

Orono City Council
Work Session
Monday, April 13, 2020
Council Chambers (Held by Electronic Means)
5:00 p.m.

AGENDA

PRESENT: Mayor Dennis Walsh, Council Members Richard F. Crosby II, Victoria Seals, Aaron Printup and Matt Johnson. Staff members present were City Administrator Dustin Rief, Director of Public Works/City Engineer, and City Clerk Anna Carlson.

1. COVID-19 Update

City Administrator Dustin Rief began by discussing the latest update from Hennepin County EOC on the latest COVID-19 information. Rief asked the Council for feedback and input about requests he had received about rolling back the utility rate increase or possibly doing some sort of forgiveness for any late fees incurred during this pandemic.

Mayor Dennis Walsh mentioned City had went through a rather exhaustive understanding and process to figure out why the increase of rates was needed. He added the City should not change things because it will be happen eventually and we made the responsible decision to begin now to fund infrastructure needs through the utilities rather than through assessments and borrowing. Walsh mentioned he would be open to looking into it case by case if needed but that it is probably best to keep things the same at this time. Walsh asked the rest of the Council for their thoughts.

Council Member Aaron Printup asked how many call has the City had about late fee forgiveness. He agrees that the City had went through an exhaustive process coming up with the decision to increase rates, however was concerned about where the communication piece about this was in the past six months. He mentioned if there had been more communication that had went out about the rate increases then it could have made it easier for everyone to understand the rationale behind it. He added that he wasn't sure if allowing the late fee forgiveness was the way to fix some of the miscommunication but that we may owe it to the Citizens. Printup asked why the communication was not sent out.

Rief mentioned that he and the Finance Director Ron Olson are looking into why the communication did not go out.

Printup would like more communications to go out now as well.

Council Member Victoria Seals agrees that the roll outs should not be held back. She mentioned that the decision to increase rates was wise and the whole Council made the decision and knew why it was needed, however we have not communicated well enough to the Citizens. Seals added that the City also owes the public an explanation and that the rate increases should be over communicated the why now and just made

that a priority.

Walsh added that we had to do the increases now to correct the deficiencies from years past, which we have been doing, however it all contributes to the

Council Member Matt Johnson mentioned that it makes sense that the City does not want to go backwards in terms of communication. The City should keep in mind that we also learned that people with wells were paying in part for people with city water. Johnson asked what the City did to communicate a major change for this. The failure is that we do not have a definitive plan to communicate with the public. He added all we can do is learn from it and develop a specific procedure to communicate things like this. Johnson added the City may also want to tell the citizens where they can go to find the information.

Council Member Richard Crosby agrees that we should have a plan in place to communicate with the public but also that we may want to try not to go backwards.

Walsh mentioned that we should readdress this at the next work session or when we have a little more information.

Printup would like staff to find out how the City can use their own website to showcase things like this now and for the future.

Finance Director Ron Olson mentioned that approximately 10% of the people calling were asking for forgiveness. Olson added we have had a lot of conversations over the past few days and that overall we do have a pretty intelligent and thoughtful citizen base.

Walsh asked if Rief had anything else to add to this item. Rief mentioned that we have had more inquiries related to parks, public works, and utility bills. Overall everything is continuing to go as normal in terms of the number of building permits coming in and the calls we are still receiving.

2. Staffing Discussion

Police Chief Correy Farniok gave an update to the Council of the recent activities of the Police Department. They have continued to respond to calls for assistance and at times have gone into many homes. Farniok asked the Council for input about what the city can do for those officers that are going into those COVID-19 related calls, because they do not have the ability to work from home. Currently we are rotating and alternating shifts so that there is no overlap, but there is still a concern of the risk involved to the officers and their families. Farniok recommended the council consider implementing a program which would include an increase of \$100-\$150 per week as COVID 19 pay for full-time sworn in Officers and the Community Service Officer during the time we are under a shelter in place order. The increase would not apply to those employees working from home.

Printup asked about the reasoning for the non-overlapping shifts. Printup asked what the City Administrator's recommendation would be about this.

Rief mentioned that there is a lot of information about this and there are a lot of valid points for implementing a program for this however he could not give a recommendation either way. Rief mentioned he may be leaning more against it this time.

Crosby asked if we did anything different back when we had the H1N1 epidemic.

Farniok responded that the vaccine had been offered after about 4 months at that time and the Governor had not declared a state of emergency at that time. He mentioned that this would occur during this time only.

Printup mentioned that he tends to be in favor of this because it could turn out to be less costly.

Walsh stated he sees both sides of this. He stated to pick one out because the Governor chose who can and can not work it doesn't add any difference to what's going on. It seems that data shown for people in the field contacting this disease has been mainly from community contact which happens outside of working hours.

Crosby mentioned that we don't get to pick and choose what we are exposed to. I think the best thing we should do is to make sure the Officers are supplied with the proper PPE.

Johnson mentioned that he feels the best way we can support is deal with it as an officer becomes sick. This seems to be like we are giving people money in case they get sick. We should look at supporting the officer if they get sick.

Seals agrees with Johnson. Possibly looking into options of how we can support staff if they get sick would be appropriate.

Printup mentioned that the option of supporting them after they contact the disease could be more costly.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Adam Edwards mentioned that if a plan does take shape then it should include the maintenance workers and building official as well.

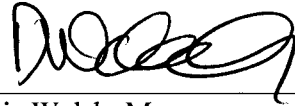
Walsh would like staff to come up with a plan.

Rief mentioned that Workers Comp will cover up to 60% of costs.

Johnson asked the City Administrator to put a formal proposal together.

Rief mentioned that he will discuss with the Attorney and bring back a formal plan in two weeks.

Adjourned: 6:50 p.m.



Dennis Walsh, Mayor

ATTEST:



Anna Carlson, City Clerk