

LOWELL TOWN COUNCIL
WORK SESSION
SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

A Work Session of the Lowell Town Council was called to order on Monday, September 26, 2022, at 5:30 P.M., by President Todd Angerman. Members present were John Alessia, Todd Angerman, Mike Gruszka, and John Yelkich. Councilman Shane Tucker arrived at 6:10 P.M. Also present were Clerk-Treasurer Judith Walters, Town Manager Craig Hendrix, Town Attorney David Westland, GIS Director Greg White, and Police Chief Jim Woestman. Also present were Fire Chief Chris Gamblin and Fire Inspector Matt VanDrunen, and Bryan Schuch from SEH. The purpose of the work session was general town business.

2023 Proposed Budget - Clerk-Treasurer Judy Walters presented a proposed 2023 budget which included a 5% salary increase and possibly longevity increase, a fulltime police officer, increase to fire contract of \$20,000 for part-time firefighters for day shifts, and full time Park Director. Other line items were increased per usage such as insurance, electric, supplies and maintenance costs. The total operating budget for levied tax funds will be advertised at \$6,879,704. All other funds were advertised based on cash on hand and proposed funds for 2023. The proposed budget will be advertised on Gateway and a public hearing will be held at the October 10th regular meeting.

Pet Store Model Ordinance - A council member had been approached about the town enacting an ordinance to control puppy mills in town to prevent inhumane breeding conditions. An example of an ordinance from the town of Munster had been received for Council review to consider for Lowell.

Agreement with Lake County Animal Control - Police Chief Jim Woestman spoke of a problem that had occurred in town where an individual had died and left some cats and had no next of kin to take them, and without an animal control contract they had to feed the cats until they could get a rescue shelter to come and get the cats. He stated most shelters he called were full. Discussion followed on the need for animal control in Lowell. Chief Woestman said normally someone takes an abandoned animal or they just wander and if they are vicious they shoot them. The agreement with Lake County Sheriff Department had expired and the new contract proposed would charge \$50/daily for stray animal plus any costs incurred if they sent the animal to a veterinary as opposed to the old contract where veterinary bills were capped at \$150. Town Manager Craig Hendrix will reach out to surrounding communities to see if we could share in the cost of their animal control centers.

Bianchi closing/Garden Center - The closing of the Bianchi property the town bought at 108 N. Clark Street was held today and they have 30 days to move out. Mr. Hendrix brought up the old garden center and stated the owners do not want to sell the building that is in a floodway and are trying to get a plumbing permit. As discussed in the past, Mr. Hendrix feels the town should take the property by eminent domain so the south parking lot can be expanded. The property has been appraised and the Town had offered a fair price to the owners of \$70,000 but they countered with \$300,000. Mr. Hendrix said as long as they are not making any structural changes the DNR would give them a permit to put sewer in since they were on septic. Discussion followed. Mr. Hendrix stated the town owns the building next to it and would like to see the parking lot expanded with possible dumpster enclosures for the businesses. Councilman Alessia asked if they could convince a court that the property is worth \$300,000. Mr. Hendrix stated the Town had three appraisals done and even the property owner had an appraisal of \$83,000. Councilman Gruszka said he was in favor of using eminent domain. Council members will make a decision if they want to move forward on the property at the next meeting. It was noted that no one knows what type of business is going into the building. The Superior building is also in the floodway but it is only being used for storage.

Park tree trimming - Mr. Hendrix had contacted Edmonds, Spalding Tree Service in Kouts, and Tree Man from LaPorte, which are similar contractors that maintain and inspect their equipment and still only received the one quote from Edmonds in the amount of \$34,000 for Evergreen Park and \$7500 for Reservation Park. He stated he plans to negotiate the price down with Edmonds by having the town crews haul away the stumps and chip the debris. Mr. Hendrix also spoke of the guard rails and electrical cabinets that were blasted and painted in Evergreen, and the restoration work that will be done from the parking lot resurfacing, and the new sign that will be installed by the end of October. A discussion followed on blasting and painting the downtown street lights that are in bad shape. The plan would be to remove a couple street poles at a time and have them repainted and have the electric changed to LED. It was agreed to solicit three quotes. Councilman Gruszka asked if we had heard anything back from the White Foundation on the grant requested for Liberty Park. Mr. Hendrix stated he had met with Bill Hanna and provided information and has had no response. He stated it will need to be decided soon if we are bidding out the Liberty Park Project in phases or as one project.

