

**Regular Meeting Ely City Council – City Hall, Council Chambers  
July 18, 2023**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regular meeting of the Ely City Council was called to order by Mayor Omerza at 5:30pm in the Council Chambers.

Present: Council members A.Forsman, Kess, Debeltz, Campbell, Bisbee, and Mayor Omerza  
Absent: Council Member Callen

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

**Campbell/Debeltz moved to approve the minutes from the July 11<sup>th</sup> 2023 Regular Council Meeting. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Callen Absent.**

**ADDITIONS OR OMISSIONS TO AGENDA:**

- A. Addition 7.B. Becky Rom - Opposition Proclamation of Appreciation for Twin Metals
- B. Addition 7.C. Jay Gustafson- Opposition to Proclamation in support of Twin Metals & Ideal for common ground issues impacting Ely
- C. Addition 7.D. Madelyn Fahnkue - My Ely Story and Experience – Why we need to move forward – Opposition to Proclamation Appreciating Twin Metals

**Bisbee/Campbell moved to approve the additions A-C. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Callen Absent.**

**MAYOR'S REPORT:**

Mayor Omerza indicated that she attended the Linda Fryer Garden Ribbon Cutting at the Chamber.

Twin Metals Proclamation – Mayor Omerza read the proclamation and indicated that the council has been doing this proclamation since 2017.

**CONSENT AGENDA:**

**Debeltz/Bisbee moved to waive readings in entirety of all ordinances and resolutions on tonight's agenda. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Callen Absent.**

**REQUESTS TO APPEAR:**

**Erik Simonson – Coalition of Greater MN Cities**

Simonson stated that he is a lobbyist with Flaherty-Hood which works for the Coalition of Greater MN Cities (CGMC). CGMC has been around for over 30 years and has around 110 members. Simonson indicated that the League of Minnesota does a great job, but CGMC focuses more on Greater Minnesota cities. Simonson indicated that starting with the election in November 2022, it was clear that complete DFL control of the Legislature and Governor's office would significantly impact the agenda for the 2023 legislative session. With Governor Walz leading the charge and narrow majorities in the state Senate and House of Representatives, the DFL pushed along a very broad and progressive agenda. Another significant dynamic of this session, from the CGMC perspective, was that the DFL majorities in the Legislature were dominated by members from the Metro. While this fact alone was not a bad thing, it meant there were fewer members who fully understood or actively advocated for the needs of Greater Minnesota. Despite the obstacles, the CGMC can claim numerous wins: an LGA increase with favorable formula updates, \$240 million for lead service pipe removal, historic funding for water and wastewater infrastructure, significant investments in Greater Minnesota housing, and permanent dedicated funding for the small cities assistance program, just to name a few. As

always the cities' involvement, council, and persistence were the key to these wins. Whether testifying before committees or contacting legislatures directly, the actions of our members remain a crucial and invaluable component of the CGMC's legislative successes.

### Becky Rom – Opposition Proclamation of Appreciation for Twin Metals

Rom indicated that she speaks in opposition to the Mayor's proposed proclamation relating to Twin Metals Minnesota. Honoring an international mining company that has no place in the future of Ely is wrong, divisive, and makes no sense. Both the federal and state governments have said no to a Twin Metals Mine. Why? Extensive environmental review that included economic and cultural and social review has shown that a Twin Metals Mine would be dangerous to our community and to the Quetico Superior Ecosystem. Such a mine would destroy much of what we love in our community. Rom said she has not met anyone who would like to live next to or downstream from a copper sulfide mine. There are no jobs at the end of the Twin Metals rainbow, there never have been. Anyone that follows mining at a global level knows these facts. Mining companies are rapidly automating, we know about the automation of mines in northeastern Minnesota, when 50 years ago 14,000 mining jobs in the taconite industry became 4000 jobs today, while maintaining the same level of taconite production today as 50 years ago. The talk of 750 jobs at Twin Metals Mine is just talk and should not be the basis for public policy and city support through misguided proclamations. The community and this city council should instead show support and appreciation for the dozens of businesses that make the Ely area thrive. Businesses that employ real people and pay real wages, businesses and organizations that have contributed to this community much more than \$550,000 to charity, and businesses that have employed many more people than Twin Metals ever has. Dozens of local businesses are far more worthy of a proclamation of appreciation than Twin Metals. There are dozens of businesses that should be honored, appreciated, and celebrated, and many of these businesses would suffer if there was a Twin Metals mine.

The proposed proclamation ignores facts, science and the work of the regulatory agencies. Rom indicated that it is time to move on with a forward looking economic vision for Ely and the surrounding area and accept this reality; there is no Twin Metals Mine. Twin Metals has no federal leases which it must have to develop copper nickel deposits. Twin Metals has no place to put its waste, the MN DNR denied Twin Metals the use of state land for a waste disposal site and the MN DNR and the Bureau of Land Management rejected the Twin Metals mine proposal. Detailed scientific studies demonstrated that the Boundary Waters would be damaged from the ordinary operation of a mine and because of the nature of the Boundary Waters the damage could not be fixed and would be permanent. Federal land managers say that the Boundary waters head waters withdrawal is the one of the most important and necessary mineral withdrawals in the history of the nation. Rom encourages the city council and the community to celebrate this land mark decision and not pass the proclamation based on opinions, erroneous facts, and a backward looking agenda.

Since 2017 nearly 675,000 Americans submitted comments to the federal government in support of protecting the Boundary Waters from copper nickel mining. Rom indicated that 70% of Minnesotans support permanent protection of the Boundary Waters from copper mining. Ely is a great place to live, recreate and work; let's celebrate the amenity based economy we now enjoy. Rom urges the city council to show appreciation to the dozens of businesses that make the Ely area great and reject the proposed proclamation for Twin Metals. Let's reunite around asking Antofagasta to leave Minnesota and return to Chile.

Jay Gustafson – Opposition to Proclamation in support of Twin Metals & Ideal for common ground issues impacting Ely

Gustafson asked what this proclamation accomplishes. He is struck by how this proclamation continues to drive a wedge into the heart of the Ely community, further dividing us on what is today a non-issue. There is no Twin Metals mine in the headwaters of the BWCAW watershed, and according to the Department of Interior, BLM, US Forest Service, MN DNR, and MNPCA, there never will be. What is the goal of declaring and signing this proclamation, he sees no benefit to anybody here tonight, not even those here in support of you on this decision. No local Ely jobs will be created, our local Ely economy will not grow, people will not relocate to Ely, and local Ely businesses that are the actual backbone of this economy are under appreciated because of this proclamation.

Businesses across Ely in July still have Help Wanted signs posted on their doors. Businesses that cannot fully staff their operation, limiting hours and days they can remain open. I've heard many iterations of losing maternity service at the hospital, no car dealership in town, only one grocery store, declining school enrollment, etc. And yet all of these issues do not hinge on whether or not Ely has a mine, they hinge on whether or not we have affordable, sustainable workforce housing.

Gustafson stated he is the store manager at Piragis Northwoods Company, who like countless other local Ely businesses, is a generous contributor to our community. We have 62 people on our payroll as of today, vs. what I believe is a handful at Twin Metals. Gustafson moved to Ely because of a living wage job with benefits where he has had the opportunity to grow in his career and community. He has lost qualified candidates he wanted to pay competitive local wages because they could not find housing. We have a tourism and recreation economy that is being held back from all that it can be, due to a lack of affordable, sustainable workforce housing.

The 2023 draft housing study from Maxfield Research is on your desks. Please make this your primary focus if you want to support your local economy and its workers. As you explore this study, I implore you to be curious, be creative, and be thoughtful. Compare the findings from the 2019 study to today. Please engage with your constituents and use their feedback to help inform your decision making.

Madelyn Fahnlne – My Ely Story and Experience – Why we need to move forward – Opposition to Proclamation Appreciating Twin Metals

Fahnlne discussed her story and how she was able to move to Ely. Fahnlne stated that she is from a similar size town to Ely in Colorado that was a gold mining town back in the day. At 15, she came to Ely on a Girl Scout destination trip where they went into the BWCA and Quetico for a 10 day canoe trip which led her to fall in love with the canoe country and a deeper appreciation for the area. She returned to Ely as a Girl Scout Guide at the Girl Scout canoe base. During the off seasons she went to college at Colorado State University and received her degrees in Global Natural Resources Tourism, French Language, and a minor in Conservation Biology. In 2021 she was able to move to Ely permanently to become a local. Her impression of Ely was that it was a wonderful town; everyone is passionate and wants to see Ely thrive. People are tired of this discussion on mining, we keep talking in circles, when there are serious problems that we should be putting our mental energy towards, instead of continuing proclamations towards an organization that is not going to have any jobs here, aside for the handful it has currently because of the actions the federal government has taken to protect the Boundary Waters. We should be focusing on affordable workforce housing, so that our

businesses that are suffering because they can't get enough help actually have enough staff to make sure they are open seven days a week, so that tourists and locals can benefit from the businesses in town.

Fahnline indicated she would like us to work forward on the issues that we are seeing in our town instead of focusing on the mining issue. We should be proud of where we are from, Ely should celebrate its mining heritage and history and celebrate the Slovenian and Finish immigrants that came to this land and helped build this town. Fahnline indicated that we should be declaring an appreciation of what makes Ely great and not focusing on a single business.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

Standing/Special

Tree Board: Minutes included in the council packet

Planning & Zoning Commission: Minutes included in the council packet

Airport Commission: Minutes included in the council packet

### **DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:**

Clerk-Treasurer

Fire Chief

Chief Marshall discussed the recent calls for the fire department. Chief Marshall indicated that the Ely Fire Department and Babbitt Fire Department are taking over Morse-Fall Lakes Fire Departments fire calls and Ely EMS is taking over their EMS calls for the time being since they lost a member of their fire department, Willie Fearn in a car accident.

Library Director

Library Director Heinrich discussed the current programing at the Library which can be found on the Library website.

Police Chief

Chief Houde reminded everyone that it is Blueberry weekend coming up; we will have a few more people in town. Chief Houde asked the public to be aware and to slow down, watch for pedestrians in the crosswalks.

City Attorney

**A.Forsman/Debeltz moved to approve the Note and Mortgage for the Residential Rehab Loan for Alex Povhe at 403 E James St for \$10,000 for a new propane furnace and new windows. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Callen Absent.**

City Engineer

**COMMUNICATIONS:** Matter of Information  
Ely Community Resource Quarter 2 Progress Report

**CLAIMS FOR PAYMENT:**

- A. City and EUC Claims for July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 for \$73,235.75
- B. Invoice #449583 for SEH for the Prospector ATV Trail for \$2992.00
- C. Invoice #88346 for AE2S for the Waste Water Treatment Facility Improvement Project for \$19,574.08

**Debeltz/Bisbee moved to approve the Claims for Payment items A-C. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Callen Absent.**

**OLD BUSINESS:**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**OPEN FORUM:**

Gerald Tyler, manages Up North Jobs, indicated that he was the one that drafted the proclamation for Twin Metals Days. Tyler indicated that this is not whether or not Twin Metals will ever have an employee, but what they have done for the community and donated to the community.

Emily Roose had to leave the meeting before Open Forum, but left her notes with the Clerk if anyone wanted to review.

**ADJOURN:**

Mayor Omerza adjourned the meeting at 6:37pm without objection.

Casey Velcheff  
Deputy Clerk