

EAST BETHEL CITY COUNCIL WORK MEETING

September 9, 2024

The East Bethel City Council met on September 9, 2024, at 6:00 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
 Aaron Berg, Community Development Director

1.0 – PER Discussion Revisited

Lewis clarified that they are requesting the Anoka County Canvassing Board to choose at random one of the three precincts in East Bethel for a hand count of the election results. He stated that the Canvassing Board does not have to grant it. He stated that the first purpose is to confirm via random sampling that machine-reported results correlate with hand-counted results. He stated the second purpose is to let all involved in the process know that the residents of East Bethel, East Bethel as a City, cares about election integrity and are watching how the process is conducted. He stated that if the request is granted, the cost should be about \$900 to cover the cost of election judges. He thinks the election judge pay should be revisited in the near future, increasing it to somewhere around \$15 an hour.

2.0 – Whispering Aspen Contract Discussion

Mundle stated that he will be abstaining from the discussion and any decision making that comes from it.

Look stated the City owned the land at some point and was looking for an interested party in developing the land to bring development to the City. He stated that this contract was signed on March 31, 2021. He noted that there was talk of a community center and outlots, and the City would retain ownership of those in exchange for selling the land and allowing Firebird Land LLC to use office space in the facility. He stated that being able to resolve this issue is important. He added the County Attorney indicated he would not provide an opinion on this, but an opinion is available through the Attorney General.

Lewis asked if there was a cost associated with that. Look stated that there should not be a cost associated with getting an opinion from the Attorney General, but there would be a cost for the County Attorney to draft a letter to the Attorney General.

Look stated that he thinks this could bring closure to this issue so if this comes up again next year, this document could be produced to bring closure at that point.

DeRoche stated that he thinks the only thing to do is have a judge or administrator look at it and make a decision. Lewis stated that judges determine what is the letter of the law versus what is the intent of the law.

Lewis stated that it is never good to lack legal clarity and would be in support of getting the Attorney General to look over things and sort it out for them.

Miller thinks it is necessary to get the opinion from the Attorney General because of what has been said on social media and what the facts are seems to be different. He added that when this came up last year, they were told the contract was fine and nothing else. He stated that they were not told

that the City was paying for the electric and gas bill, building insurance, phone bill, DSL, bathroom/cleaning supplies, cleaning costs, snow removal, lawn care, and building improvements, and nowhere in the contract does it say that the City would be paying for these things. He added that in paying for these things, the money is coming right from the resident's pockets, from taxes. He noted that he does not know why it is set up this way, and he has been told that the building was donated back to the City. He stated that in the purchase agreement contract, it says that the seller will retain ownership of the streets, curbs, sidewalks, potable water system to the curb stops, sanitary sewer system to the curb stops, storm sewer, and Outlots A, B, C, and D. He noted that Outlot C has the community center on it. He asked why the City is paying all the bills and who owned the building.

Lewis stated they are all biased in one way or another, which is why there is a need for the Attorney General's opinion as a third party who is not involved.

Smith asked why the water and sewer bills are so high. He stated that it seems the residents have been paying dearly for this development for over 20 years.

Look stated that he will contact the County Attorney, have him draft a letter for the Attorney General, and provide a copy of that letter for Council approval before it is sent.

3.0 – Mayor and Council Compensation

Look stated that the original compensation started in 1994 and was changed in October 2005. He also stated that when comparing salaries to other neighboring communities East Bethel is in the same ballpark. He stated that the increase has been included in the preliminary budget but that does not mean they have to go with that. He added that one of the challenges that councils and commissions face is that of time and time commitment. He presented the neighboring communities' current salaries for mayors/councilmembers and the frequency of Council meetings.

4.0 – Commission Stipends

Lewis stated that the priority should start with the Commissions and should be doubled if you are giving an average of 2 hours per meeting, in addition to another hour or 2 of prep. He stated that \$40 is not overpaying compared to the current \$20.

DeRoche agreed with that point.

Look stated that if you are doing your job well, then you are spending a significant amount of time.

Mundle stated that they seem to be in the middle for Mayor and Council compensation but thinks the Commissions should increase.

Look clarified that the Commissions compensation should be increased, and the Mayor/Council remain the same.

5.0 – White Pines – Rental Presentation

Look stated that staff has brought this topic before the Council in the past and the applicants are here to present to give more information on what they are thinking.

Pete Dimich, owner of White Pines General Store, stated that they are looking for ways to increase revenue because there is not enough support from the community to make their business profitable. He stated that with the other piece of property they own next door, they could use it to develop a rental property.

Pete Benincasa, Metropolitan Property Management LLC, stated they are looking at developing a 320-square-foot cabin that could be used as a rental property.

Lewis asked about rezoning the property to allow for a house to be built instead. Lewis also asked if he has considered developing a liquor store and getting a liquor license. Dimich stated that they would need to sell a large volume to make a profit, and he thinks the cost would outweigh the profit.

Berg stated the problem would be the zoning and that there is no short-term rental ordinance, inspection, or fees. He also stated the City has nothing in its ordinance about cluster septic systems, so if 6 cabins were placed here, they would need a commercial septic design that could be approved by the City Engineer or Building Inspector. He stated there are a number of hurdles that would have to be addressed.

Benincasa asked if the Council is open to the idea, and if so, based on their requirements, they can draw something up to present.

DeRoche stated he does not have enough information to give an opinion at this time.

Mundle stated that there are lots of unanswered questions at the moment, but he likes the idea of it. He stated he is not sure how realistic it will be for the City to get through everything in a timely matter.

Berg stated they would need the City Planner to do research on what other cities have done regarding short-term rental properties. He stated there would be lots of questions that would have to be answered based on their proposal.

Mundle noted that one of the hard parts of writing code is that it would have to be universal over an entire city, not only applicable to them.

Benincasa asked if it would be more feasible to talk about a change for a single-family dwelling for a personal house. Berg stated that would be a much easier process.

6.0 – Adjourn

Work Meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Submitted by:

Lilian Rokosz

TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.