

The City Council for the City of Junction City, met in regular session at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 9, 2021, in a virtual meeting format via internet and phone.

PRESENT: Mayor, Beverly Ficek; Councilors Sandie Thomas, Ken Wells, Andrea Ceniga, John Gambee, Dale Rowe, and Sidney Washburne; City Attorney, Carrie Connelly; Police Chief, Bob Morris; Public Works Director, Gary Kaping; Finance Director, Mike Crocker; and Planning Technician, Tere Andrews.

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Ficek opened the meeting at 6:32 p.m. and led the pledge of allegiance.

Mayor Ficek said that she wanted to make a statement before continuing with the agenda. She said that last week, employees at City Hall went home ill and to err on the side of caution, City Hall was closed and Serve Pro did a thorough sterilization and cleaning. On Friday, City Hall was closed, due to low staffing, but she was delighted to say that as of yesterday, staff were healthy and regular hours of operation had been resumed.

2. Changes to the Agenda

Councilor Wells asked to have communication between staff, the Mayor, and Council added to the agenda, as he felt it had been poor over the last few weeks.

Councilor Washburne asked to have public comments added to the agenda. Councilor Thomas expressed her agreement.

Councilor Washburne continued that he would like to see an agenda item where answers to the public's questions from a previous meeting could be answered. He felt they also needed to add discussion of expenditures on agendas.

Attorney Connelly stated that she understood the desire for individual Councilors to pose and add items to the agenda, but staff needed time to prep on items so there could be productive meetings with background provided in writing. She continued that Councilors could express things under Councilor Comments, and then there was an agenda forecaster process for getting items on the agenda. She noted that Changes to the Agenda usually were for last minute items brought by staff that required Council action. She added that she was curious why Public Comments were not on this agenda, but thought it probably had to do with technological abilities and not having a staff member to manage that.

Mayor Ficek shared that she had noticed Public Comments were not on the agenda as well and intended to add that back on the agenda, but was told that staff did not have the technical ability to do that tonight.

Councilor Rowe stated that he had been contacted by a couple of citizens who asked him to communicate things directly to the Council because they suspected this might be an issue. He thought other Councilors probably had questions coming from the public as well, so he did not think that technological issues were an excuse to not have Public Comments on the agenda.

Councilor Thomas expressed her agreement that they should add Public Comments and noted that she was a bit upset that the Council had not been notified of the City Hall closure.

Mayor Ficek expressed her understanding and stated that this had been an unusual situation. Director Kaping cautioned the Council not to talk about staff medical issues, as that would be a HIPAA violation.

In response from Mayor Ficek for comments, Attorney Connelly said that it sounded like Councilors were prepared to present some public comment on behalf of members of the public and those could be shared under Councilor Comments or could be added as a separate item for Public Comments for Items not on the Agenda.

Councilor Gambee asked for confirmation that just because an item was asked to be added to an agenda for a meeting or added as a regular agenda item did not mean that it would automatically be added. Attorney Connelly responded that was correct.

Councilor Gambee continued that he was not frustrated or angry and thought staff did an excellent job and was glad they erred on the side of caution. He respected Councilors bringing up comments and thought they could be handled during Councilor Comments.

Councilor Washburne stated that he would like to see these items put on the next Council meeting agenda, so that staff would have time to work on them.

Mayor Ficek stated that if Councilors had something they wanted to say or to ask questions, this could be done under Agenda Item 8 Councilor Comments and Questions. She noted that questions could be asked, but some of the questions might not be able to be answered this evening.

3. Approval of Minutes – January 12, 2021

MOTION: Councilor Washburne made a motion to approve the January 12, 2021 minutes. The motion was seconded by Councilor Rowe and passed by unanimous vote of the Council.

4. Tri-County Chamber Funding Request

Director Crocker presented the annual request from the Tri-County Chamber for \$4,000 from the Room Tax dollars that the City received for tourism. This was in the City's budget in the General Fund non-departmental section.

MOTION: Councilor Rowe made a motion to approve the Tri-County Chamber of Commerce's request and direct staff to issue a payment to the Chamber in the amount of \$4,000. The motion was seconded by Councilor Thomas and passed by unanimous vote of the Council.

