Stark said she remembered when they started building the new station that Chief Stempowski still wanted to use this building for storage and he could afford the costs. Therefore, does he still have use for this building. Chief Stempowski said the fire department's stance has not change as originally when they talked about the new facility the plan was to vacate what was current station #3, which is at the Service Center, and they could give it to the Service Department to however they deemed it necessary. However, the plan was to maintain the former fire station.

B. Brady asked if the Parks Department has the funds to maintain the building. T. Valerius said he hasn't approached the parks department yet, but the utilities at the current location run about \$6,700 a year for gas and electric and the building has been maintained over the year and they recently put on a new roof, and the building was painted in 2012 and in 2009

a new HVAC system was installed throughout the entire building, and in 2009 the north wall was stabilized and there were some windows replaced, so overall he doesn't think maintaining the building would cost that much.

B. Holmes thought it would be great if the fire department felt they had no further use of the building, so it would give the Parks Department something to work out of that is workable. It is rough where they are currently, and it would give them an opportunity to give some longevity to the equipment because they would be able to work in a building that is heated, which is good for the equipment. It would give them the opportunity to winterize the equipment in a heated building, which they cannot do now. If the parks board can continue to pay the utilities, then they should investigate this.

T. Parker said they have not considered this, but they will look at it if it becomes an option.

Rodney Johnston of 776 Exchange Street said he lives next to the fire station and has been on the department for 43 years and when they talked about this issue back in November, Chief Stempowski said he was still interested in keeping the station. The organization within the fire department raises money to put back into the community and they use this building. He said before Council decides, he would hope they would talk to them and look at their power point presentation on things they planned for the building as far as a museum, meeting hall, and keeping it as a historical site for a fire station. He said over the last ten years with scholarships they have probably put close to \$75,000 back into the community. If they lose this, he is not sure people will come to the new \$4 million fire station to have breakfast. He would like Council to consider their proposal.

T. Valerius said certainly the Parks Department would be willing to accommodate their Pancake Breakfast as it would not take much to remove the vehicles out of the bays. R. Johnston said if they had the building, they would do more things to put money back into the community and he thinks them utilizing the building would be a better fit.

TOPIC TWO: Vermilion Community Pool

Mayor Forthofer said despite the current temperatures he thought it was time to start thinking about the decisions for the Vermilion Community Pool for this year. He said the pool survey informs them about the future decisions they may have to make regarding the pool, but it does not affect this year's decision on whether to open the pool or not. He said the purpose of the pool survey is to provide them the facts to determine the long-term decision. The survey was done by the Parks Department and Pool Subcommittee.

T. Parker presented a brief overview on the survey and in addition to the bulk data that was released, there were three focus groups conducted by an intern at BGSU, which has not been submitted to them at this point. He said they are looking at the long-term and they are not going to be able to get to that this spring, so in the meantime they are trying to open the pool this summer. It was closed last summer due to the COVID restrictions. He said assuming the heater and filters work after sitting for two years, and assuming COVID protocols permit them to open, and they can find adequate funding – they want to open it this summer. They do need to get on this because it could take a month to get things up and running. They have identified what they believe is the source of the water leak and have planned to address it this spring. They can probably open the pool for less than \$6,000 worth of repairs for this season. Through a combination of slightly reduced hours and outside fund raising, they hope to be able to do this. The expense of the pool over the last several years was probably low to mid-\$50,000 and \$16,000 was admissions and memberships and the rest had to be made up from either the general fund or the parks board. This year they are looking at reduced hours and better management and losing less water of a budget of \$40,000. Of that, they hope to raise a minimum of \$10,000 and preferably \$20,000 from donations and the community, and daily admissions. One way to save money is by fixing the leak. If you are losing a couple thousand gallons a day, they need to replace the water, heat, and treat it. The chemical usage is four times what the big pool in Amherst uses and the gas is higher than theirs. They feel by fixing these things they can reduce these expenses. They will continue working with Master candidates from Bowling Green who are helping them define two future options for the community to consider. People have indicated they should operate a pool, so they must take things into consideration on what they want to see in that pool and what it would take to make it serve more people, and how will they pay for it. This will take more time than what they have this spring, so they will continue to work on it, and they will try to keep the community better informed.

