

City of Decorah Community Betterment Committee Meeting

Monday, August 5th, 2019 – *Immediately following the regular city council meeting.*

The City of Decorah Community Betterment Committee met on Monday, August 5, 2019 at approximately 6:50pm, immediately following the regular city council meeting.

Chairman Johanna Bergan called the meeting to order and the following answered roll: Ross Hadley, Steve Luse, and Randy Schissel. Mayor Lorraine Borowski, Andy Carlson, Kirk Johnson, and Emily Neal were also in attendance. Others in attendance: City Manager Chad Bird.

Agenda

Discussion regarding city flag policy

Bergan opened the meeting by reviewing the city's current flag policy. Schissel offered that he would like to see only the US flags flown and that they should be flown year-round, maybe on a center mount and other flags could be flown on either side. Then he also recommended the only other flags to fly should be Decorah Community Schools, Luther College, and flags of other countries, such as Nordic countries.

Luse offered some changes to the section five definition of "Community Oriented Flags" currently in the policy. He wondered if "city group, board, or commission" could be added saying if a city board endorsed a flag, that would warrant permission to fly the flag.

Hadley offered that the current divisiveness of the flag issue may not make it worth the hassles. Bergan responded that she had been doing some research on this issue and shared some other cities' examples, such as having the city council initiate hoisting flags rather than user or civic groups.

Neal added the city should develop a value statement and this might help guide the issue. She also thought there was some merit to only US flags on light poles.

Bird shared the political definition and some thought this should be refined and adopted by the council.

County resident Tom Hansen spoke of the First Amendment issues. Schissel reiterated his position that only the four basic flags should be flown.

Jeremy Jostand stated the United Way campaign did not want to be engaged in this issue, this year and was seeking an alternative for their flag in September.

Melissa Koch spoke, representing the Decorah Human Rights Commission, and thanked the council for their work and echoed the city needs a value statement.

There were many general comments supporting the flag policy, with some critics of the current policy and some supporters.

Johnson stated the pride event and the pride flag is now an issue of a national celebration of civil rights.

There was some discussion about developing a value statement for the city.

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Discussion regarding residential tax abatement program

Bird noted there are several real estate development professionals recommending changing the time line, so the implementation and expiration of the program more closely aligns with the construction season.

Brian Huinker lead the discussion with several contractors and developers engaging.

The council looked favorably on the idea and agreed to have Bird explore changing the dates of the program with an approximately 18-month window of authorization.

An example might be a July 2019 through December 2020 approval and authorization.

There was no other business and the meeting adjourned at 8:10pm.

Respectfully submitted,

