

Windsor Heights (Iowa) City Council Study Session Unabridged Minutes – December 15, 2007
Council Chambers, 1133 66th St.

Mayor Sullivan called meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. Council present: Diana Willits, Carole Tillotson, Steve Peterson, Flo Hunter and Donna Markley. City Administrator Marketa George Oliver also present.

Council Ethics Policy

Tillotson said she thought the proposed ethics document was too broad and it duplicates what is in the Iowa Code. She thinks the draft Ankeny Code of Conduct is much more concise. The proposed document, which was drafted on an Urbandale policy is much too broad and there is no way to enforce anything. If we handed this policy to our board and commission members, it might be difficult to get anyone to serve. We may not need anything at all because State law covers it.

Markley said the Ankeny one is much more to the point and the spirit of the document is much clearer. Peterson agreed. Willits said the desire is to create something visible that we can handed to someone who is coming on a board as a Council Member or as a member of a Board or Commission. It is true that some of it might duplicate what is in State law, but it is unlikely that those coming on board are going to read the Code of Iowa to find the parts that are pertinent. Hunter said it is good to have something to point to and identify what the expectations are. Tillotson said the Ankeny draft only addresses Council Members, but there was the consensus that it should include members of the Board of Adjustment and the Planning and Zoning Commission. Oliver noted that a document can be for the individual's protection, also. For example, during a recent issue in front of the Board of Adjustment, citizens were attempting to contact the Board Members directly, which is not allowed because they serve in a quasi-judicial capacity. A document that addressed such issues as appropriate communications would help the board member as well and would give them a clear guideline. Tillotson volunteered to rework the Ankeny document to include the Board of Adjustment and the Planning and Zoning Commission. Willits asked if Planning and Zoning Commission members could be sworn in at a council meeting. Oliver said yes, but it might be better to swear them in prior to the meeting and recognize them during the meeting or do a mass swearing in. Sullivan asked what consensus was on the issue. Peterson said since Tillotson volunteered to revise the Ankeny code, the Council should take her up on that and discuss it again when she has done that. Markley said it was good to have a document you can hand to people, rather than rely on the fact that the information is included in the Iowa Code. Tillotson will go through and use the Ankeny policy as a template and return to Council with another draft.

Other - Meeting Time

Sullivan said he would like to talk about meeting time, which would technically be under "other" on the agenda, but he would like to do it before Council Member-elect Butz had to leave. Tillotson said she has another meeting on Monday nights and 5:15 is the latest she could start. Hunter said several members of the public had mentioned to her that they would like the Council to meet later. Butz said 5:30 is good for her. Willits asked if 7:30 would work as it would possibly be after Tillotson's other meeting. Tillotson said she gives a lot to the City and as a Council Member should receive consideration over a few comments. Willits said a lot of people want the Council to meet later. Tillotson said she thinks 15 minutes helps a lot, because it gives people time to get off work and come to City Hall. Peterson noted that the Council used to meet at 4:00 p.m. Willits thinks a later meeting time will help with communication. Tillotson said 5:15 can work. Markley thinks it is short-sighted to do nothing. It is difficult for people who want to be involved, especially with both people working in many cases. Hunter said it is not just a few calls, she has had several. Willits asked if switching nights would be better. Hunter thinks it is a problem to switch nights, because of established meetings of other community organizations. There was consensus to change to a 5:15 meeting beginning in February.

Citizen Survey Results

Oliver provided detailed copies of the citizen surveys and comments. She said the numbers were extremely good. The number that dipped below 90% of people satisfied or better was in the area of communication. She said it was only 87%. Peterson said 87% was a good number. Oliver said that is true, but would like to focus on that area to improve that. She suggested a few things. First, the survey also indicated that 92% of the people responding said they regularly read the City's newsletter. It was possible to expand the newsletter without increasing postage, by adding an 8 ½ x 11 sized insert. The overall cost would be in printing and would be approximately \$2,000 annually. The insert could contain the Council meeting minutes. Tillotson said she did not favor expanding it, but simply improving what is there. There are notices in it monthly about sewer backups and one call. She suggested removing those in favor of other information. Oliver said those have to appear on a regular basis for legal purposes, but they did not necessarily have to be included each and every month. Willits said she had several people comment on the projects update in the most recent newsletter and think we should keep highlighting what the City is working on.

Oliver said that she attended the Chamber planning meeting the prior week, which involved representatives from the Foundation, the Neighborhood Association, the Lions Club and Keep Windsor Heights Beautiful. There is a desire to come together for a comprehensive city-wide strategy to coordinate special events and it would be a good idea to set the yearly calendar and print magnets with those dates and events on their and distribute them to all of the households. This way, people would have something on their refrigerator that would constantly remind them of what is going on in the community.

Another idea that Oliver had was what she calls a "Taking it to the Streets" program, whereby the Council closes a street and has a meeting on the street in each precinct at least one time per summer and then invites the neighbors to a block party. She thinks that this would be well-received and the City could have some great media attention to the idea. Markley thinks that is a great idea. Oliver said it would take some planning, but could be a great way of getting people involved in places where there has not been as much interest. Tillotson also likes the idea. Willits is in favor of doing this. There was consensus to pursue this idea.

Oliver said another comment on the survey was that people would like more notice about spring and brush waste clean ups. One option to consider would be to have an autodial phone message delivered to households. It would cost approximately .07 cents per household and would be an incredibly economical way of promoting the date and time for the clean up.