Mayor Forthofer said the survey will inform them as they continue to move forward. He said he would support Terry Parker as he thinks they should intend to open the pool this year. He asked the finance director not to include pool costs in the budget this year considering they are \$285,000 short in revenue from where they were last year. He suggested they commit to opening the pool in considering they receive funding support from the public. He said they need to be concerned about unforeseen structural problems with the pool which may reveal additional problems. He said the last item will depend on requirements put on them by the health department.

M. Stark thought it was a good plan in moving forward to open the pool as she fully supports a pool in the community. They live on the lake and it is

important they have a pool, so kids learn to swim. She said the Rotary Club offers free swim lessons and it is priceless to have a pool to provide a safe place to swim, since the lake is not always a safe place to swim.

Rodney Johnston said if they are looking for some place to raise funds, this is what the Social Club does. He advised T. Parker to get ahold of him.

H. Taft said he would love to see the pool open, but he thinks there is a financial issue. He thought they spent over \$40,000 two years ago of public money for a summer of 250 – 500 people – using it 2,500 times in total. This is a major investment in just a few folks, and he would hope the council would insist and the parks board would come up with a plan where perhaps there would be enough subscriptions to cover most of the operating costs, rather than a substantial minority of those folks. He said they need higher fees, and they should charge people the full rate who do not live in the city. He thought a pool would be great for the community, but not if it is just for the summer only. He thinks it needs to be a far better plan and he will urge for a better plan than what they have now.

T. Parker said to follow up, one of the things the master candidates are looking at is admission prices across the area in terms of other pools, and Vermilion is really in line. To change the equation, he thought they could offer something that will draw more people and serve more people, but they will know more when they get their work done by mid-April.

Mayor Forthofer agreed with H. Taft, but noted the people love the pool. He said when they held a fund raiser last time the vast majority who donated were people that never get wet or go to the pool, but there is a sentiment in the community that they have one. He thinks the survey falls in line with Mr. Taft's concerns and he feels they are in sync with what they need in the long term.

B. Holmes said the study that BGSU is working on is phenomenal as they are giving the city options for the future. With the studies, he said it should help the city get to those options so they can offer more. If they can get the pool open this summer, then he encourages all citizens to go to the pool, so they can build the future for the Parks Department and the pool, and bigger and better things.

TOPIC THREE: Urban Paving

C. Howard updated Council with regards to the bridge over the Vermilion River as it relates to the Urban Paving project. Over the last couple of years, the city has spent several thousand dollars to have a contractor replace the back wall of the westbound lane expansion joint on the bridge, which has

been a temporary fix. With the Urban Paving project, they asked ODOT to investigate the issue since the existing steel expansion joint is fully closed and is exhibiting stress. After ODOT's review, they have determined that a complete replacement of the deck and sidewalk expansion joint is required. They also determined that the east bridge joint needs to be replaced. To facilitate this, the bridge will require a full closure. ODOT would like to close the roadway at the conclusion of the tourist season. The city has requested that the work be done after the Woollybear Festival and they are estimating the closure would be a minimum of 45 days, weather depending. When the roadway is closed, ODOT is proposing to allow pedestrian traffic, except for short intermittent periods during construction. He said the cost of this work will be covered by ODOT.

S. Hologacs said he was involved when they shut down the bridge about 20 years ago, which basically shut the whole city off and it affected the businesses downtown. It is not easy to go from one side of town to the other because the access is across the bridge. If not, you are using Route 2 or you are going through Mill Hollow, so this is something they should be ready for because it will affect the entire city.

B. Holmes assumed that ODOT would set up the detour way ahead. C. Howard said they will.

M. Stark assumed the city would be in close contact with the school district concerning busing as it will affect the route times.

S. Hologacs adjourned the meeting after no further business came before the committee.

Next meeting: March 8, 2021 @ 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Gwen Fisher, Certified Municipal Clerk
