

**CITY OF WILLIAMSTON
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
OCTOBER 24, 2005
MINUTES**

Mayor Zichi called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at 161 E. Grand River Ave., Williamston, Michigan. Mayor Zichi led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Zichi, Mayor Pro-Tem Hanna, Council Members Davis, DeForest, Monroe, O'Connell, VanAllsburg

Absent: none

Others: City Manager Hitchcock, Attorney Perrone, Executive Secretary Garnham, Community Development Director Alfredson

Visitors: Mike Barnes, Lorie Barnes, Terri Campbell, Diane Cratsley, Art Crawford, Dawn-Marie Joseph, Linda Mullen, John Pratt, Bill St. John, Melanie Schall, Roger Smeltepok, Barb Vandenberg, Jim Vandenberg, Aly Wendt, Diane Gorsline, JFM Productions

4. Approval of Agenda

Motion by **DeForest**, seconded by **Hanna**, to approve the agenda as submitted. Voice vote all Yes. **Motion carried.**

5. Audience Participation (non-agenda items)

John Pratt of 530 North Putnam stated that he disagreed with the proposed Charter Amendment regarding appointment and removal of administrative officers that is on the ballot for the November 8, 2005 election. Mr. Pratt stated that removing the option for a discharged employee to have a hearing before City Council was taking away an employee's rights and would impact employee morale.

Mayor Zichi stated that the issue was on the ballot for the voters to decide. Zichi stated that the hearing process affects the employee/employer relationship and can contribute to insubordination. He further stated that if the Council determines that the actions of the City Manager are inappropriate, then the Council can fire the Manager.

VanAllsburg stated that administrative officers are at-will employees. DeForest stated that the public hearing process was distasteful to the Council, and that in past instances the Manager had sought Council input before making that type of decision. He further stated that an at-will employee has recourse through the courts, such as a wrongful discharge suit.

Dawn-Marie Joseph, Chair of the Williamston Area Chamber of Commerce, announced the Chamber is holding a "Meet the Candidate" debate at 7:00 p.m. on October 25th at the McGoff Auditorium at Williamston High School.

Lorie Barnes of the Westside Deli stated that she had heard the City's EDC (Economic Development Corporation) was considering possible low-interest loans for small businesses. Mayor Zichi stated that both the EDC and DDA (Downtown Development Authority) had considered the idea, but had not determined how to make it work.

6. **Approval of Minutes – Regular Council Meeting of October 10, 2005**

Motion by **DeForest**, seconded by **Hanna**, to approve the minutes as presented. Voice vote all Yes. **Motion carried.**

7. **Accounts Payable**

Hanna reported that the accounts payable, reference numbers 5519-5601, total \$330,420.76 and include liability insurance, consultants, a payment on the City's portion of the Putnam Street Bridge project, street lights, and the DDA Streetscape Phase II. Mayor Zichi stated that the DDA Streetscape payment is the last one except for the retainage.

Motion by **Hanna**, seconded by **VanAllsburg**, to approve the accounts payable as presented. Yes: Davis, Monroe, VanAllsburg, Hanna, Zichi, DeForest, O'Connell. No: none. **Motion carried.**

8. **Action Items**

a. **Thursday Open Late Advertising Campaign**

Mayor Zichi stated in reference to his comments at the October 10, 2005 Council meeting that he did not want to give the impression that he did not support the proposal, that he felt it was appropriate for the City to support it, and that it is important to have a vital downtown district, both for the businesses and the residents.

Community Development Director Alison Alfredson submitted a summary of 15 examples of past opportunities for the businesses to partner with the City and/or the Chamber of Commerce to spend money on radio and TV advertising, as well as on the light parade. She presented mock ups of posters and postcards that would be used in the campaign. Alfredson stated that the campaign was intended to stimulate business during the holiday season, as well as into the winter months. Alfredson stated that the TV campaign would use the same sort of graphic impact as the posters/postcards; it would be a colorful, dynamic campaign and a unique concept. She further stated that it would encourage people who wouldn't normally come downtown to experience the downtown atmosphere, and would hopefully carry over to other activities.

Hanna stated that the money was not a grant to the businesses, but for advertisement to try to develop an atmosphere in the City. Davis asked Alfredson what the Chamber of Commerce's reaction was to the idea. Alfredson stated that the Chamber can only spend money on its members, and unless every business was a member they could not participate.

Dawn-Marie Joseph, Chair of the Williamston Area Chamber of Commerce, stated that 12 out of the 20 businesses participating were members, and they did not want the Chamber to spend money on this campaign.

Zichi stated that the campaign was comprised of three parts: posters, postcards, and the TV campaign for about \$1600 per month. DeForest asked why the money for the campaign would be coming out of the General Fund instead of the DDA. Zichi stated that not all of the participating businesses were in the DDA district.

O'Connell stated that he had spoken with Dawn-Marie Joseph and that she said the Chamber members had concerns. He further stated that he thought it ~~would~~ **should** benefit all downtown businesses.

Linda Mullen of Cappuccino Espresso stated that they had been Chamber members for the first eight years they were in business, but they had let their membership lapse this year due to financial reasons. Mullen stated that there had been construction in the City for four out of the last eight years and it had significantly impacted their business. Mullen further stated that the City of Chelsea had a similar campaign with different artists and it did draw more people to their downtown.

Barb Vandenberg of Williamston True Value Hardware stated that the business owners seek assistance wherever they can get it. Vandenberg stated that the construction had affected her business, and that the majority of the community does not shop downtown. She stated that a lot of previous specialty shops had closed down due to the construction.

Diane Cratsley of Old Plank Road Antiques stated that they are a two-person business and that they don't have a big advertising budget. She stated that she had heard many positive comments from customers on the streetscape and what a beautiful town Williamston is.

Aly Wendt of Bloom stated that she and her husband were new business owners and that they lived above the store. She stated that the downtown was on the verge of something exciting if only the business owners could get a little help.

VanAllsburg stated that there were really two issues: whether to support this particular advertising campaign, and whether it is appropriate for Council to spend money for this type of activity **in the future**.

Davis stated that it appeared as if the City was subsidizing businesses quite a bit, and that the businesses need to participate. She also stated that the Council should have more specific information on where the posters would be placed and how the postcards would be distributed.

Hanna stated that the road construction had brought all progress to a stop, and the businesses need help getting the ball rolling again. Monroe stated that in the past businesses had special events and giveaways to bring people downtown. Hanna stated that the Chamber was participating in a business expo in Lansing on January 18, 2006.

O'Connell thanked Alison Alfredson and Dawn-Marie Joseph for answering his questions regarding this issue. He asked for clarification on the source of the funds. Hitchcock stated that because the TIFAs (Tax Increment Financing Authorities) did not capture this year, there was approximately \$200,000 extra in the General Fund, about \$30,000 of which was designated for advertising and marketing.

Barb Vandenberg stated that the hardware store had seen an increase in business as a result of past advertising campaigns sponsored by the City. Linda Mullen stated that their business is dependent on locals and was greatly impacted by the construction.

Davis stated that the businesses and the City should work with the Chamber to develop a more comprehensive marketing plan for 2006. City Manager Hitchcock stated that she and Alfredson had already discussed formulating a comprehensive marketing plan for Fiscal Year 2006.

O'Connell stated that he had initial reservations about the advertising campaign, that he misunderstood that the money came from what would have been TIFA funds, and that he was supporting it because it was paid for by TIFA money.

DeForest stated that the issue of whether to continue to support advertising should be decided at the budget workshops next spring.

Melanie Schall stated that in the meeting two weeks ago it was stated that the money would come from TIFA funds. She also stated that in response to O'Connell's comments at the October 10, 2005 meeting, she had checked with three other area cities, including Charlotte and St. Johns, to see if they provided support to local businesses. Charlotte did provide funds for advertising, and St. Johns provided office space and support staff for their Chamber of Commerce.

Terri Campbell stated that she used to come downtown when there were a lot of specialty shops open, but got out of the habit due to the construction. She further stated that she was thrilled that Cappuccino Espresso would be open until 9 p.m. on Thursdays.

Art Crawford stated that as a resident he would love to have a vibrant downtown.

Motion by **Davis**, seconded by **Hanna**, to approve the proposed Thursday Open Late advertising campaign for three months and to request a report from Alison Alfredson at the next Council meeting to include information on placement of the posters and postcards. Yes: VanAllsburg, Hanna, Zichi, DeForest, O'Connell, Davis, Monroe. No: none. **Motion carried.**

b. Amendment to Engineering Contract for Putnam Street Bridge

City Manager Hitchcock stated that Capital Consultants / DesignWorks A|E (Capital) had submitted a proposed amendment to the time and materials contract for engineering oversight of the Putnam Street Bridge construction. She explained that Verizon Telephone had held up the start of construction due to a delay in relocating their utility lines, resulting in an extension of the construction project into spring of 2006 for final paving and restoration.

Monroe asked if the City was going to pursue restitution from Verizon for the additional cost. Hitchcock stated that the City could not send a bill to Verizon until the invoice has been paid by the City.

Motion by **DeForest**, seconded by **Hanna**, to approve the amendment to Capital's contract for the Putnam Street Bridge construction oversight for an additional amount of \$12,300 for a total cost not to exceed \$204,700. Yes: Davis, Monroe, VanAllsburg, Hanna, Zichi, DeForest, O'Connell. No: none. **Motion carried.**

9. Discussion Items

a. Zoning Map

City Manager Hitchcock stated that Lynn Wilson, the Planning and Development Administrator, had had the Planning Commission and City department heads review the updated zoning map for accuracy.

