

**COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 2023
6:00 PM**

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

Council Members

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

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

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

ORDINANCE 2023-4: AMENDING CHAPTER 32 – BOARD OF WORKS – 2ND READING

Motion was made by Jennifer Romano to read Ordinance 2023-4 by title only, Jennifer Middleton seconded the motion, all voted aye. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2023-4 an ordinance amending Chapter 32 regarding the Board of Public Works for the City of Columbia City, Indiana.

Mayor Daniel noted this was a cleanup ordinance to ensure everything the State has changed over time is codified into our ordinances.

Motion was made by Jennifer Middleton to approve Ordinance 2023-4 on second and final reading, Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, all voted aye.

UTILITY RATE INCREASE RECOMMENDATION Mayor Daniel reminded Council of the presentation by Baker Tilly in February about the overall concept of where we are at with utilities. He mentioned it has been discussed in the past the idea of instead of waiting until the last minute to do a big adjustment, look at the rates yearly and move forward with any adjustments needed. He explained the Utility Rate Advisory Board was made up of 5 members, one from each Council district as well as one resident who is outside of the City limits, are all rate customers of ours and have also reviewed the Baker Tilly plan that Council saw in February.

Lee Baatz, Chairman of the Utility Rate Advisory Board, was present to discuss the recommendations. He shared the Utility Board met with the Mayor and Clerk Treasurer to review the report. He noted this approach was a little different in that they looked at all of the utilities separately and made recommendations. He advised after review of the plan, the Utility Board is recommending the City Council approve the first year of the 3-year plan for the water, sewage and stormwater utilities as set forth in the 2023 rate study prepared by Baker Tilly

Municipal Advisors. He advised with respect to the electric utility, the Utility Board was recommending City Council approve a 2% across the board increase, excluding the wholesale rate Tracker. He advised they were also recommending they come back next year to review rates for 2024 and 2025. He noted the water, sewer and stormwater rate increases in the proposal were very modest; in the neighborhood of 2% - 4% for the first year. He explained with respect to the electric utility, those rates were passed on in 2 ways; through the wholesale purchase power Tracker rate, which has a quarterly delay but can go up or down, and then the base rates. He shared in the report Baker Tilly combined those rates but the Utility Board was recommending to keep them separately; leave the purchase power Tracker alone and let it operate as it currently does and recommend a 2% increase in the base rates. He shared they considered 2% a very modest increase at a time when inflation is at 5%.

Mayor Daniel appreciated the work of the Utility Rate Advisory Board and felt we were unique in some ways in that we have a citizen lead Board that gives these recommendations. He very much concurred with what Lee shared and felt one of the things they were hoping to get out of yearly reviews was to be more responsive to changes in the market rather than waiting until that last minute.

Mayor Daniel asked department heads what increases they were seeing in their supply lines. Mike Shoda shared his chlorine seems to increase monthly; they used to pay \$80/tank and were now paying about \$180/tank. He shared brass prices, if you can get it, were increasing. Mayor Daniel noted it was both the raising in price as well as the delay in getting the material. Mike Shoda noted they could not get a cost on piping or anything anymore; it is whatever the cost is when it is delivered. Mike Cook advised pumps he ordered last November will not be delivered until August or September of this year. He shared before the cost would have been \$15,000 - \$17,000 but has about \$30,000 in it now. He advised the lead times were ridiculous. Kelly Cearbaugh agreed with the delays in getting material and doubling costs.

Mayor Daniel shared, ultimately no one likes to do anything with the rates, but the measured approach was much better than waiting until the last minute. He advised the other piece was that the City was mandated by the State of Indiana to run solvent utilities; utilities that are not gaining a ton of profit but at the same time are not in the negative.

Tad Varga questioned how soon the rates would go into effect. Mayor Daniel explained from a timeframe perspective there was a schedule that would have to be followed. Rosie Coyle shared, right now, she has the public hearing and final ordinance reading at the June 13 meeting, but rates would not go into effect until July.

Jennifer Romano questioned if things continue to go up, would it be possible we would need more of an increase next time. Mayor Daniel noted the way in which it has been laid out is to try and do steps along the way; he thought the first increase being discussed would be less than \$6.00 per month overall. He explained the challenge is that customers get bills from various companies but for us everything is on one bill but with this plan, we will still be lower than our friends at NREMC on the electric side and our friends at Churubusco on the drinking water side. He felt by taking a year-by-year approach it was a more responsive and responsible approach.

Motion was made by Jennifer Romano to move forward and have Attorney McNagny draft an ordinance, Tad Varga seconded the motion, all voted aye.

SENATE BILL 248: INDIANA DRIVING RECORD CARD PROJECT: ED

RODRIGUEZ Ed Rodriguez was present to discuss support of Senate Bill 248 which addresses driving privileges for undocumented citizens or those not able to comply with the current BMV requirements to obtain a State issued ID card or driver's license. He advised the proposal was under committee investigation last summer then finally went into Homeland Security and Transportation Committee and passed by a vote of 5 to 4. He explained this proposal has been in the works for years but fails due to what the legislative body considers a lack of support. He shared it recently stalled once again at the appropriation stage. He advised this truly was a bi-partisan effort with a total of 9 Republicans and 2 Democrats who were co-sponsoring this effort.

Mr. Rodriguez shared members of La Voz Unida have been working to meet with Senators and Representatives across Northern Indiana to ask for their support and advocacy but with their busy schedules it has been a struggle to present to them. He advised they have now taken the approach to take leaders such as City Council to provide a Resolution that would serve as a symbol of the support and advocacy that Columbia City offers to the proposal now known as the Driving Privilege Card Program.

Mr. Rodriguez distributed and reviewed a packet of information from the group La Voz Unida. He noted there were 19 States across the United States that were now allowing this type of program to exist. He reviewed the requirements for applying for one of these cards and stressed this card could not be used for identification purposes, could not be used to vote, pass security at an airport or drive in other states. He advised they have 11 Resolutions from other cities and towns who have provided their support.

Mr. Rodriguez believed this was a Country of law and order. He advised most of these folks were here undocumented or without permission, so why should we give them the privilege to drive. He agreed, but advised these folks were going to drive whether we want them to or not and questioned would it not be better to try to harness these drivers, teach them our laws, force them to go through a driving instructor through the BMV and have the BMV vet them all. He added they would have to carry full coverage insurance on their vehicles whereas now they are not.

Mr. Rodriguez shared another key point was voting. He advised the number of organizations involved in this at the State level was huge. He shared they have had discussions of making the card round so if someone walks in and attempts to vote, it would be flagged as not valid. He advised they were trying to prevent the card from being used for identification purposes.

Mayor Daniel shared he and the AIM Board of Directors were supportive of this, and a lot of their concerns were addressed. He advised it really was specifically for the purpose of protecting us when it comes to our driver's insurance if in the unfortunate case of an accident with someone who does not have an ID or necessarily driving legally.

Council members requested time to review the information.

Gary Parrett questioned if this passes, what would make these folks want to get one of these cards. Mr. Rodriguez advised he thought the meeting was at 7 pm so the rest of the group was in route, but if they knew just one of these people; there are mothers who are taking their kids to school who are being pulled over and handcuffed in front of their children. He advised these people were just scared to death. He stressed this would be a privilege; this is not a right by any means. He stated we pay \$17.50 for a driver's license that is good for 5 years and these folks would have to pay a proposed \$50 for one year, plus they would have to come back every year with the proper documentation and be vetted again. He advised these people just want to comply and this program would bring them that.

Tad Varga questioned if they have put together a Performa or expected number of people who would sign up for something like this. Mr. Rodriguez advised the real problem was there are those folks who live in the shadows. He shared the numbers they are going by are, Indiana has about 7 million and as a rule 25% of that number is Hispanic so could easily say there are about 1 million folks out there and is going to continue to grow.

Jennifer Romano was curious about the degree of fear in that if they apply for this card and then are concerned they would be put on a list. Mr. Rodriguez advised they addressed that in their information sessions. He explained the BMV was a State agency but the FBI and ICE were federal agencies and they do not share databases. He understood databases are hacked every day and nothing is secure but advised they tell these people to be open to getting these cards. He stressed they were really after the insurance component and right on the heels of that was the education piece.

PARKING ISSUES – SPENCER STREET Tad Varga shared there was a concern presented from a resident regarding the parking on Spencer Street across from the Catholic Church. He thought this had been discussed several years ago. Mayor Daniel recalled as well but was not sure anything was ever pursued by the resident.

Gary Parrett explained about 6 months ago he was contacted regarding a parking issue surrounding a driveway on Spencer Street. He advised he looked into it and recommended making it no parking from the east side of the driveway to Line Street which would open the view for turning onto Line Street.

After additional discussion, Council was in agreement to move forward with establishing no parking from the east side of the driveway on Spencer Street to Line Street.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS **Chip Hill** – softball and baseball started, bids for Eagle Park received. **Mike Cook** – Board of Works approved moving forward with force main and pump projects at Main Street and Jefferson Street, update on concrete pour correction for CSO project, setting base for new sampler, new process for grease trap warnings and fines, annual inspections completed. **Kelly Cearbaugh** – working with water department on storm line on West Van Buren Street, concrete work, fixed sanitary sewer main on Old Trail, televising and cleaning in Columbia Shores, limb pickup, appliance pickup, running street sweeper. **Tom LaRue** – repairs to Truck 101 & 102, dual training with Columbia Township at burn facility, air packs tested, generator installed but were waiting on a part, waiting to do installation and training on gas

meters, update on hiring process. **Terry Wherry** – network outage to update servers. **Mike Shoda** – hook up to new jail, collapsed tile on Emancipation Court. **Gary Parrett** – Officer Campbell & Thomas graduated from police academy, Officer Cornejo started, update on hiring process for police and communications.

MAYOR REPORT Mayor Daniel gave an update on the Citywide junk pickup, he reported on Arbor Day celebrations as well as the downtown cleanup. He advised the State of the City address is scheduled for May 5.

ARTS COMMISSION Jennifer Romano shared they were continuing to move forward with planning. She advised they were applying for a grant to assist with financial costs of the things they want to do.

CHICKENS Jennifer Romano reported they have been crafting an ordinance regarding chickens. She advised there were still many questions to be answered.

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION Tad Varga reported the testing on the old LML property did not go well and more will have to be done in June.

Tad Varga reported the Redevelopment Commission gave Columbia City Connect a \$5,000 matching grant for projects and things they will be doing.

MELANIE LOVE – CHICKENS Melanie Love of 113 E. Market Street was present to discuss misconceptions regarding hens and chickens.

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

Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle