

JULY 20, 2020

The Common Council of the City of La Porte met in regular session in the Council Chambers on Monday July 20, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.

Pledge

Councilwoman West led the Pledge of Allegiance

Present: Feikes, Galloway, Cutler, Franke, Vincent, Brown, and West

Absent: None

Minutes

As each Council Member received an advance copy of the minutes from the previous meeting, Mayor Dermody asked for a motion to approve. Councilwoman Cutler moved to approve the minutes as presented; motion seconded by Councilwoman Feikes. The Mayor asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes. As there were none, the minutes were approved as submitted.

Councilman Galloway read the following statement:

“I realize now, as a City Councilman, I should keep my beliefs and personal feelings to myself while conducting City business. It was an embarrassment to you, Mayor, the Council, myself and the public. I am sorry.”

Mayor Dermody read the following statement:

“Before we begin, I would like to talk briefly about our last City Council meeting. Some things were said that are not at all reflective of our goals for the future of our City. La Porte is a welcoming community. We want people of all races, religions, and sexual orientations to feel welcome, safe, and happy here. On behalf of the entire City Council and City leadership team, I apologize. We clearly have more work to do and this has opened our eyes on some of the ways we can improve. Our entire City team will be taking diversity training. We also met with representatives from Out in La Porte and they shared even more ideas of what we can do in the future. We are grateful to these individuals who are willing to come and have an open discussion with us and we are humbled by their unwavering love of this City and their commitment to help it improve. Again, we’ve got work to do, but we are going to continue to do all we can to continue to make La Porte proud.”

Mayor Dermody asked City Attorney, Nick Otis to clarify the process of the Ethics Commission and what happens with any claims.

Petitions and Comments of Citizens

Larry Pinkerton of 1612 L Street discussed his concerns about the closure of Detroit Street and inquired if he was “just wasting his time” to which the Mayor responded that his voice continues to be heard and this matter has not yet been determined.

Jason Milo of 600 ½ Clay Street, Apartment B, spoke regarding the offensive and reprehensible words from Councilman Galloway at the previous City Council meeting. He expressed his disdain and embarrassment as a citizen of and from La Porte. Mr. Milo stated, “as a City and a community, we are bigger and better than those small-minded words.”

Donna Johnson, 1037 Indiana Avenue, asked “how do we go forward and protect our Police and how do we prepare for when the violence of a mob comes to La Porte?” Ms. Johnson wants to make sure the City is supportive of our Police Department.

Mayor Dermody responded to Ms. Johnson by stating that the City is not going to defund the Police. Policing in the future may look differently, but we support our Police.

Jane Swanson, no address given, discussed her concerns about the 2020 goals for the Police Department. She stated that the Police were looking to increase officers from 43 to 50-54. According to Ms. Swanson, the national average per 10,000 citizens is 15.9 officers and 20 personnel. She asked why the Police Department wanted to increase officers to 50-54 and where the funding is coming from.

Mayor Dermody responded with accurate information regarding the Police Department and noted that Police Officers are not equipped to be mental health professionals to many of the calls they receive. He would like to work on a partnership with community resources better suited to aid in these situations because the Police Department is not everything to everybody.

Standing Committee Reports

Airport Authority - Councilwoman Brown reported that the Airport will still be hosting the Flight Show the week of August 12th in La Porte County.

Park Board - Councilwoman Feikes reported that the Park Board met on July 15, 2020. Three bids came in and Larson-Danielson was the lowest bid for the Stone Lake Kayak Launch project. Their bid came in at \$123,995.65 which is \$40,000 over budget. Mark Schreiber spoke with Larson-Danielson and they are quite certain that they can stay within budget by some value engineering. The Park Department has a potential lease with the Maple City Bike Club for the old telephone building located at 1604 1st Street. The Bike Club will pay \$1 per year, plus utilities for the use of the building. The Healthcare Foundation of La Porte installed a water stop on the Chessie Trail. The Park Department agreed to do the maintenance on the stop which consists of turning the water on and off at the beginning and end of each Park season. Permission was given to enact an athletic fields policy. The policy states that there is no smoking or vaping allowed within fifty feet of the chain link fence at all ball fields and tennis courts.

Traffic Commission - Councilwoman Feikes reported that Traffic Commission will meet Tuesday, August 4, 2020 at 6:00 PM at the Police Station.

Planning Commission - Councilman Vincent reported that the Plan Commission meeting will be on Tuesday, August 11, 2020 at 6:00 PM in Council Chambers

Business Improvement District - Councilwoman Cutler reported that the Business Improvement District Board met for their first in-person meeting at City Hall on Monday, July 13, 2020. Tom Casey, Director of Community Development and Planning introduced himself and his assistant, Grace Roman, to the board. The board, in turn, brought Tom and Grace up to speed on the partnership between the City Planner’s office and the Business Improvement District Board. The next meeting will be Monday, August 10, 2020.

Urban Enterprise Association - Councilwoman Cutler reported the next meeting of the Urban Enterprise Association is scheduled for Wednesday, August 19, 2020. There was no meeting in July to report on.

School Board - Councilman Franke reported that although La Porte Community School Corporation does not have concrete solutions for the community as it relates to the new school year, they do have another School Board meeting on August 3, 2020. Until then, they have adopted a stop light system which will identify where our community is related to the COVID pandemic and how school will progress. Green is safe and in person classes will ensue; yellow identifies there has been some increase in COVID cases and to proceed with caution - school would be a hybrid of in school and virtual learning; red signifies that the physical schools will remain closed and all schooling will be done virtually. This continues to be a fluid situation and Councilman Franke wishes the School Board the best as they finalize a plan for our children.

Recognition of Life Saving Actions by Young La Porte Citizens

Jerry Fulton, Drake Gunn, Wes Cabrera and Tarik Jackson were invited to the front of Council Chambers by Mayor Dermody. Mayor asked Jerry Fulton to describe what happened the prior Sunday. Mr. Fulton explained that he and his friends were driving down I street and saw a garage that was on fire. They immediately stopped the car, ran up to the house, banged on the door until the homeowners answered and got them out of house while they called 911 and waited for the Fire Department. Mayor Dermody added that this was an older couple and had it not been for the heroic actions of these four gentlemen, this couple might not have made it out alive. City Attorney, Nick Otis noted that Jerry Fulton is in the Army, Drake Gunn is playing college basketball at Eastern Arizona, Tarik Jackson and Wes Cabrera recently moved back into the La Porte area.

Clerk-Treasurer, Courtney Parthun awarded each of the four gentleman a certificate and Councilwoman West gave each of the four gentleman a key to the City of La Porte thanking them for their heroic, life-saving actions, putting their own health and safety on the line to save the lives of other community members.

Introduction of a Resolution Declaring Fund 635, Bond Debt Service, Dormant and Transferred

Councilwoman Feikes moved to introduce a Resolution Declaring Fund 635, Bond Debt read for the first and only time in its entirety; motion seconded by Councilwoman Cutler and unanimously passed.

Clerk-Treasurer, Courtney Parthun reported that these dormant funds originated from the 2004 General Obligation Bond for Park renovations. It was paid in full in January 2017. These were property taxes received to pay the bond payments and after speaking with our financial advisors at Baker Tilly, we were advised that dormant fund, with the approval of City Council, may be declared dormant and can be transferred into the Rainy Day Fund.

Motion/Vote- Adopt Resolution R- 11-2020

Councilman Franke moved to adopt the Resolution as presented; motion seconded by Councilman Franke and unanimously carried.

RESOLUTION R-11-2020
RESOLUTION DECLARING FUND 635, BOND DEBT SERVICE, DORMANT AND TRANSFERRED

City Council Appointment of Ethics Officer

Councilman Franke made a motion to appoint Attorney Sarah Konieczny as the City's Ethics Officer.

Ms. Konieczny gave a written statement stating the following: "I am writing to express my interest in the position on the Ethics Committee. I am currently a La Porte County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney living in La Porte living at 1515 Michigan Avenue. Since moving back into the area, I've wanted to contribute more to the City I grew up in. I think this committee would be a perfect fit for me both personally and professionally. Personally, I want the citizens of La Porte to have the utmost respect and the actions and representations of our La Porte leaders and professionally, I have to make ethical decisions every day and make sure those around me are adhering to the ethical duties they are sworn to uphold. One of the most important aspects of being an attorney, if not the most important, is the ethical guidelines provided to us, which include independence, integrity, and honesty. Considering my background in law and my personal desire to see La Porte thrive, I believe I would be a great asset to this committee."

Motion seconded by Councilwoman Cutler and unanimously passed.

Other Business

Mayor Dermody announced that the Police Department has, on record, 39 calls to one rental home on Jefferson Avenue, highlighting the needs of the Police Department. All four officers on duty were at this one location the night before and one officer had to arm himself with an Automatic Weapon because of the threat that was reported. Mayor Dermody stated that Chief Brettin and the Police Department met with the La Porte County Drug Taskforce who reported that we do not have big drug dealers in our community. We have a major problem with small users that are dealing to keep their habit up. This results in rental homes turning into what is called "flop houses" that people are going into and using/dealing. We must continue to hold the high standard for our landlords.

Councilwoman West reported that there is a problem with feral cats in the areas of Cable and Cherry Streets causing damage. Councilwoman West is asking the public to notify her of any farms in need of farm cats to call her at (219)608-1849.

Adjourn

There being no further business, Councilwoman Feikes moved to adjourn; motion seconded by Councilwoman Cutler and unanimously carried.

Approved: _____
Thomas P. Dermody, Mayor

Attest: _____
Courtney Parthun, Clerk-Treasurer

Approved: August 17, 2020