

December 7, 2020

The regular meeting of the Decorah City Council was called to order by Mayor Borowski at 5:45 p.m.

The meeting was held in the Council Chambers and electronically for those that meeting in person was impossible or impractical due to COVID19 regulations.

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members present: Emily Neal, Ross Hadley, Kirk Johnson, Andy Carlson, Steve Luse, Randy Schissel, Steven Zittergruen.

Motion by Hadley, second by Carlson, to approve the consent agenda as presented.

- a. Minutes of the November 16, 2020 regular meeting
- b. Claims
- c. Resolution 3138 extending the 35 MPH speed limit on Locust Road from Pine Crest Drive to City limits
- d. Resolution 3139 to install a "No Parking Corner to Here" sign near the intersection of Broadway Street and Oak Street
- e. Resolution 3140 setting a public hearing on zoning code amendments, Chapter 17 – Zoning; related to storage containers in the City of Decorah; *January 4, 2021 at 5:45pm*
- f. Resolution 3141 setting a public hearing on zoning code amendments, Chapter 17.68; 17.72; 17.76 – Zoning code; residential definitions, dwellings, room houses, boarding houses in the City of Decorah; *January 4, 2021 at 5:45pm*
- g. Resolution 3142 setting a public hearing on zoning code amendments, Chapter 17.140 – Floodplain Management Ordinance 17.120 – F-1 Floodplain District in the City of Decorah; *January 4, 2021 at 5:45pm*
- h. Resolution 3143 approving the negotiation and acquisition of permanent sidewalk and utility easements from property owners for the 2020 Quarry Street and Utility Improvement Project

Roll call vote. All voting aye. Motion carried.

Motion by Luse, second by Johnson, to approve Resolution 3144 fixing value of lots to be assessed and adopting the preliminary plat, assessment schedule, plans and cost estimate for the Bruening Sidewalk Improvement Project. Roll call vote. Voting aye: Luse, Johnson, Schissel, Neal, Zittergruen, Hadley. Voting nay: Carlson. Motion carried.

Appointment of a municipal electric utility task force was opened for discussion. Mayor Borowski announced she had intended this to be discussion only as the city council has not had the opportunity to fully discuss the task force guidelines, objectives or membership considerations. Her desire was to engage in full discussion at a work session December 28.

She noted 2 council members requested it be an action item, which is allowed under the Council Rules of Procedure. Given it has the potential for action, she will allow public comment.

She reminded the council and public that City Boards and Commissions play significant roles in city government. Their reports and recommendations can be very useful in establishing policies, resolving problems and helping provide effective city government. They are required to follow open meeting laws, open communication, public input and transparency. The future of a potential municipal electric utility is key for citizens. As such, it is prudent for the council to receive the sustainability commission's report and recommendations, review, discuss and establish guidelines for the Task Force. It is important to seat a task force which broadly represents the citizens served. She believes any action should be conducted after the special Ward 5 election. She doesn't feel there is any immediacy needed for action at this time.

Kent Klocke, 702 Decorah Ave., stated it seems the one mission of the task force is to establish a MEU in Decorah. Wonders how the work will be done and who will be funding the effort. Believes the one and only thing in councils' mind is to get rid of Alliant Energy in our community. He doesn't feel tax payers should pay for more studies when it was voted down. He noted council complains about Alliant raising their rates but then added increased taxes making it look worse. He felt it was interesting timing having this vote before the special election.

Attorney Anderson advised Councilperson Zittergruen has been legally appointed.

City Manager Bird read letters from Jody Niess and Steve Knipe into the record.

Ms Niess stated she didn't understand why the Sustainability Commission's only agenda is an MEU. People named to the task force have definite ties to either Luther or the Winneshiek Energy District. Stated Luther isn't the only entity being affected by this. There is an entire community out there. Believes almost every person on the list is for an MEU – it seems like a total waste of time when it's a given what the outcome will be. Believes it won't be based on fact but on the biased opinion of a special interest group. Open meetings and public input is what is called for. Not the meetings before the meeting – it's against the law. We need leaders that will look honestly at the information and make decisions based on truth.

Mr Knipe said he had attended every meeting of the Sustainability Commission and was surprised at the last Special Session meeting that the task force was announced. It seemed many Commission members had no idea who was on the Task Force until it was put on the ZOOM screen. 4 members are not on any published list and no meeting minutes reflect this. He called 18 people on the original lists that are highly qualified local business leaders and not one had received a phone call or any communications. Stated the task force cannot be one sided. Believes the new Sustainability Commission has gotten off to a rocky start with these definite questionable practices. He implored the Mayor to fix this.

Councilperson Neal reviewed the timeline leading to this action. The recommendation came from the Sustainability Commission and the Sustainability Plan called for a task force. Since the initial vote for municipalization numerous things of come to light and noted the prior study was funded by a non-profit, local group.

Discussion was held regarding residency. It was noted proposed members follow Alliant territory. They wanted a broad base with the membership including those familiar with MEU's and those not.

Mayor Borowski noted she saw 3 original lists that were publicly discussed. At least 5 names on the list were not publicly discussed. She is concerned with the number outside city limits.

Councilperson Neal stated numerous people were contacted but declined and that Jim Martin-Schramm could explain where the names came from.

Councilperson Hadley agrees it is a divisive issue. Believes the council approved the Sustainability Commission, who was tasked with appointing a task force to study the issue. It is an advisory group to a commission council approved.

Councilperson Johnson stated he knows all but one. Believes they are all tremendous folks, has worked with some and they are ultimately qualified to advised on the matter.

Councilperson Carlson wondered if we are looking for people who are in favor and wondered if all the proposed members are served by Alliant. He noted 1 doesn't live in or near Decorah.

Councilperson Luse is supportive of the proposed members.

Councilperson Zittergruen was on the fence for the prior vote but subsequently believes we should have a task force that moves us toward another vote.

Councilperson Schissel expressed concern that proposed names were not on a prior list and believes members should be city residents. No one saw most of these names prior to tonight. He is concerned about the super majority needed to pass a bond issue. This has the potential to cost a lot of money. Task force members should have a financial stake.

Councilperson Neal stated we have to be able to have a discussion regarding all concerns. Meetings should be held with all different groups to find out what all people think. Proposed task force has all different skills.

She doesn't believe this has happened in a short period of time and this was not a giant secret list. Believes it is disrespectful to the commission charged with this.

Councilperson Zittergruen asked what efforts were made to ensure there was a balance of diverse perspective.

Jim Martin-Schramm spoke of how the commission was chosen. He stated they didn't want those known to be opposed. They didn't want objectionists as members. They were concerned with age, gender and employment diversity.

Motion by Hadley, second by Luse, to approve the recommended task force as submitted. Roll call vote. Voting aye: Hadley, Luse, Heal, Zittergruen, Johnson, Carlson. Voting nay: Schissel. Motion carried.

Councilperson Neal requested appointment of a Council Liaison, to the task force, be placed on the next agenda.

Motion by Schissel, second by Carlson to approve and certify the following 2020 residential tax abatement applications:

- a. Ridgewood Real Estate, LLC, 504 and 506 Valley Dr. multi-family completed August 1, 2020

Roll call vote. All voting aye. Motion carried.

Motion by Schissel, second by Johnson, to approve the Mayor re-appointment of Sue Sander to the Board of Adjustment. Roll call vote. All voting aye. Motion carried.

Motion by Luse, second by Neal, to approve the Mayor appointment of Rowan Collins to the Human Rights Commission. Roll call vote. All voting aye. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned on motion.



Wanda Hemesath, MMC  
City Clerk, Tr.