

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING  
COMMON COUNCIL  
March 27, 2023**

The Common Council of the City of Rensselaer met on March 27, 2023 in regular session in Council Chambers of City Hall. Mayor Stephen Wood called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. followed by invocation offered by Michelle Bartel with First Presbyterian Church and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Answering roll call were: Mayor Stephen Wood; Clerk-Treasurer Shelby Keys; Council Members Russ Overton, Bill Hollerman, Noelle Weishaar, George Cover, Ernest Watson, Jr; Building Commissioner Kevin Cochran; Park Supt. Joe Effinger; Fire Chief Kenny Haun; Police Chief Matt Anderson; Utility Office Manager Heather Smart; Electric Lead Line Foreman Lenny Larson; Asst. Street Supt. Bryce Black; Project Coordinator Jerry Lockridge; Gas Supt. Carol Lockridge; Harley Tomlinson with the Rensselaer Republican. City Attorney Jacob Ahler and Cemetery Caretaker Tony Baltes were absent.

Also in attendance were Robert Schenk with Rensselaer Adventures, Michelle Bartel, Josh Davis, Caleb DeJong, Stan Haines, Brienne Hooker, Gabrielle Taber, Ryan Marovich, Chris Janak with Bose McKinney & Evans, Jeff Phillips and Jim Miller.

The minutes of the March 13, 2023 regular council meeting were presented. There was a motion by Overton, second by Hollerman, to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

**Citizen Comments and Petitions:** Stan Haines spoke on behalf of the BZA and Plan Commission and expressed his appreciation for all the work Kevin Cochran did. Haines said both Cochran and Haun were always helpful and offered guidance.

**Public Hearing for St. Joseph's College Super Voluntary Annexation:** There was a motion by Overton, second by Hollerman, to close the regular meeting and open the public hearing. The motion passed unanimously.

Chris Janak discussed the annexation ordinance that was first introduced on March 13, 2023. The process for annexation is to introduce the ordinance, publish notice of a public hearing, adopt a fiscal plan and adopt the annexation ordinance. The fiscal plan must be adopted before the annexation ordinance and there must be 14 days in between the public hearing and the adoption of the ordinance.

Brienne Hooker had a few questions regarding the annexation. She thanked council for being respondent to her questions prior to the meeting. She asked who from the Saint Joe Board of Trustees has been working with the city on the annexation. Wood said Kim Morisette, CFO of Saint Joseph's College. Hooker asked if Bill Carroll has reached out to him. Wood said no. Hooker asked if Mike VanEekeren has reached out. Wood said yes, he signed the petition. Hooker asked if any other board members locally have reached out or if anyone present was from Saint Joe. There were no answers from the audience. Hooker asked if the council was aware if the whole SJC board voted on this matter. Wood said yes, he received a signed petition. Hooker said she is worried about the transparency from the Saint Joe board. Hooker asked if they have shared their strategic plans. Wood said no. Hooker asked if they shared anything about long-term plans for the buildings or anything dealing with campus. Wood said no. Hooker said she is asking questions as SJC has not been a valuable partner to our community since the closure in 2017. Wood said he has had many conversations with the CFO Morisette. Hooker said she (Morisette) is not the legal decider of anything on campus. Hooker was checking that the people who are legally responsible have been talking to the city. Wood said the board President VanEekeren signed the petition. Hooker asked what the utility loss to the city would be. Cover said \$3,700.00 for the year. Hooker asked if it makes sense that they are asking to do this to save \$3,700.00. Hooker asked what would be the benefit to Rensselaer. Cover said they don't have a plan, but they have a vision. He said a benefit to Rensselaer said it gives the city some control due to zoning if they are to sell-off or build. Cochran said another benefit is that if they are in city limits and they lose accreditation, they are no longer a not-for-profit and the city would receive taxes on any development out there. Hooker asked about the resolution and questioned page 8 pertaining to the city being responsible for the streets on campus. Wood said they dedicated the streets to the city. Hooker asked one street or all of them. Wood said they dedicated Schuster Road and that the County dedicated Sparling Ave and Daugherty Road. Janak said the rest of the streets within the campus will remain the college's responsibility. Wood said the infrastructure within the campus is old and it's theirs. Hooker said the resolution doesn't read that way. Janak said the fiscal plan does suggest the city will extend capital services. But, he said the ordinance says they will dedicate Schuster Road, but the remaining roads are private. The city will not maintain the private roads or private infrastructure. Wood said they are already serviced with electric, gas, water and sewage now. There won't be any capital improvements to those utilities.

