

**COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, APRIL 12, 2022
6:00 PM**

Mayor Ryan Daniel – Present
Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle – Present
Attorney Marcia McNagny – Present

Council Members

Walter Crowder – Present
Jennifer Middleton – Present
Jennifer Romano – Present
Tad Varga – Absent
Daniel Weigold – Absent

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members except Walt Crowder present, Mayor Daniel presiding.

MINUTES Approval of the minutes was tabled due to the lack of a quorum.

REZONE: CUSTOM HOME DESIGNS, LLC – 1126 S. 50 E. Nathan Bilger, Planning Director, was present to discuss the rezone. He explained the request was for the old UAW property and was to rezone from R-3 to Local Business. He shared they were looking to remodel the hall into an architectural design business with no more than 12 employees. He advised they were seeking LB because of the proximity to residential.

Mayor Daniel questioned if the property was served by our utilities. Nathan Bilger advised it was on septic but was unsure about water. Mayor Daniel shared if future development happens in that area we certainly would welcome that property to be a part of the City. He advised since it was disconnected, he was not sure it made as much sense right now but did think in the future it would be great to have them, assuming nearby properties would be annexed in at their request. Jennifer Romano shared the property has already been a different kind of use property and as much as she does not want to do spot zoning it was probably appropriate.

Jennifer Middleton questioned if they had plans to put other buildings on the property. Nathan Bilger advised they did not, they would be doing architectural design. He explained the septic field was a constraint as well so until they would get City sewer, they won't be able to do much of anything else.

ORDINANCE 2022-1: REZONE – 1126 S. 50 E. – 1ST READING Motion was made by Jennifer Romano to read Ordinance 2022-1 by title only, Jennifer Middleton seconded the motion, all voted aye. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2022-11 an ordinance amending the zoning classification of certain property from the R-3 multi-family residential district to the LB local business district.

Motion was made by Jennifer Romano to approve Ordinance 2022-11 on first reading, Walt Crowder seconded the motion, all voted aye.

COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT Niki Keister with Columbia City Connect was present to discuss the events their organization had planned for the year. She was excited to introduce the downtown walking tour as a new event. She reported they have partnered with the Whitley County Historical Museum and the high school audio-visual department for this project. She advised Pam Koch and Doug Clark of the museum were working on writing a narrative for the 10-stop tour. She explained how the self-guided tour would work. Mayor Daniel questioned if there was a timeline for the completion of the project. Niki was not sure but hopeful by the end of the school year.

Mayor Daniel requested additional information on the downtown clean-up day. Niki explained there had not been an overwhelming response, but it has been good to talk with business owners about it.

PHASE 2 – ELECTRIC RATE INCREASE DISCUSSION Mayor Daniel reminded Council of the two-phase rate increase that was approved last year. He advised the plan had not changed and the recommendation was to continue moving forward with the next phase.

Walt Crowder questioned if Buzz had been in to further discuss the increase. Mayor Daniel was aware of conversations Shawn Lickey has had with Buzz. He also noted the year-end reports should be coming in the very near future.

Shawn Lickey, via phone, explained he and Buzz have had a lot of conversation concerning the supply and demand issues and with prices skyrocketing they were not only looking at the previously approved phase but may also need to start looking at next year's rates as well to try and make adjustments. He shared most things in his field have gone up between 50% - 60% in cost over the last year and is becoming a struggle to complete the projects that are mandatory. He advised they were going to start looking at next year's rates and would all depend on the nature of the market. Mayor Daniel shared one of the things this Council has talked about, and he was very supportive of, was the idea that we take a look at incremental adjustments every year instead of doing major increases. He advised he has had conversations with Baker Tilly about putting together a proposal for what a multi-year phased rate schedule adjustment would look like. He shared the idea was not that we would raise rates every year but to really look at what our needs are and what future projects we have. He advised we owe it to our rate payers and citizens to not run our utilities into the ground and put them into a deficit where we really have to do some damage.

Shawn Lickey shared Council did a lot of hard work to get the exit from the IURC years ago and to not reap the benefits of that by making the small incremental increases defeats the purpose. He felt we could make adjustments to where we are financially but need to stay on top of getting our financial reports and studying those. Mayor Daniel advised May 9 would be the next Utility Rate Advisory Board meeting so they will be reviewing the financials and potentially giving recommendations.

Council was in agreement to proceed with implementing Phase 2.

MAYOR REPORT Mayor Daniel reminded everyone City Hall would be closed Good Friday. He reported he attended the first half of the Northeast Indiana Defense Summit that was hosted by Congressman Banks and felt they did a good job talking about the defense industry. He advised they were having conversations with the Regional Sewer District regarding Coesse and the future of that project. He reported the Rotary Easter Egg Hunt was scheduled for April 14 at 6 pm at Morsches Park. He shared there was a lot of advocacy happening between the US 30 Coalition and himself about really looking at the SDI intersections. He advised he had conversations with the Kurt Carlson of the Bowen Center and the City's interest in their building.

Having no further business to discuss, Mayor Daniel called the meeting adjourned.

Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle