

**COMMON COUNCIL  
TUESDAY, JULY 9, 2024  
6:00 PM**

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

**Council Members**

Jennifer Middleton – Present  
Leslee Robinson - Present  
Jennifer Romano – Present via phone  
Tad Varga – Present  
Daniel Weigold – Present

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members present. Mayor Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance led by Asher and Messiah Helsel.

**MINUTES** Leslee Robinson made a motion to approve the June 25, 2024, meeting minutes as presented. Tad Varga seconded the motion. On the voice vote Leslee Robinson, Jennifer Middleton, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold voted aye, Jennifer Romano abstained.

**UTILITY RATE ADVISORY BOARD PRESENTATION** Lee Baatz, member of the Utility Rate Advisory Board, was present to discuss the rates and recommendation of the Utility Rate Board. He shared that a year ago Baker Tilly Consulting Firm presented a three-year proposal on rates; however, felt they may have overlooked operations for future years. He reminded the Council that last year the Utility Rate Advisory Board recommended that the City proceed and adopt the first-year implementation of the water, sewer, and the storm water rates. He advised with respect to the electric operations, Baker Tilly looked at both the purchase power and the operating costs together, but it was recommended that that they not do that and let the purchase power tracker adjustment continue as it was scheduled and recommended a 2% across the board increase in the base rates of the electric utility. He expressed that one of the beauties of the three-year plan is if things go awry, it can be adjusted.

Mr. Baatz reported the Utility Board met to review the various financial statements and recommended a very similar approach again this year. He explained they were recommending the City Council approve year 2 of the proposal for water, sewer, and the storm water utility. He advised with respect to the electric utility, they were recommending a 4% across the board increase exclusive of the purchase power tracker adjustment. He added that they were recommending they come back a year from now and look at year three.

Mr. Baatz commented on their recommendation for a higher base rate on the electric. He explained a year ago there was the 2% increase along with letting the purchase power tracker adjustment flow through and in addition there was a pretty significant increase in the purchase power costs from our supplier Indiana Municipal Power Agency. He pointed out on the chart presented showing the five-year usage that starting with the year 2019 the electric consumption for Columbia City Municipal has been declining every year, although a slight decline, it declines nonetheless. He noted a number of reasons for that could be due to the high school moving out of the city limits, to the efficiency of appliances in our homes, LED lighting and more outdoor solar lighting. He suggested that customers were conserving and felt that was a good thing, but it does deprive the utility of the revenue. He pointed out that a year ago, they recommended a 2% increase in the base rates for the electric but that pretty much evaporated just by the decline in kWh consumption. He advised the electric utility is

really kind of tight of cash and with the major expenditure last year of the transmission upgrade project it left very little cash reserves remaining in the electric utility account. He noted that all of the utilities are really kind of low on cash reserves.

Mayor Daniel felt we have been fairly conservative in the projects we have had to do across all of our utilities. He stressed that materials were up significantly, as well as purchase power cost is up. He added that costs were up across the board, including I & M, AEP, down in Indianapolis they have an increase, everybody's power is going up. He suggested some of it had to do with the EPA and things happening with federal regulations and the coal fired plant things happening across the nation because of the current federal administration. He advised everybody is getting hit in the same area as they try to move toward a greener grid, and at the end of the day it costs more to produce power now than it did a year or two or three ago.

Mr. Baatz noted our rates were still comparable to those utilities around us and were lower than the investor owned. Mayor Daniel felt we were about in the middle when it comes to municipal's. Mr. Baatz explained, in going back to the chart, as costs continue to increase and sales remain stable or are declining, we really do not have much of an alternative other than to raise the electric rates or go out of business, and we do not want the utility operations to go out of business.

Mayor Daniel advised this would be on the agenda for the next meeting if Council so chooses to accept the recommendation. He shared that Baker Tilly put the numbers together for the next phase and to give some perspective of what it might look like, sewer would be about \$4.60 per month, water \$0.71 a month, stormwater \$.61 a month, and electric about \$6.00.

Leslee Robinson shared in discussions with Mike Shoda he had asked for the two-year rate increase at once and questioned the decision to not go with that. She did not feel \$0.71 was going to go very far, especially with some of the big projects coming up. Mike Shoda advised they have work they have done and continue to do and just do their best to make it through. Mr. Baatz advised they accepted the recommendations of the Baker Tilly Consulting Firm as they did not want to separate one of the utilities from the other. He advised they were not necessarily opposed to an additional increase on the water side. Mayor Daniel shared, from his perspective, the Utility Rate Advisory Board considered the plan set up by Baker Tilly, which was based on the information coming from the superintendents as to what projects they were projecting out and chose to just stick with that plan. He advised that the Council has the authority to make the decision on how to proceed.

Mayor Daniel questioned if it was the preference of the Council to prepare an ordinance that reflects the Utility Rate Advisory Board's recommendation. Council agreed to move forward.

Rosie Coyle confirmed the recommendation was a 2% increase for everything except electric. Mayor Daniel read the recommendation from the Utility Rate Advisory Board which was that the City move forward with year two of the three-year plan for the water, sewer and stormwater utilities as set forth in that rate study. He continued with respect to the electric utility it is recommended that the City Council approve a 4% across the board increase in the City's base electric rates, excluding the wholesale base rate tracker with the base rates being defined as the rates currently in effect, less the purchase power cost embedded in the rate structure. He advised that recommendation was passed unanimously by the Board.

Jennifer Middleton pointed out on the graph that it reflects a 4.5% increase. Mayor Daniel believed the difference to be that the tracker is included in that number. He advised the tracker is kind of an exterior piece but part of our rate structure. He explained it is a variable based on the power cost so as the power costs go up or down the tracker adjusts in and of itself. He advised the Utility Rate Advisory Board has recommended keeping it out and on its own for now. Jennifer Romano noted on that

same page that it states the calculation was based on 4% increase across the board and does not include the tracking factor.

Mayor Daniel thanked Mr. Baatz for making the presentation.

**ORDINANCE 2024-9 AMENDMENT TO MOBILE NON-FOOD AND FOOD VENDORS – 2<sup>ND</sup> READING** Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2024-9 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion. On the call of the voice vote, all voted unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2024-9 an ordinance amending Chapter 114 Restaurant and Chapter 112 Mobile Non-food Vendors of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Columbia City, Indiana.

Mayor Daniel stated that there was some conversation in the Board of Works meeting regarding the actual permit and how those permits were being processed. He shared that there was also discussion regarding the fees and to make sure it was clear in the ordinance that if the vendor was going to be using public infrastructure such as parking spaces, streets, etcetera, that they come to the Board of Works for approval ahead of time. He advised the Board of Works did not approve any kind of fee schedule and will be on the next Board of Works agenda to talk through.

Leslee Robinson made a motion to approve Ordinance 2024-9 on second and final reading. Dan Weigold seconded the motion. On the call of the voice vote, all voted unanimously.

**DEPARTMENT REPORTS** **Chip Hill** - pickleball courts have been placed at Eagle Park and have to wait 30 days for those to be sealed, concrete for the sidewalks is going to start coming in the next couple of weeks and the swing structure should be happening soon, in Westgate they are hoping to start pouring curbs on Lawrence Street and Buddale Drive, they are anticipating information from the engineer on the Blue River Trail project to the high school. **Shawn Lickey** – update on the Jefferson Street and Rolling Hills Project, worked through SCADA issues last week, two individuals accepted offers for employment today; one is transferring from the water department and the other is a gentleman moving back from Texas who already has completed lineman school and has his Class A CDL. **Tom LaRue** – Certified Driver Operator class has concluded, City fireworks brought up some concerns for the future with the development of the Connie Dye property and may have to redo some measurements to see if it is even possible to continue having the fireworks there, 4-H is next week, meeting with Attorney McNagny later in the month to review ordinances that may need to be updated, update on new firefighter, two of his firefighters will be out on medical leave due to surgeries, will be replacing AED batteries at the different departments. **Matt Heiden** - picnic tables are a big hit, sinkhole issue addressed in the parking lot at Morsches Park, getting ready for JFL and soccer. **Mike Shoda** – Board of Works approved hiring of employee to fill open position, update on north water tower. **Gary Parrett** - update on the two new hires, they have 16 applications for the current hiring process and will continue to take applications up until the testing date on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, he reported for the Communications Department they have 14 applications with the process ending on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, First Friday and the Farmers Market were a success this last time with no issues, posted ‘No Parking’ signs and talked with the residents on Spencer Street due to the bridge closure on SR 9, Board of Works approved the purchase of 2 Ford Explorers from City Ford, they have firearms qualifications this week, Officer Anspach and Officer Leatherman attended the Indiana School Resource Officer Conference and are ready for the next school year. **Mike Cook** - material has been ordered for their breakroom remodel, update on Phase III of the SCADA project, having a meeting this week to finalize the 600 E. project for putting the new pump base in.

**MAYOR REPORT** Mayor Daniel reported they will be doing an inspection of the current jail with a firm, the President of the Redevelopment Commission and a couple of County officials to see what the conditions are at the jail. He advised there was

potential for the City to maybe acquire that building. He shared that he received some pretty good comments about the fireworks celebration. He advised he would be headed South tomorrow afternoon for an AIM Board of Directors meeting so would not be in the office. He reminded everyone of the Employee Appreciation Luncheon on Monday. He reported there was an event happening in Warsaw on Wednesday regarding US 30. He advised that legislators and state leaders will be in attendance. He shared that July 20<sup>th</sup> was the start of the weeklong Taste of the City event. He explained they were partnering with as many local restaurants as they could to offer a special or something that would give our residents an opportunity to stop in at a local restaurant that they have never been to before.

Having no further business to come before the Council, Mayor Daniel called the meeting adjourned.

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Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

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Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle