

EAST BETHEL CITY COUNCIL WORK MEETING

July 22, 2024

The East Bethel City Council met on July 22, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. for the regular City Council Work meeting at City Hall.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Kevin Lewis Brian Mundle Bob DeRoche
Tim Miller Jim Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Matt Look, City Administrator
Mike Jeziorski, Deputy City Administrator/Finance Director
Rodney Sanow, Fire Chief
Aaron Berg, Community Development Director
Nate Ayshford, Public Works Manager

1.0 – 2025 Proposed Budget Discussion

Jeziorski reviewed the proposed 2025 budget and requested the Council discuss the initial draft and give direction to staff regarding any adjustments. He noted Department heads were in attendance to give updates also.

Fire Chief Sanow stated the Fire Department's budget had been reduce by 12 percent from last year due to the elimination of the proposed community outreach position and fire aid dollars not flowing through to the City. He noted there were a few increases due to the cost of goods and services going up.

Lewis noted that the heavy equipment cost had really gone up. Sanow responded fire trucks were generally custom built and were going for around a million dollars. He noted each year they put aside into an account some funds for the equipment replacement.

Jeziorski noted the function of the equipment replacement fund was to set aside each year to replace equipment items that become depreciated over the years. He noted they were a little behind in how much they were funding, but the strategy was to bump it up incrementally over the years instead of trying to make it up all in one year.

Sanow noted they had no major engines or tankers coming up for replacement for a few years and the next big cost would be the SCBAs in approximately seven years.

DeRoche inquired if interfund loans were still done. Jeziorski responded they were no longer being done.

DeRoche asked once the money was shuffled and the City decided to not do this any longer, did the money just stay gone. Jeziorski responded he would have to go back and look as he didn't remember the last time they had an interfund loan, but he recommended the City steer away from interfund loans unless there was a dedicated payback schedule.

Lewis stated one of the reasons he valued Jeziorski was because he managed the finances well.

Commander Paul Lenzmeier, Anoka County Sheriff's Office, stated for the 2025 law enforcement contract there would be a 5.3 percent increase from 2024 which consisted of four main areas of increased in 2025 and those are 5 percent in wages. He noted the 5 percent was the estimated wages

they believe will be negotiated and if it went lower, then the City would get a credit but they were confident in this number.

Commander Lenzmeier summarized where the other increases would occur such as in phones, Joint Law Enforcement Committee, and public safety data system costs were increased also. He noted another increase was the worker's compensation that doubled to \$16,000.

Miller stated he had heard that the Sheriff's Department was building a new facility in Lynwood. He asked if East Bethel would be getting coverage out of that new facility since it was closer to East Bethel. He asked since Coon Lake was by that new facility, would it make sense to move one of the Department's boats to that location. Commander Lenzmeier responded that their current substation was right down the street where they had three squads parked there, along with office space. He noted they would not have a substation, but would have a cubicle, a workspace, and some parking spots, which would be a nice central location for the east side Countywide cars. With respect to the boat, which had been discussed in the past but they did not have a lot of extra boats to do that, but this is something they could look at again.

Sheriff Wise noted they were doing great for staffing and they work very hard to recruit their own community service officers, but the fundamental challenge still existed that young people did not go into the profession the way they used to. He believed the only way they were going to recover for staffing was through wages.

Jeziorski stated the Community Development Department was proposed to increase by 19 percent with the primary driver of that being the reinstatement of the City Planner position.

Berg summarized what the Community Development Department responsibilities were. He noted a City Planner was being proposed to be put back into the 2025 budget in order to assist him with improving the ability to answer zoning questions across the City as well as continue to facilitate all of the other duties that happen within the office to include supervision of the building department.

Lewis wanted to make sure that a City Planner was absolutely necessary because hiring people cost a lot of money in salary and benefits. However, with the developments coming up, it might be time to make a move to hire a City Planner.

DeRoche asked what happened to their conversation previously that a City Planner was not necessary. Lewis responded things changed.

Smith stated he understood that when the Community Development Director was hired, he would be able to handle both positions. He asked why had this changed so much. Berg responded the previous City Administrator and himself split duties. He noted Mr. Davis had done all of the EDA work, so the City Planner's position was split between Mr. Davis and himself.

Look noted with the advent of the \$100 million being invested in Highway 65 he anticipated there would be a wave of requests come in and they wanted to be prepared for what he anticipated would be coming in. Lewis noted this did not need to be done immediately, but he could see things are probably going to be coming in and it was not good to bury a high valued person with a bunch of things that could be a training ground for another person who was learning the ropes.

Berg stated a City Planner would need time for training and would not be able to come in and start answering questions the first day. He noted the job takes time and they don't want to get behind.

DeRoche stated he felt misled and he did not know if things were laid out the way they should have been from the start. Berg noted when he was hired, they actually had three people in the Department – Stephanie Hanson, Aaron McDermott, and then himself as the intern.

Lewis believed it might be a good idea to get someone in house. Berg believed the best way to serve the customers was to try and get them an answer to their question, application, permit, etc. within 14 days and when he started in the position he promised them 7 days, but now they had to move the needle because they could not get to them in that amount of time.

Miller suggested putting information on the City's website so people didn't need to ask Berg. Berg responded that the information was on the website, but people didn't want to do the research to find it. He noted they would rather just call and ask their questions.

DeRoche noted even if people got the information off the website, the City had their own opinion on the Ordinances. He did not know if the City Planner position was the answer. Berg stated it was up to the Council if they were going to hire a City Planner, but the timeframe in which staff was able to respond to applicants and the residents was going to get longer and longer as the applications would continue to come in.

Lewis noted there was the reality that there was a defined capacity to any human being and he believed Berg has just informed the Council that he was at his limit. He indicated he never thought that Berg's abilities were limitless and he believed Berg was at his limit.

Mundle noted historically employees in the Planning Department went up and down due to the workload.

Berg stated it "pained him" to tell someone he would get back to them and then he would keep getting calls from that person because he had not had the time to get back to them. Lewis noted they did want a certain acceptable level of customer/resident responsiveness also.

Look noted the last thing they wanted was to have a reputation that the City did not want a business in the City because of not being able to get back to someone timely. He noted Ramsey had that kind of a reputation and a lot of businesses won't do business in Ramsey because of that.

Look stated this position would be wearing multiple hats, one of which would be looking at the City's Ordinances and making sure they were up to date. He indicated while this might be boring, it had to be done.

Ayshford reviewed the park maintenance budget, the street budget, the CIP, recycling budget, and water and sewer noting where they were increasing the amounts to reflect what they have been in the past few years. He noted on the equipment replacement schedule, all of those items would come back to the Council when it came time for a purchase.

Lewis asked Look if there were any new developments on the reserve capacity loan as a result of his meeting with the Met. Look summarized his conversations he had had and noted more information would be upcoming when the Legislature started up.

Jeziorski stated with respect to the general government section (administration, finance departments, attorney, and city assessor) there would be a net of zero percent for these.

2.0 – B-Roc Auto Repair Discussion

Look stated both interested parties were in attendance and he believed there was potentially some agreement.

Broc Vierzba, 655 198th Avenue NE, stated they have been running an auto shop for a long time as a family-owned business and at one point he did have an employee, which did not work out and he understood why the neighborhood did not want that person around. He noted he had let this person go over a year ago. He indicated he was trying to cut down on work and eliminate traffic as much as possible. He stated he did not consciously make noise that the neighbors would hear and he would have one AC in the summer in there, so the doors would be closed when it was hot outside. He indicated when he was using electric tools that made noise, he would close the doors. He had done the same thing for 13 years and for the first 11 years, the City didn't even know he was there, so he obviously did a good job with noise.

Mr. Vierzba stated he wanted to reach some agreement; he was not a bad guy; he was not trying to cause a problem in the neighborhood; but, he could also not afford a million-dollar shop somewhere with a handful of employees.

Mr. Vierzba noted he was currently working on something else and as soon as he took this over, he would not be working on cars any longer out of his home. He noted he was working hard on his exit strategy every day.

Mr. Vierzba acknowledged he should have taken his neighbor's concerns seriously from the start, but they have had a good conversation and they were now back on a neutral playing field.

Lewis stated he had no interest in shutting down businesses even if they are not compliant with the zoning, but it should be done the right way with CUPs or IUPs.

Look believed it was an anomaly for neighbors coming together and working with a company, which was great and it was what they should all be looking for. He recommended for any agreement that the conditions were clear so in the event there was a violation, there would be no question at that point. He noted the Council would be given the opportunity to review whatever complaint was received and determine if it were valid or not.

Mundle noted while this was a good, clean business, there were other mechanic shops that might not be and he wanted to make sure they don't have those types of businesses.

Look recommended they rewrite the contract with the terms laid out at this meeting, have it reviewed by both parties, and have both parties agree to it.

Berg stated ultimately the Council had the governing authority to do what they want to do. He did not advise having an IUP for a motor vehicle operation in a residential neighborhood though. He noted the contract was for Vierzba to relocate his business within a year and then that contract was extended another year and has expired, which was why they were here today.

Mr. Vierzba stated he tried to keep his place as clean as he could. He noted he had a fenced gated area and he pulled everything behind it, so nothing is seen from the road. Lewis suggested doing this and see what happens. He thanked both parties for working this out.

3.0 – Rooster Ordinance

Look requested additional guidance from the Council in terms of the direction they wanted to go, such as there an acreage limitation and if there is no acreage limitation was that unlimited roosters, or one rooster.

Lewis stated he did not have a particularly strong position on this.

Miller asked if the complaints received were from a planned subdivision. Berg responded that was correct.

Look stated right now the Ordinance states that chickens had to be in a coop and contained so free-range chickens were not allowed under the Ordinance and if everyone followed the Ordinance, this became less of an issue. He noted some people wanted roosters to protect the rest of the chickens from predators, but he was not sure if roosters really were able to defend against predators.

Lewis believed this might be more of a zoning issue rather than an acreage issue. Berg noted each lot in the City had its own unique situation.

Mundle recommended roosters be prohibited on lots smaller than 1.5 acres or any lots in a platted subdivisions, and no more than one rooster permitted on other parcels.

Lewis noted a person could have 20 acres, but their coop could be located next to their neighbors which could create issues. He stated it should be that it could not be located within X number of feet from the nearest neighbor.

DeRoche stated he could see someone complaining and then wanting them to go out there with a noise meter to file a noise complaint. Berg explained that in order to enforce the public nuisance of noise, the neighbor would have to be willing to testify and he did not know how many people would be willing to do that. He did not know how they were going to solve this, except to say no roosters were allowed.

Lewis stated the IUP fee could be so high that people would not want roosters.

Berg stated he would check with the neighboring communities to see what their ordinances said and bring that information back to the Council. DeRoche requested Berg email that information to the Council.

4.0 – Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Submitted by:

Kathy Altman

TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.