5. Budget Committee Mid-Year Meeting Date

Director Crocker reviewed that at the January Council meeting, staff had been asked to look at potential dates for a mid-year Budget Committee meeting. Director Crocker had worked with Councilor Washburne, who was the Vice Chair of the Budget Committee, to develop the agenda.

MOTION: Councilor Ceniga made a motion to direct staff to schedule a meeting for the Junction City Budget Committee on February 25, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Thomas and passed by unanimous vote of the Council.

6. Council Agenda Forecaster

Mayor Ficek noted that the Council Agenda Forecaster had been included in the Council packets. It was noted that Attorney Connelly would provide Council Orientation Sessions at the February and March Work Sessions.

7. Staff Reports

Director Crocker reported: Staff had been notified that the City received the Distinguished Budget Award (3rd time) and the Audit Presentation Award for Cash Basis Small Government Reports (8th time). He thanked staff, Council, and Budget Committee for their support over the years to participate in these programs. He looked forward to upcoming budget discussions.

Attorney Connelly reported: She provided an update on the ability to meet in person for meetings. She said that they were all eager to meet in person again but noted that the City was still under Governor's Executive Order EO 20-16, which was adopted in April 2020 and had been extended to March 3, 2021. It required that public meetings be held virtually whenever possible. Her thought was that since the City had been holding public meetings virtually, that it would be hard to make the case that it was not possible for the City to do this. Beyond that, if the City found that it was not possible to meet virtually, it would still need to meet all social distancing standards (masks, spacing, etc.), maximum capacity for a public facility where employees and the public were (35 square feet net area per person was used to determine maximum occupancy), and to have the City's insurance carrier, City County Insurance, do a risk assessment.

Councilor Thomas asked about meeting at the Community Center. Attorney Connelly responded that she believed there was no City facility that could meet the maximum capacity requirements, under the Governor's current regulations.

Councilor Thomas noted that the cities of Harrisburg and Monroe were both meeting in person with capacity limitations. Attorney Connelly responded that she could not speak to how those determinations were made, but she was advising the City, per current regulations, that meetings should be held virtually for now.

(Attorney Connelly left the virtual meeting for a pre-arranged meeting at 7:05 p.m.)

Chief Morris reported: The Police Department (PD) was very busy. A significant sexual assault had occurred three weeks ago, and the PD had the suspect in custody within less than 24 hours after it had been reported. The suspect was currently in Lane County jail and had been indicted with over 20 charges through the Grand Jury. A double stabbing had occurred where an individual stabbed his wife and stepson. The PD had the suspect in custody within minutes of the assault, and the suspect was currently in Lane County jail. A number of people had recently been arrested for drunk driving. The Department received re-accreditation through Oregon Accreditation Alliance, which was a very significant benchmark for the department and for a City.

Director Kaping reported: At last night's Public Works Committee meeting, the Committee decided to move ahead with placement of a lighted, 40-foot banner that read, "Bless the USA." This would be placed on 6th Street on holidays such as Memorial Day, President's Day, Flag Day, etc. The Committee also decided to start charging late fees and begin to do utility shut offs at the end of April; the City had not been charging late fees or doing shut offs since March of 2020. Public Works had been doing flushing this week, and Superintendent Tracer had communicated that it was going well. Bids had been received for the concrete work for the new metal building at Public Works; this item as well as the Scandinavian Festival street closure and a request from the Junction 4 Junction Association would be before the Council next month.

Councilor Washburne thanked Public Works for putting up more stop signs. He had heard positive remarks from the citizens of Junction City, as they appreciated the signs being put it. Director Kaping responded that Superintendent Tracer had worked hard on getting that project completed. They had all the stop signs and posts ordered to complete the Stop Sign project and would be wrapping up that project shortly.

8. Councilor Comments/Questions

Councilor Wells shared that to continue with what he had brought up earlier, the public had asked Council members questions that the Council was not able to answer because they had not been informed. He continued that he would like to see a discussion of communication between the City Administrator and Council at the next Council meeting. He referred to Section 27 of the Charter 5(b): The City Administrator shall keep the Council advised of the affairs and needs of the City.

Councilor Thomas stated that she was very frustrated that the Council had not been told that City Hall had been closed and that when the public asked her about it, she had no information. She expressed her agreement with the request from Councilor Wells to discuss communication. She continued that she had spoken to the Mayor over the phone three weeks ago and asked where she had gotten her homework on making the Council Committee appointments and had been told by the Mayor that she had spoken to ex-Councilors and staff. Councilor Thomas expressed concerns that ex-Councilors had been voted out because the people did not like the direction they were going, and the Mayor had removed a Councilor who was a public safety officer from serving on the Public Safety Committee and replaced her with someone who knew nothing about public safety.

Mayor Ficek responded that she had never said anything about ex-Councilors. Councilor Thomas responded that was what had been said, but that Mayor Ficek was the Mayor, she respected that, and that was all she was going to say.

Councilor Ceniga shared that it was unacceptable and embarrassing to have not been told that City Hall was being closed and to find out about it from the public. She expressed concerns that if COVID had been a factor at City Hall, the City had a responsibility to notify

Councilors or community members who had been at City Hall about potential exposure, following contact tracing and HIPAA guidelines. She continued that the Council worked for the citizens of Junction City and they deserved to be heard, ask questions, and have those questions answered; that was why at the January meeting, she had requested that an agenda item be added for staff to provide answers to public comments/questions from the previous meeting. She added that over the last couple of months, this had been put on the back burner and she felt this needed to change and they needed to put the public first.

Councilor Washburne expressed agreement on the concerns about not being notified about the City Hall closure and not having any knowledge of it when the public contacted him. He noted that this was not the proper way to run a business for the citizens. He continued that he would like the review of bills to be added to the agenda, so the citizens could know where the money was being spent and so questions and answers about the bills could be held in a public forum.

Councilor Rowe expressed kudos to Director Kaping and the Public Works staff for completing the Stop Sign Program and for the quick communication over an issue that happened a couple of weeks ago. He expressed appreciation to Director Crocker for his time in providing wonderful explanations on the half year financial report. He reminded everyone that HIPAA protected individual medial records, but they could talk about exposure; if exposure had occurred, the City had a responsibility to the citizens and to make sure all that necessary reporting and OSHA requirements had been met. He continued that a citizen did not agree with legal counsel on not giving out the names of people who took public money for pandemic relief, and the citizen would like the Council to vote to see they wanted to overturn that; Councilor Rowe felt the Council needed to discuss this. He added that they had bills on the agenda in the past, and he thought they should add that back onto the agenda.

Councilor Gambee stated that he was not angry or frustrated. He spoke with hundreds of citizens of Junction City every week and not a single one had brought up anything about City Hall being closed for a couple of days, so he did not think this was the alarming thing that people were making it out to be and that many citizens would agree. He thought staff did a tremendous job and he was fine being notified in advance or finding out a few days later. He continued that the bills had been on the agenda for years and he was not opposed to adding that back on the agenda or leaving it off; he noted that regardless, questions could be asked at each meeting. He thought this and other requested agenda items would best be thoroughly discussed at a work session or regular meeting. He added that the City had excellent administrators and staff and commended them on the Police Department re-accreditation, finance awards, and for working really hard in these challenging times to provide good services to the community.

9. Mayor’s Comments

Mayor Ficek stated that she was sorry that a lot of the Councilors were upset about how things were handled, and she expressed her understanding and agreement that it was unacceptable. She continued that she accepted part of the responsibility because things were supposed to land with her. She stated that she wanted the Council to know that if she had something to decide, she got her information everywhere that she could, but made up her own mind and did not go with someone else’s opinion. She had never done that and never would and hoped that after working together down the line, the Council would understand more about where she was coming from and how she made decisions. She expressed congratulations to all of City staff, as they were operating under a very difficult situation, but had pulled through and she was very proud of them for what they had done.

10. Adjournment

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

Kitty Vodrup, City Recorder

Beverly A. Ficek, Mayor