

Osakis City Council – Special Meeting
March 4, 2021
7:00 PM

Present: Dan Wessel, Tim Thornbloom, Alan Larson, Laura Backes

Absent: Randy Anderson

Others Present: Ila Anderson, Brenda Majerus, Hattie Thorson, Shannon Graft, Ashley Nathe, Lynnette Swenstad, Jeff Lund, Kyle Kostrzewski, Allan Stoll, Chad Zimmer, Mark Pomerleau, Travis Middendorff, Craig Dropik, Jason Schultz, Adam Trisco, Brian Ferris, Cole Johnson, Kyle Swenstad, Eric Zwilling, Chad Gulbranson, Derek Lang, Jason Mounsdon, Angela Jacobson, Eric Jacobson, Greg Gottwald, Reenie Goodwin, Calvin Uhl, Dale Niehaus

The March 21st, 2021 meeting was called to order by Mayor Dan Wessel at 7:00 p.m.

Roll Call was taken.

Motion by Backes, seconded by Thornbloom, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion Carries
Absent: Anderson

Project #373: Policies

Mayor Wessel spoke – There is a lot of animosity with city employees and others. Alan Larson has been working on a personnel policy on his own and the policy includes what things actually mean. We need to work together to get issues resolved. Getting things out in the open will help resolve them.

Larson – The city policy is old and has needed to be updated for a long time. The city had a very small employee base before, but now we have more people and the policy will work to resolve conflicts in the workplace and a means to be able to work together to do the job.

Larson commented that this is not set in stone. We want input to make changes and make this process much more transparent.

Backes – The rest of the council got it. City employees are expected to follow it – City Council also should follow these policies.

Larson said it is not a problem to include the council to review and follow.

Backes – Things need to be in writing to explain the protection for employees now and in the future. We hope to never deal with these items. The policy is a lot of common sense.

Mayor Wessel commented that we should conduct ourselves in a manner as expected by your position. We are in a fight for the same thing. We don't want to say "what are those yahoos doing, if they are not going to help us, we don't want them." - That is not the thing we want said about us or talked about us. If you conduct yourself in this manner, then we don't need you in the city.

Calvin Uhl requested that the council also follow the policy. First Responders and Fire Department respond to the council to request language changes and all can submit suggestions to the council.

Discussion was held as to what an employee is defined as – One who receives benefits or stipends on a regular basis is defined as an employee.

Mark Pomerleau spoke – You say there is animosity between all departments. Asked why and what is it for. Pomerleau didn't know of any issues.

It was not meant to say just the Fire Department and First Responders.

Backes – Somethings are personnel issues and they have been discussed at closed meetings in the past. Need to honor that process – we don't share and can't talk about items from a closed meeting at a public meeting.

Mayor Wessel commented on an issue about a meeting at the fire hall – The Fire Department has a room in the fire hall and the Police Department used that room but did not discuss it with the Fire Chief. The next morning it was talked about at the gas station. Said they pissed off the Mayor and Fire Chief. Mayor Wessel said he called about it and found out where it came from and it took 2 to 3 days to squash that gossip. You are respectable adults acting like 3rd graders.

Mayor Wessel said the solution is communication. The room was needed then because the heat was out at the Visitor's Center. Do not want people from the city calling me asking why the city guys are fighting. Let's get back to a normal way of life. We are a small town and people do gossip. Turn this into a good thing.

Dropik said he wouldn't have known but a supplier had stopped by the fire hall to drop off thousands of dollars of items. Dropik had no communication from the police.

Dropik said he didn't go talk to Backes because she was on vacation and didn't talk to her until she was back.

The discussion of the policy is not to have a fight about it, this is to get input. The policy will need to be reviewed by the city attorney.

Dropik said he is not against it but does it apply to everybody. A lot that applies to full-time employees. Volunteers are not full-time. Do they need to follow? The evaluation piece can be a lot.

Larson stated that it doesn't need to be negative – can be a positive evaluation.

Brenda Majerus commented – Volunteers have full time jobs. Evaluations for full-time employees, people would be better. We could do letters of recommendations if volunteers are moving on and want information on their performance.

Any department – positive or negative feedback – leaders need to give feedback.

Dropik said they were not given a policy in the past. The policy is going from 4 pages to 18 pages. It's like small town to Minneapolis.