Mayor Zichi stated that it would be great to have an accurate zoning map on the City's website. Hanna asked about the "wellhead park" and the designation for public land. Hitchcock stated that the Planning Commission was looking into how the zoning ordinance was written in regard to this matter.

O'Connell asked if the zoning map was needed to start the master plan. Hitchcock stated that the master plan process would take about one year and the zoning map could then be revised as a result of the master plan.

10. Correspondence Received / Information Only

g. Potter Park Zoo Correspondence

Mayor Zichi announced that Williamston Day at the Potter Park Zoo would be Sunday, December 4th, the day after the Light Parade.

a. Chamber of Commerce Correspondence

Hanna stated that the High School Choir would be performing at the Chamber lunch on December 15th.

c. Williamston Community Library Foundation Minutes

VanAllsburg asked for an update on the Community Center in regard to relocating the library, as well as the City's chances of purchasing the building. City Manager Hitchcock stated that the City had received the bid package in the mail today, but that she had still not received the minutes from the School Board meeting. Mayor Zichi stated that the sale was for the building and three separate parcels.

11. Staff Reports

a. City Manager

City Manager Hitchcock submitted a written report. She encouraged members of the audience to use the sign in sheet. Hitchcock referred to the timeline and documents regarding the proposed Wells Drive construction presented to the Council at the table, and thanked Melanie Schall for providing copies of documents that the City Staff had been unable to locate. She also encouraged everyone to vote on November 8th.

b. City Attorney

Nothing to report in open session.

c. Police Chief

No report.

d. Community Development Director

Alison Alfredson submitted a written report.

e. WWTP Reports

Mayor Zichi requested that rainfall data be added to future wastewater reports.

12. Committee / Sub-Committee Reports

a. Legislative Director

DeForest stated that he had attended a TIEA Committee meeting. He referred to HB 44617 regarding the MDEQ dioxin standard, and his concerns about regulations that are arbitrary.

e. Downtown Development Authority Minutes October 18, 2005

Mayor Zichi talked about the ongoing façade improvement program and the goal of bringing the Victorian character back to the downtown. Zichi also stated that the DDA continues to work with Wild Ones on getting lower-maintenance indigenous plants to grow on the island in the Red Cedar River.

13. Audience Participation (non-agenda items)

There was no public comment.

14. Council Member Comments

Monroe – stated that he had attended a Cemetery Board meeting and had suggested using the proceeds from the sale of plots to acquire more land for the cemetery.

Davis – reminded everyone to change their furnace filters, change their smoke detector batteries and clean the lint out of their dryers.

DeForest – stated that he was glad people had read the article regarding the Charter Amendments on the November 8th ballot. He also stated that someone needs to take over as champion for sidewalks after he leaves Council.

Hanna – gave condolences to Charles Galbreath of NIESA on the death of his mother-in-law; stated that Lea Estes would be the Grand Marshall for this year's Light Parade; stated that three new service businesses will be moving in to Keller's Plaza.

O'Connell – appreciates the information on the road connection and thanked Alison Alfredson and the business community for coming to the meeting to support the advertising campaign.

VanAllsburg – announced that the Williamston Arts League will be having its annual La Dolce Vita event and auction at 7:00 p.m. on December 1st at Cappuccino Espresso and Poynter Phelps Photography (spaces connected), tickets are \$20 each or \$35 per couple.

Zichi – announced the public hearings for the road connection on October 26th and November 1st at 7:00 p.m. at the Middle School Commons, and asked City Manager Hitchcock to make sure the information the Council had received was available for public review at City Hall and the library.

15. Closed Session – Union Negotiations with Fraternal Order of Police

Motion by **DeForest**, seconded by **Hanna**, to go into closed session for union negotiations with the Fraternal Order of Police. Yes: Zichi, DeForest, O'Connell, Davis, Monroe, VanAllsburg, Hanna. No: none. **Motion carried.**

Closed session started at 8:42 p.m.

Motion by **DeForest**, seconded by **Hanna**, to return to Open Session. Voice vote all Yes. **Motion carried.**

Returned to Open Session at 8:53 p.m.

Action on Closed Session: no action was taken on Closed Session.

16. Adjourn to the Call of the Chair

Motion by **DeForest**, seconded by **Hanna**, to adjourn. Mayor Zichi called for opposition to adjournment. Hearing none, Mayor Zichi called for adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Catherine Garnham, Executive Secretary

Kenneth V. Zichi, Mayor

Date approved: _____