Declaratory Amendments for RDC - Bryan Schuch, SEH - had prepared two Resolutions that will be acted on during the Redevelopment Commission meeting that will remove parcels from the allocation area due to their large decrement and then be added back into the allocation area to reset the base assessed value of the parcels to generate the most tax increment possible. Mr. Schuch said the resolution amending the Declaratory resolution will prune/remove twenty-six parcels, removing two parcels that are owned by the school and are tax exempt. The second resolution would then add back in the twenty-four parcels including the Trilogy parcel, a lot next to Speedway and the parcel on Mohawk the town recently sold to Austgen. The parcels have a decrement assessed value of \$3,401,020 and the decrement produces a loss of \$102,000 in tax increment. Mr. Schuch said it is suggested to prune the allocation area every five-seven years to increase the TIF base where development will occur. A public hearing will be held through the Plan Commission and adoption by the Town Council. Mr. Schuch also noted that the town assessed value had increased and may have fluctuated because Aunt Millie's did not file their tax abatement and they may ask for a waiver.


Lowell EMA Program - Matt VanDrunen, Lowell Fire Department - presented a plan to establish a Emergency Management Agency to include volunteers and an EMA Director to take on the duties to include the maintenance of the warning sirens as well as keep up to date the emergency operation plan for the Town. He has spoken with the Police Chief, Fire Chief and Town Manager and would like the program to mirror programs that Crown Point has as well as similar programs in Cedar Lake, Hammond, Griffith and Highland. The volunteers would assist the police/fire and public works if needed during an emergency and/or disaster. He presented a draft of an ordinance that could be adopted for emergency management in Lowell. He suggested the agency become a 5013C so it could fundraise for funds to operate. Councilman Tucker stated he fully supports the program and asked what the costs would be to get the program started. Mr. VanDrunen stated he currently has five volunteers interested and there would be a cost to outfit them with uniforms and radios, and they would be interested in using the old patrol cars for their use. He also suggested the volunteers could also serve as code enforcement officers. Discussion followed on possible storing of equipment at the old distribution plant on Liberty Street and that Mr. VanDrunen would be interested in the Director's position. Both the Police Chief and Fire Chief were in support of the group and the extra help they would provide. Fire Chief Chris Gamblin said the fire department would be able to loan radios and would include the EMA in any grants they apply for. Council will review the proposed ordinance and discuss further at a future work session.

Water Proceeds Investment Status - The decision on which bank to invest the proceeds of the water sale is on the agenda tonight to act on after the committee had narrowed the selection to Centier, Peoples Bank, and Wells Fargo. Discussion had

been held at previous work sessions. Councilman Tucker, Councilman Alessia and President Angerman were all comfortable with Peoples Bank and Wells Fargo. Councilman Yelkich preferred Centier and Peoples Bank but not Wells Fargo. Councilman Gruszka would only vote for Wells Fargo. Councilman Yelkich stated he felt the cost of doing business with a local bank is less expensive and would be considered in any future bonding. President Angerman said time is of the essence because the price of stock is low right now, and the Council still needs to decide how much to invest and how much to withdraw of the interest annually. Councilman Tucker said that Peoples Bank will have a local representative, but liked the layout presented by Wells Fargo and could vote either way. Councilman Alessia stated he felt the 14 million would mean more as an investment to Peoples Bank than Wells Fargo. President Angerman said when this venture was first started the investment from Wells Fargo looks almost identical of what we were projecting., but he would be okay with either Wells Fargo or Peoples Bank.

No further discussion, the work session adjourned at 6:40 P.M.

Attest:


Judith Walters, Clerk-Treasurer


Todd Angerman, President