

**Regular Meeting Ely City Council – City Hall, Council Chambers
February 6, 2024 - Minutes**

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Omerza called the council meeting to order at 5:30pm.

PRESENT: Council members A.Forsman, Debeltz, Callen, Campbell, Bisbee, and Mayor Omerza

ABSENT: Council Member Kess

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Debeltz/Campbell moved to approve the minutes from the January 16, 2024 Regular Council Meeting and January 16, 2024 Public Hearing. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

ADDITIONS OR OMISSIONS TO AGENDA:

A. Additions 7.B. Cindy Smyka – Update on Ely Area Tourism Bureau 2023 Recap
B. Additions 13.A. Resolution 2024-009 Resolution Appointing Election Judges for the 2024 Presidential Nomination Primary Elections

C. Additions 13.B. Water/Wastewater Operator I, II, III, IV Job Description

A.Forsman/Bisbee moved to approve the Additions A-C. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

MAYOR'S REPORT:

Mayor Omerza indicated that it was a busy weekend in town with all the Winter Festival activities happening.

CONSENT AGENDA:

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

REQUESTS TO APPEAR:

Grant Spickelmier, Executive Director & Krista Woerheide, Interpretive Center Director– International Wolf Center

Woerheide indicated that they have been making a lot of improvements to the center in the last year. Last winter they had a brand-new A/C unit installed, and a new Arctic Wolf Eco System exhibit was created. The International Wolf Center does a lot of virtual programming including out of state virtual programming with schools so they updated the background wall for the virtual programming. They have installed 14 web cameras, 3 of which are for public viewing. They worked with Zone 3 Gardens to update the outside foliage, plants and shrubs. They invested in a truck with a lift gate so when they go pick up road kill for the wolves to eat it is easier to pick them up. The Wolf Center got a new sign on Highway 169. They have been working with the accessibility at the Wolf Center, they have had videos made for programs with ASL interpretation and have an iPad for visitors to use for ASL, and they have a motorized scooter for people to use. They also put new carpeting in the auditorium. This last year they have expanded the staff by adding a Facilities Supervisor Position and they plan on adding more positions in 2024.

Spickelmier indicated that the Wolf Center still needs funding for a new roof, HVAC system, General Drainage Improvements, Improvements to the entrance and lobby to improve accessibility, improve visitor access and security and other exterior repairs and site

improvements including window replacements and re-staining building exterior. Spickelmier stated that the building is owned by the MN DNR and they are looking for state bonding money. They are asking for \$2.1 Million and would love to get the city's support.

Debeltz/A.Forsman moved to write a letter of support for the International Wolf Centers bonding request. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

Omerza stated that she appreciates how they educate Ely and beyond, it is good to get different view points for others.

Cindy Smyka – Update on Ely Area Tourism Bureau 2023 Recap

Smyka indicated that the lodging tax comes in February for Quarter 4, currently they have through Quarter 3's numbers. The tourism bureau has signed an agreement with the USDA Forest Service- Superior National Forest. They are working on a Superior National Forest for All Project. The Campaign is projected to reach 600,000+ people and they plan on doing quarterly newsletters and monthly by 2025. The Tourism Bureau is also working on seasonal guides, the spring and summer digital guide has been finalized and will be published and promoted by 2024, and they will continue to work on the Fall and Winter guides. The social media Facebook and Instagram 2023 metrics snapshot: they reached 695,600 people, an increase of +395.8% over 2022, they had 45,100 content interactions, an increase of +304.8% over 2022. EffectTV Campaign had 470,694 streaming impressions in 2023, and the average watch through rate is 60%. They have 3 podcasts out right now, Forest North a collaboration with the Forest Service, What's Up Ely?, and My Ely Story. Smyka discussed the lodging tax report, though 2023 Quarter 3 with the amount held by Lake County for Ely Area Short Term rentals is \$334,880.44. Smyka indicated that the goals for 2024 are the seasonal guides to be released, working with the Ely Heritage Preservation Commission Walking Tour, MN monthly digital geofencing campaigns, Superior National Forest for All Campaign launch, a successful launch and ongoing effort of email marketing, Podcast growth, and others.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Standing/Special

Ely Utilities Commission (EUC)

A.Forsman/Callen moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to purchase new lab equipment as recommended by the MN Dept of Health at a maximum cost of \$17,472.81. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Campbell moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to move forward with posting the Water/Wastewater Operator II Position internally for 7 days. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Debeltz moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to increase Mick Shusta's contract by \$350 per month due to additional duties at the Water and Wastewater facilities. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Campbell moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to approve the consulting agreement with Frontier Energy.

A.Forsman indicated that Frontier Energy handles our energy rebate analysis that is required by state law when EUC customers apply for the energy efficiency rebates.

Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Bisbee moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to forward with the Solar Interconnection Agreement with Steve Piragis at 105 N Central Avenue. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Callen moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to approve \$860,815.66 payment of the EUC December Bills. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Debeltz moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to approve payment of \$822.62 for the Minnesota DNR Water Permit. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Bisbee moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to approve Invoice #92287 for \$7995.29 for the WWTF Improvements Project, Invoice #92175 for \$2536.00 for the WTP Improvements, and Invoice #92176 for \$2664.50 for General Consulting Services to AE2S. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Campbell moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to approve \$500 payment to Mick Shusta for A Operator Services for December. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Callen moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to approve \$400 payment to Minnesota Rural Water Association membership renewal. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Callen moved to approve the recommendation from EUC to approve \$7290.00 payment to MMUA for 2024 Electric Utility Membership dues. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

Employee Relations

Debeltz/A.Forsman moved to approve the recommendation from Employee Relations to post the Water/Wastewater II position internally for seven days as required by contract. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

Debeltz/A.Campbell moved to approve the recommendation from Employee Relations to provide 50% of the health care savings to the employees as a one-time payment into their designated choice of MSRS retirement account, HSA or as a payroll check.

Langowski indicated with the City Health Insurance renewal there was a significant increase from Heath Partners, so we researched other health insurance companies. Blue Cross Blue Shield came in significantly lower. Health insurance changes need to be negotiated by the unions and it was approved to switch to Blue Cross Blue Shield and share the savings with the employees.

Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

Debeltz/Callen moved to approve the recommendation from Employee Relations to approve an MOU concerning the new Earned sick and safe time (ESST) with all employee groups. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA): Minutes included in the council packet
Campbell welcomed Shiela Moravitz to the HRA as the Property Maintenance Specialist.

Ambulance Joint Powers Board

A.Forsman/Callen moved to make the February 26, 2024 Ambulance Joint Powers Board Meeting at 4pm at the Winton Community Center a Special Council meeting so all Council members can attend if they choose. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman indicated that the audit is still not completed since they cannot get the prior billing services to respond to the auditors inquiries. Patty Banks from the hospital indicated that they have the preliminary results for the hospital ambulance study and are hoping to get the results by the next meeting. Banks also clarified that the 3 separate entities are separate and need to work individually together to make things work.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:

Clerk-Treasurer

Langowski indicated that the outdoor skating rink at the Rec Center is closed, because of the mild winter and warm days we are having.

Langowski commended the Ely Nordic Ski and Bike Club for getting the High School Ski meet of. Lots of work went into getting the meet accomplished with the lack of snow and the warmer temps.

Fire Chief

Chief Marshall discussed the current fire and medical calls for the Fire Department.

Fire Department Minutes, Quarter 4 Summary and 2023 Annual Summary

Chief Marshall discussed the Quarter 3 summary: there were 88 medical calls, 4 fire calls, and 14 other(meetings, trainings, etc). The department average response rate was 58.6%. For the Annual 2023 summary there were 314 medical calls, 44 fire calls, and 48 other (meetings, trainings, etc.) The average response rate for 2023 was 46%. In 2023 the Ely Fire Department had 41 calls (93.2%) in City of Ely & Stony Township, 0 calls in Morse Fall Lake Mutual Aid, 2 calls (4.5%) for Babbitt Mutual Aid, and 1 call (2.3%) for Breitung Township Mutual Aid.

Library Director

Library Director Heinrich discussed the current programming for the Ely Library which can be found on the Library website.

Police Chief

Debeltz/Campbell moved to approve the conditional job offer for open Patrol Officer Position to Christian Debrey pending passing background investigation, psychological and medical examination. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

City Attorney

A.Forsman/Debeltz moved to approve a Closed meeting per MN Statute 13D for Strategy for Ely Supervisors of Other than Essential Employees at the end of the council meeting. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

City Engineer

COMMUNICATIONS: Matter of Information
Arrowhead Library System 2024 Annual Budget Summary

Habitat for Humanity – Habitat Highlights – January 2024

**Debeltz/Bisbee moved to approve the updated agreement with Highland Bank for servicing the City of Ely’s Loan Accounts.
Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.**

St Louis County Community Development Block Grant(CDBG) Citizen Advisory Committee – Open Positions

CLAIMS FOR PAYMENT:

A. City and EUC Claims for February 6, 2024 for \$390,899.85

B. Invoice #459749 to SEH for \$5,502.50 for the Prospector ATV Trail

Debeltz/Callen moved to approve claims for payment items A & B. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

OLD BUSINESS:

Campbell/A.Forsman moved to approve the Amended and Restated Joint Powers Agreement – Ely Lodging Tax Board

Attorney Klun indicated that the changes came from the county and it is updating it to today's standards and how the entities operate.

Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

Legal Newspaper Bid

A.Forsman/Callen moved to award the 2024 legal publishing to the Ely Echo. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

Committee Seat Applications

Callen/A.Forsman moved to approve Larry Polyner for the open seat on the Ely Utilities Commission (EUC) with the Term Expiring 1/31/2027. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

NEW BUSINESS:

Debeltz/Callen moved to approve Resolution 2024-009 Resolution Appointing Election Judges for the 2024 Presidential Nomination Primary Elections. Roll Called: Council Members A.Forsman – Yes, Kess- Absent, Debeltz – Yes, Callen – Yes, Campbell – Yes, Bisbee – Yes, and Mayor Omerza – Yes. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

A.Forsman/Callen moved to approve the Water/Wastewater Operator I, II, III, IV Job Description. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

OPEN FORUM: None

Mayor Omerza indicated that currently the city has committee openings on Gardner Trust (resident), Police Commission, and Tree Board if anyone is interested in applying, please contact the clerk’s office for more information.

Mayor Omerza recessed the council meeting at 6:58pm.

Mayor Omerza called to order the closed council meeting per MN Statute 13D for Strategy for Ely Supervisors of Other than Essential Employees to order at 7:10pm.

Mayor Omerza opened the meeting at 7:28pm.

Debeltz/Campbell moved to approve the Supervisors of Other than Essential Employees contract as presented and for City Attorney Klun to provide the contracts. Motion Carried 6-0-1 with Kess Absent.

ADJOURN:

Mayor Omerza adjourned the meeting at 7:30pm without objection.

Casey Velcheff

Deputy Clerk