Jim Miller asked what the city plans to gain or lose from this and if services have to be run to College Woods. Wood said College Woods is not being annexed. Miller asked about the old buildings that are in disarray on the campus. He said if they don't have any money, who is responsible for tearing them down. Wood said the campus is already in the buffer zone, regardless of annexation or not, the city would still have some sort of responsibility regarding the buildings. Miller said he thinks somebody walked away from there at some time with a lot of money. Cochran said a similar example would be Grandma's Kitchen. Miller said the city paid on that. Cochran said although it was in the buffer, the city still had some responsibility. Miller said not if it's in the buffer zone, the city wouldn't be responsible. Cochran said yes, the city would still be responsible regardless if it's in the buffer zone or city limits. Miller said outside of the buffer zone you wouldn't be responsible. Cochran said SJC is inside the buffer zone. Wood said they have a vision for the campus. Miller said a plan is better than a vision. Wood said he doesn't see where the problem is or what the hurt would be. Miller asked if they are still responsible for Lake Banet. Wood said yes. Miller questioned the liability with annexing the lake. Wood said that's why they don't allow anyone back to the lake or on campus. Cochran said all this does in change city limits, the campus is still private property. The city is not taking over SJC, the liability still falls on them. Cochran said he knows this is scary, but we've got to all work together to make this happen. One way or another we will be affected by it. Miller asked why we have to make this happen. Cochran asked him if he likes to sit back and watch something fall apart. Miller said they've let it fall apart without our help. Cochran said with most of our

jobs we are stabbed in the back, but that doesn't mean we stop helping people grow or get better. Cover said if SJC for some reason sold off part of the land to someone else, they wouldn't be a non-profit organization the city would have some control and receive taxes. Cochran said one of the city's biggest issue is housing and that land to the west of SJC would be prime area for housing development. Watson said there is movement this way. Coming down I-65 years ago there was nothing, now it's got buildings all along it. He said we need more housing and the only way to do that right now is to make areas available for development. Wood said we have a lot of people who commute to work in the city but don't live here. Miller said it has to be affordable housing. Wood said that what we're hoping for, single family affordable housing. Miller said just think what it would be like to have a good factory here that has good hours and that most people don't want to work swing shifts. Wood said someone is doing it. Miller said they don't want to. Wood said a job is a job. Miller said yeah, but there are good jobs. Weishaar said they have all taken considerable thought in the annexation. When they were approached, she weighed the pros and cons. She said they have to look long-term for the city and she doesn't know why we wouldn't do this. Haines said he is aware of a large, national sports marketing firm contacting someone in town about purchasing the athletic facilities on campus. That did not happen, but there is nothing to say it couldn't in the future, and that would be a big boom for the tax base.

There was a motion by Cover, second by Watson, to close the public hearing and open the regular council meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

**Resolution 07-2023, Redevelopment Commission Resolution RC-01-2023 Funds of Rensselaer Arts Program:**

Cochran explained that this has already been passed by the Redevelopment Commission and the Plan Commission. This resolution is for utilizing TIF funds for public art in town. It is not a set amount that will be utilized, it is just allowing the Redevelopment Commission to spend TIF funds to help support public art in Rensselaer. There was a motion by Cover, second by Overton, to approve the resolution. The motion passed unanimously.

**Resolution 08-2023, St Joseph's College Super Voluntary Annexation Fiscal Plan:** Janak explained that this resolution is for the fiscal plan to show the economic impact to the city the annexation would cause. He said it is pretty much break even from the beginning. Janak said annexation laws have changed in the previous years and it is much more difficult to annex. If any of the campus is sold off and goes private, the city would be left in the dark. There was a motion by Cover, second by Weishaar, to approve the resolution. The motion passed unanimously.

**2023 Community Crossings Matching Grant (CCMG) Bid Award:** J. Lockridge said the engineer's recommendation would be for Town and Country Paving with a bid of \$897,971.40 that includes alternate #2. Funding is available in MVH, EDIT and Riverboat that can utilized for the project. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Watson, to approve the bid and submit the information to the state. The motion passed unanimously.

**Public Relations Fund Request:** C. Lockridge requested \$3,100.00 from the public relations fund for the gas department open house. She has applied for a reimbursable grant that would cover these costs, if awarded. The open house is April 28<sup>th</sup> from 11-1. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Watson, to approve the fund request. The motion passed unanimously.

**Credit Card Statement:** Wood asked council for permission to sign the credit card activity log. There was a motion by Overton, second by Hollerman, to allow the mayor to sign the log. The motion passed unanimously.

**Wastewater PER Submittal:** J. Lockridge said a resolution was prepared to approve the PER and apply for SRF financing for the wastewater treatment plant improvements. This is part of the long-term control plan. These improvements are needed to meet the regulations for the outfall. Lockridge said they need to find funding for the project. Gabrielle Taber with Commonwealth said this preliminary engineering report will be sent to SRF for funding consideration. The deadline to submit is April 1<sup>st</sup>. Wood said this is to see if there is funding available from SRF for this project. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Watson, to submit the wastewater PER. The motion passed unanimously.

**Special Claims Register:** Smart said she turned in a claim today to do a transfer from the gas operating fund to the gas depreciation fund. There was a motion by Weishaar, second by Overton, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously.

**Committee Reports:** Cover said he wanted to re-evaluate the fines. The committee will consist of Overton, Davis and Cover.

**Administrative Comments:**

**Cover** said the school board appointment needs to be advertised in April. Interviews will be conducted the first of May.

**Watson** welcomed Josh Davis as the new building commissioner and said goodbye and good luck to Cochran.

**Keys** thanked the superintendents to taking her on tours of their facilities and introducing her to employees.

**Wood** had nothing.

**Overton** thanked Cochran for an excellent job over the past few years and wished him nothing but the best.

**Hollerman** had nothing.

**Weishaar** thanked Cochran for the job well done and welcomed Josh. She also thanked Brienne and Jim for coming and speaking.

**Claims Approval:** The claims were presented to council for its approval. There was a motion by Watson, second by over, to approve the claims. The motion passed unanimously.

**Superintendents Reports:**

**Police Dept:** Anderson had nothing.

**Law Dept:** Ahler was absent.

**Utility Office:** Smart had nothing.

**Building Dept:** Cochran introduced Josh Davis and thanked everyone for being good co-workers and friends.

**Fire Dept:** Haun had nothing.

**Electric Dept:** Larson asked for approval to hire one summer employee. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Watson, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously.

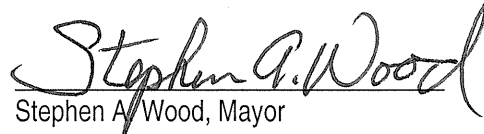
**Street, Sanitation, Water and Sewage:** Black said April 22<sup>nd</sup> is the electronic recycling day. J. Lockridge said clean-up week is May 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>. There was a proposal from Timber Tree Service to remove 8 trees along the highway at Brookside Park. The quote is for \$7,300.00 and there are funds in the EDIT fund to cover the costs. There was a motion by Cover, second by Watson, to approve the quote. The motion passed unanimously.

**Cemetery Dept:** Baltes was absent. Wood requested approval to hire one summer employee for the cemetery. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Cover, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously.

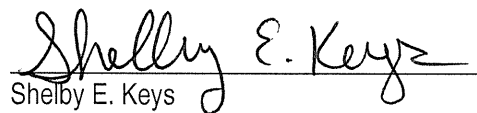
**Gas Dept:** C. Lockridge requested approval to hire two summer employees. There was a motion by Cover, second by Hollerman, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously.

**Park Dept:** Effinger asked for approval to hire one summer employee and he needs to put in ad for a full-time helper. There was a motion by Watson, second by Cover, to approve the request of one summer employee and replace the full-time employee that has left. The motion passed unanimously. Effinger said there is park board meeting scheduled for next Monday at 6:00 PM. The RUFC received 27 trees that will be planted throughout the city.

There being nothing more to come before council, there was a motion by Hollerman, second by Cover, to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

  
Stephen A. Wood, Mayor

Attest:

  
Shelby E. Keys  
Clerk-Treasurer