It was suggested that the departments could do the evaluations as a group and not single out anyone. May not feel worthy if they are singled out.

Jason Schultz wanted clarification that the policy doesn't supersede the bylaws or union contracts.

It was stated that it does not – this is a respect policy.

We have had issues going on for 6 years and we want to have something in place. Whatever happened in the past is in the past. Start on a clean slate – ready to throw it out starting from the policy adoption.

Mayor Wessel commented – We appreciate what the Fire Department, First Responders and Public Works do. You are called out at 2 a.m. to come and take care of an issue or accident or water main breaks – we know it is not easy.

Backes – The First Responders and Fire Department feel the paid employees should have more parts of the policy, we can sit down and see what makes sense for volunteers. Schultz and Dropik feel a lot in the policy doesn't pertain to volunteers. Could discuss a separate policy for volunteers to full-time and part-time employees that represent the city and want to see that these policies are followed.

Anybody representing the city should act in a respectable way. If you act in a way not fitting for the job, you will be talked to.

Kyle Kostrzewski commented – an at will employee could be terminated without notice or cause seems a little harsh, and the last paragraph comment (to change as we see fit) and (change as you want) seems a little overboard.

The departments are asked to review and give comments regarding the feedback on what they like and don't like.

Larson said this is a living document that has to pertain to now and the future.

Kostrzewski suggested to add a section in the policy for social media. Social media is not a spot for venting and grievances and there should be a policy for that.

Larson commented his concerns about social media is that you can say something one way to someone and it turns into an issue because of how they feel.

Each department will review the policy and give suggestions on what concerns they have.

Project #373: Policy / Expense Account

Discussion was held regarding what departments can do for dining out for training events and city clothing.

The council wants to explore and look into the legality of allowing some type of expense for these items.

Project #403: City Clothing

Mayor Wessel showed a shirt that would be offered to city employees and volunteers. This item could be worn to events that you go to representing the city.

The color discussed would be a blue with the new city logo. Cost for each shirt is \$42.00. The shirts would be promoting the city. Cost could be half by the city and half by the employee or the employee pay all.

Thornbloom suggested that if someone wants one, the city can pay.

Backs feels splitting the costs would be good – that way they also pay for it.

Polo shirts or short sleeves for summer were asked about.

We will do one style for now, maybe we can do more in the future.

The consensus was to split the cost of the shirt if the employee wants one for \$21.00.

Project #175: Off-Sale License

Mayor Wessel commented that Steve Wright is interested in purchasing the gas station currently owned by Chris Stoetzel. Wright wants a convenience store and an off-sale liquor license.

Comment was made that Brothers Market wanted an off-sale liquor license a number of years ago and the council did not go along with it then. Mayor Wessel doesn't think it is a good idea now either.

Reenie Goodwin said that off-sale and on-sale are making money. If the off-sale goes, we don't get it back.

Backes commented that as a business perspective we look at the numbers and review. It is not personal – doesn't want a business to close and employees to lose their jobs. Sales and expenses should be compared. The community value the liquor store and we should see the numbers if we want to make a decision.

Thornbloom doesn't want to see the off-sale leave. In the municipal we need to see good prices for off-sales and sale prices. Thornbloom was in the beer business.

Larson – we need to look at all angles – Covid stepped in the middle and will be hard to gauge the past 2020 numbers. There are different people in place now and it is hard to do that with the changing times.

If it is sold, none of the money stays in town – it is gone. Have to see how it will go in the future.

Backes sees value in the employees and having it in the community.

Mayor Wessel will be working with Goodwin to look at how much money is needed to make it work better. Clean things up, redo some things to update. Bargo is starting which is a good thing,

Mayor Wessel wanted to make it clear that he did not say to sell the off-sale, those were rumors.

Council told Goodwin to keep up the good work. All do our part and work together.

Backes said you won't hear from her if everyone does their job the best they can.

Mayor Wessel – We are going to work more on working together – someone said to me, we fell to the bottom, Osakis was good to work with but not anymore.

First Responders/Fire – See what we can do going forward.

Respect the best we can, see any policy change after that.

Mayor Wessel commented that he appreciates each for the jobs we do. All do a marvelous job and keep up the good work.

Motion by Backes, seconded by Thornbloom, to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m. Motion Carries
Absent: Anderson

Mayor – Daniel J. Wessel

City Clerk/Treasurer – Angela A. Jacobson