Sullivan asked if any of the Council Members had been called in the random survey. A few had been. Willits said she had declined to comment because she is on the Council. Hunter said she had not yet talked with anyone in the town homes who had been surveyed. Peterson asked if it was possible to know if anyone there was surveyed. Oliver said she could ask Iowa State that question. Willits asked if they can have the results broken out by precinct and a statistical synopsis of the comments provided and a comparison on similar questions from the most recent survey. Oliver will bring this information back to the City Council. Peterson asked when the next survey would be conducted. Oliver said it should be done annually or at least, biennially. She suggested doing it again next year and then biennially after that. Each election year, the City spends approximately \$3,000 on for the Council election. The costs were less this year because of low turnout. If the survey were done on the off years, it would keep operating costs fairly consistent from year to year, instead of having them spike a little in a year with both an election and a survey.

Financial Information

Bonding

Oliver said at the last study session, the Council wanted staff to look into doing a bond issue that would address the Hickman Road project, the shelter house and City Hall. Oliver presented information on three different bonding levels: \$8 million; \$7.5 million and \$6 million. She said that the City has a State-imposed, constitutional debt limit of 5% of the City's total valuation, which is referred to as the "Gross" debt limit. Additionally, the City has a self-imposed debt limit of 75% of that amount, which is referred to as the "effective" debt limit. The City's current gross debt limit is \$18,842,322 and the effective debt limit is \$14,131,742, of which approximately \$8 million is used. At the \$8 million or \$7.5 million level for a bond issue, the City would exceed its effective debt limit and would want to revise its financial policies prior to any such action, so as not to breach an internal (the effective) debt limit. However, while it is possible to issue debt in that amount under State law, Oliver does not recommend issuing debt over the City's effective limit. It is precisely because the City has conservative fiscal policies that the City has a good bond rating and has been financially successful. Oliver noted that any bond issue will have an effect on the City's debt service levy rate. She provided Council with information on the FY 08 general obligation tax levy rates of surrounding communities. The average is \$2.74 per thousand of taxable valuation. Windsor Heights' rate is \$.52 per thousand. If the City bonded to the effective debt limit (approximately a \$6 million issue), there would initially not be enough Tax Increment Finance dollars to rebate the bond. Therefore, for a short period of time, the City's G.O. debt levy would be an average of \$1.31 higher over the next five years.

Willits said it is so important to get these projects done and the Hickman project would add a great deal of value to the area. For the City to thrive moving forward, there needs to be a better balance of properties and the redevelopment needs to get done. Hunter agrees. Also, she noticed there were numerous comments on the survey about the shelter house and thinks that people really want to see the improvements made.

Oliver said she also wanted to ensure that the Council was aware that a bond issue of this magnitude could have an effect on the City's bond rating. It may also be necessary to have a face-to-face meeting with the bond raters to discuss the City's projects and the how they will impact and broaden the City's tax base. Tillotson said if the bond rating was adjusted, it simply meant the City might have to pay a little more in interest and was not too worried about it in the overall scheme of things. Peterson asked if future conduit bonds would be affected and Tillotson said no. There was consensus to direct staff to work towards issuing a bond to the City's effective debt limit.

Markley noted as the Council moves forward with the park project, to keep an eye on security for the new shelter house. Willits suggested checking to see if there is any money available for security. Oliver will check if the private security companies have foundations that give grant funds for such projects.

Water Rates

Oliver said at the most recent Public Works meeting, the Committee discussed a water capital plan. Staff recommends implementing a water capital plan similar to the street resurfacing plan, whereby improvements are made on a regular, scheduled annual or biennial basis and funding is allocated on a regular basis. Water improvements are recommended to be on a biennial basis because of the nature of the projects. Many areas in the city have seen frequent water main breaks, causing citizens to be without water for several hours. The water mains will be replaced in a strategic order so that the most critical infrastructure needs can be met first. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to generate approximately \$130,000 annually through the water rates. The City's current capital rate is \$.25 per thousand gallons of water and generates roughly \$30,000 to \$35,000. The current capital improvement rate has not generated enough revenue on an annual or biennial basis to undertake the capital projects that need to be constructed. The capital rate would need to go to \$1.00 per thousand gallons of water to generate the \$130,000 annually. For the average household who uses 7,000 to 7,500 gallons of water, this equates to an increase of approximately \$5.25 per month. Previously, the City would collect money into the capital fund, but it would take several years (5-10) for it to accumulate enough to undertake a major project. Peterson said the Committee looked at the number of breaks and the age of the pipe and thinks this has to be done to preserve the water infrastructure. There was consensus to put this on the January 7th agenda for action.

Stormwater Rates

Oliver said the Public Works meeting had also recently discussed stormwater needs and rates. Currently, there is an urgent need to dredge Walnut Creek near the Buffalo Road Bridge that goes into Wal-Mart. The cost of the project is \$75,000. The City also just finished a \$75,000 stormwater project and currently the stormwater fund owes the general fund approximately \$60,000 from that project. As part of the Missing Link Trail project, some stormwater drainage improvements were made. The drainage improvements were approximately \$75,000. The decision was made by the City Council to adjust stormwater utility rates to recoup the \$75,000 over a period of five years and that construction has been completed and a portion of the inter-fund debt paid. The current monthly residential rate is \$2.00 per month. Oliver provided a comparison of other stormwater utility rates in the area. Des Moines is \$6.43 and Clive, Waukee and West Des Moines are currently \$3.25 going to \$3.75 next year. Oliver also provided Council with information on the revenue that would be generated by different rate structures. Going to a \$3.00 residential rate and accompanying commercial rates would generate approximately \$30,000 in additional revenue. Going to a \$3.50 residential rate and accompanying commercial rates would generate nearly \$40,000 in additional revenue. Tillotson said she would like to also see the promotion of rain gardens to prevent erosion. There was consensus to put this on the January 7th agenda for action.

Adjournment

Sullivan thanked Markley for her service as a Council Member and as a volunteer over the past four years and adjourned the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Jerry Sullivan, Mayor

ATTEST:

Marketa George Oliver, City Administrator/Clerk