

**COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2023
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 – Present
Daniel Weigold – Present

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

MINUTES Motion was made by Dan Weigold to approve an overview of the February 28, 2023 meeting minutes as presented, Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, all voted aye.

NIKI KIESTER – COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT ANNUAL UPDATE Niki Kiester was present to give a report on last year's events. She advised the downtown digital tour was done and would be launched in May. She shared some of the events scheduled for 2023.

ABBI CARROLL – DIRECTOR OF HUMANE SHELTER – UPDATE Abbi Carroll, Director of the Humane Shelter, was present to review a report with Council.

Ms. Carroll felt a big misconception was that their municipal contracts only consist of less than \$60,000 of their annual budget. Mayor Daniel questioned what their annual budget was. Ms. Carroll advised it was between \$250,000 and \$300,000. Jennifer Romano questioned what their other sources of income were. Ms. Carroll advised they rely heavily on donations and fundraisers.

Walt Crowder questioned if they put the micro-chips in at a cost. Ms. Carroll advised all dogs leave micro-chipped, whether through adoption or a reclaim. She shared they only do cats upon request and the general public can bring their pets in to be micro-chipped for \$35.00.

Walt Crowder questioned their vision for the next 5 years and if they were looking to grow the facility. Ms. Carroll advised her personal thought was yes, but was not sure she could convince her Board of that.

Mayor Daniel asked Ms. Carroll to talk about the Rainbow Bridge. Ms. Carroll explained at the far end of their property they have a place where people can go to reflect on and remember their 4-legged friends who have passed.

RESOLUTION 2023-3; FOOD AND BEVERAGE TAX SUPPORT Motion was made by Jennifer Romano to read Resolution 2023-3 by title only, Tad Varga seconded the motion, all voted aye. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Resolution 2023-3 a Resolution of support for a Food and Beverage Tax for the funding of Eagle Park.

Mayor Daniel advised this has been something they have had conversations about. He noted the continued dialogue is the concept of how do we fund Eagle Park in the long term. He advised we have been able to secure a land and water conservation grant of about \$600,000.00, which funds a good portion of the first phase. He advised as we look into the future, trying to figure out how do we capitalize on the 30,000 vehicles per day coming through our community; how do we capitalize on the tourism draw that Eagle Park is going to bring and more importantly how do we find a way to fund this that is not necessarily directly out of the taxpayer dollars in the City of Columbia City. He

explained as they were looking at those options, they really took a look at the Food and Beverage Tax. He advised this tax is in places like Shipshewana, Fort Wayne, the majority of the donut counties in Indianapolis, French Lick and many other places across the State of Indiana. He shared the proposal was that a Food and Beverage Tax would be a 1% tax implemented on prepared food; restaurant food, not groceries. He felt at the end of the day it would give us an opportunity to capitalize on those people coming through and help us invest in our own community without it being a mandatory tax on our residents. He advised they were looking at 1% sales tax; he was thankful to have the support of Columbia City Connect, Whitley County Chamber of Commerce, multiple restaurateurs who have signed off on a letter of support for it. He shared the idea was that Eagle Park would be built with the revenues, plus additional grant dollars in the future, which then brings in more people who will eat and shop in our community.

Mayor Daniel explained the process in getting permission to move forward on this tax. He shared it has passed through the Senate and was on the House side for consideration. He advised they were not passing the tax for us but were giving us permission to make the decision locally.

Mayor Daniel stressed there would be a lot more process along the way and opportunity for public input. He noted the important part was the Resolution in front of Council was only to express support for the concept, it would not pass it or put it into effect. He shared from a dollar value, Baker Tilly, our financial consultant, was able to project a number of about \$400,000.00 per year for our community, Eagle Park specifically. He felt we also needed to have a 20-year sunset on this tax, which is what was going through the legislature.

Dan Weigold questioned if this would include food trucks or just establishments. Mayor Daniel was not positive but thought it would and would get a definite answer.

Tad Varga felt this was a cool and smart thing for our community going forward as a way to fund the park. He felt it was a great incentive to have a facility or park for people to go to but also help keep people in this community.

Mayor Daniel pointed out that, outside of maybe the baseball program, Whitley County residents do not pay to use our parks, but they do eat in Columbia City so was another way in which we can help support our park system.

Walt Crowder felt this was a great way for the future. He advised this was work in progress and having the funding behind it would give us opportunity to enhance the different things we need. He noted 5 years ago we did not even know Eagle Park as a park but looking at where we will be in the next 5 years we will still be work in progress.

Jennifer Romano shared they have looked at the many different ways to fund this park. She felt this was probably one of the best options from the standpoint that the economic impact on every individual was not as harsh as it would be if it were put across the board. She noted it was helpful knowing the local restaurant owners were in support of it as well.

Mayor Daniel felt this was a great opportunity for us to be able to fund the future phases of this park. He shared when looking at the totality of our tax burden within the City, we were still in the lowest quarter of City tax rates across the State of Indiana.

Melanie Love questioned baked goods such as bake sales, etc. Mayor Daniel advised the tax would only be on commercial restaurants; it would not affect non-profits, school functions or anything like that.

Motion was made by Dan Weigold to support the Resolution, Tad Varga seconded the motion, all voted aye.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS **Chip Hill** – working towards getting water meter real time reads, continue to work on putting in a sewer line at 100 S and 300 E.

Shawn Lickey – looking into apps for customers to see utility information, project finally started on transfer switch with AEP, Tree Board work almost complete. **Terry Wherry** – network outage scheduled to update firewall and install certificates. **Mike Cook** – working with Donohue & Associates on force main project, signed contract with DR Lab Services to test equipment, cleaning SDI force main, meeting on SCADA system. **Mark Green** – overlook rebuild completed, putting baseball and softball teams together, preparing bathrooms for opening, athletic building roof blown off and working towards repairs, skating rink put away and pickle ball nets are up, installed new lights at baseball fields, main pump went out at Aquatics Facility and were working to get it repaired or replaced, plan approval from DNR for Eagle Park. **Fire Dept.** - Mayor Daniel reported for Tom LaRue in that the 3 new volunteers were signed up for Firefighter 1 & 11, preparing quotes for new fire engine, new generator will be installed next month, received gas meters. **Water Dept.** – Mayor Daniel reported for Mike Shoda in that a PLC went down at the water plant and was getting quotes to replace. **Street Dept.** – Mayor Daniel reported for Kelly Cearbaugh in that the mulch is still available at the back of Morsches Park, junk pickup scheduled for week of April 17 for the West side and week of April 24 for the East side.

YOUTH COUNCIL Karmen Brown was present to share what the Youth Council has been doing.

PARKING Dan Weigold reported that Nathan Bilger was working on some parking changes. He shared they were looking at both the City and County ordinances and how they can make parking better.

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION Tad Varga reported they discovered the LML property was never tested for metals in the soil; it was something the State forgot to inform us that needed done. He advised they do not have idea when that is going to happen.

CHICKENS Melanie Love of 113 E. Market Street shared information on other States who allow or are considering allowing chickens.

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

Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle