

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
COMMON COUNCIL
May 8, 2023**

The Common Council of the City of Rensselaer met on May 8, 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 Doug Harris and the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Also in attendance were Robert Schenk with Rensselaer Adventures, Doug Harris with The Bridge Church, Nancy Klockow, Michelle Lindstrand, Kimberly Joseph, Kevin Arnold, Caleb DeJong, Stace Pickering, Nancy Studer and State Representative Kendell Culp.

The minutes of the April 24, 2023 regular council meeting were presented. There was a motion by Overton, second by Hollerman, to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent.

Citizen Comments and Petitions: Nancy Klockow stated she was concerned about what is happening with Van Rensselaer St. and the upcoming project. She was happy the streets are being redone, but is upset that the businesses were not included in the design of the project. The main concern is switching the parking spaces from diagonal to parallel. She is concerned for the safety of pedestrians crossing the street, the elderly, and people having to parallel park. She stated tried to set up a meeting with the Mayor, but it never happened. She brought up people parking in the lot near Fenwicks and using the alley to walk. She questioned if there were lights in the alley. Wilhite said there are no lights in the alley. Klockow said that is a concern and something that should be thought about. She wanted construction on Van Rensselaer St. to happen first, so that businesses can get back to being open full time. Klockow mentioned that there are handicap visitors that frequent the businesses. She wanted to make sure that the temporary sidewalk would hold wheelchairs and other handicap equipment. J. Lockridge said the reason for the parking being switched is to make the sidewalk wider and to accommodate a path that connects from Potawatomi Park. He said this has been part of the downtown plans for several years. Klockow asked when the street is done, where will the handicap parking be? She was told it would be on the ends. J. Lockridge said it would be on the west side of Van Rensselaer St. Klockow said a lot of business are in the middle and it will be difficult for elderly or handicap people to get to those businesses. J. Lockridge said he has talked with the engineers and a portion of the sidewalks will be done at a time to minimize the amount of disruption to the businesses. They may do some work on Saturdays and Sundays to accommodate businesses during the week. Klockow said she's open Friday, Saturday and Sunday so it needs to be done different days than that. Studer said since the businesses weren't asked to give their input during the planning stage, they are asking now for the parking to stay the same. Studer asked if the designers could be asked if there is a reason they can't just keep the parking how it is. Klockow said its just lines. Wood said the plans are done, but that he can ask. Klockow stated they are losing their handicap parking and access for people to get to their businesses. Watson said let us take the first step to ask and talk with the engineers.

State Representative Kendell Culp said he was starting to visit towns and cities within his district. He said he was asked to continue to see the new EMS building through completion from when he served as County Commissioner. The EMS building is located within city limits and the contractors doing the construction have received an invoice from the Utility Office regarding tap fees. The county was hoping to have those fees waived. The fees total \$5,000.00. Culp said the county and the city have had a long-standing tradition of not charging for those types of things. Wood said the city has waived building permits and other things like that in the past, but never tap fees. He believes there is ordinance that doesn't allow the city to waive tap fees. Culp said he didn't want to go against an ordinance, but that it will serve the city. Wood asked Ahler what he thought. Ahler said he would want to review the ordinance. Cover said this service is essential to the whole county. Ahler will review the ordinance and report back at the next meeting.

Ordinance 14-2023, Amendment #3 to the 2023 Salary Ordinance: Keys said council decided at the last meeting that they wanted to give an \$80.00 biweekly raise to the Utility Office Manager. There was a motion by Cover, second by Hollerman, to approve the ordinance. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent.

Resolution 16-2023, PER Acceptance: J. Lockridge said this resolution would be to approve the PER that was presented at the public hearing on April 24th. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Watson, to approve the resolution. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent.

Resolution 17-2023, Signatory Authorization Resolution: J. Lockridge said this resolution would allow the Mayor to be the authorized signatory for all SRF Loan documentation. There was a motion by Watson, second by Cover, to approve the resolution. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent.

Resolution 18-2023, May Gas Tracker: C. Lockridge reported that this tracker reflects a 9.75¢ decrease per 100 cubic feet of gas. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Overton, to approve the resolution. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent.

Resolution 19-2023, White Castle Abatement Declaratory Resolution: Ahler said this declaratory resolution is for the White Castle tax abatement. There are two locations: 809 N. Melville and 701 N. Melville. He said this is covered by statute and that tonight the statement of benefits form is to be reviewed and that an economic revitalization area is

declared. Once this resolution is approved, a notice is published for a public hearing, after the hearing a confirmatory resolution would be passed. This is for a 7-year tax abatement that is outlined in the resolution and will cover personal and real property. His recommendation is to approve the resolution. There was a motion by Cover, second by Hollerman, to approve the resolution. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent.

Cemetery Road Paving: Baltes said he has a quote from Town & Country Paving to sealcoat, fix cracks, patch work and repair roads at the cemetery. The quote is for \$18,000.00 and there is money within the cemetery budget to cover the cost. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Watson, to approve the quote. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent.

Consideration/Review of Fire Truck Purchase: Haun said he sent an email out regarding the update for fire trucks. He found out that all new trucks purchased after 2026 have to meet new zero emissions laws. The current build time for a new truck is 28 months. The price for a new truck today is almost \$950,000.00. If the city waits to order one when the new laws go into effect, the price will be \$1,500,000.00 due to increasing annual costs. There is currently nothing wrong with the truck now, but it is 26 years old. The current truck can be certified until it is 30 years old. Cover asked if it had to be zero emissions by 2027? Haun said that's when the law takes effect. Anything manufactured in 2026 and beyond has to meet the new standard. Cover asked if there were grants for this that could be pursued. Haun said the next grant cycle is in March 2024, which would be too late to get the price quoted today. Watson said it all sounds good, but there are too many other things going on right now. He asked when the last time the truck was inspected. Haun said it gets inspected every year. Watson said if it turns out that the truck can't be certified, to inform council. Haun was told to look for grants.

Administrative Comments:

Hollerman had nothing.

Overton said great job during clean-up week.

Wood complimented the clean-up crews.

Keys had nothing.

Watson said awhile back wastewater education had been discussed and questioned what was happening with that. Black said he went to the high school in November and spoke to about 75 juniors and seniors. Those conversations continued to the apprenticeship program that the city has a few employees enrolled in. Black was approached to represent the city on a committee with the Indiana CTE. A curriculum was put together and taken to the Senate Utilities Committee a couple of weeks ago. Water education will be offered in high schools soon. They have asked if Rensselaer would be interested in being a pilot utility for the program. Watson asked what it would take for Rensselaer to be that showcase pilot program. Black said he has a meeting with them next week to get more specifics on what it will look like. The biggest concern is finding somebody to teach the curriculum.

Cover complimented Black on clean-up week and a great job. Cover said the deadline for those interested in serving on the School Board has passed. Two individuals submitted information and interviews will be set-up with each of them. A recommendation will be given at the next council meeting.

Weishaar was absent.

Claims Approval: The claims were presented to council for its approval. There was a motion by Overton, second by Watson, to approve the claims. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent.

Superintendents Reports:

Police Dept: Anderson said 41 vehicles were identified as fitting the abandoned vehicle statute. All were either moved by the owner or brought into compliance, except for one.

Law Dept: Ahler said he's had a lot of back and forth with the lawyer for the EDA brick street project. They wanted more information on the title search. Everything was sent to them, he didn't get a response but heard from J. Lockridge that we were given the green light to proceed.

Utility Office: Smart had nothing.

Building Dept: Davis said there is a BZA meeting this Thursday at 6:00 PM. Bryan Culp is asking for a variance of use to operate a firearms retail business out of his house in Curtis Creek Estates. It will be online only. Weapons will be on the premise, but there will not be any pick-ups from his residence. All sales will be shipped. Davis has been reviewing members on the Advisory Plan Commission and the BZA Commission. According to state laws, some changes may need to be made. He will meet with Ahler and update council at the next meeting. All of the software in the Building Dept will be moved to online. This will work for permits, inspections, business licenses, and zoning violations.

Fire Dept: Haun had nothing.

Electric Dept: Wilhite had nothing.

Street, Sanitation, Water and Sewage: Black said the totals for clean-up week were 19 employees per day, 13 loads of metal, 38 tons of yard waste, 8 gaylords of electronics, 72 tires, 17 tons of brush and 191.8 tons of trash. J. Lockridge said the new main lift station is operational and the switch has been made over from the old lift station. The old lift station has been demoed and the project should be wrapping up shortly.

Cemetery Dept: Baltes said thank you for approving the road paving.

Gas Dept: C. Lockridge had nothing.

Park Dept: Effinger said there were over 20 teams at a tournament this weekend. They have tournaments scheduled for the next two weeks.

There being nothing more to come before council, there was a motion by Watson, second by Cover, to adjourn. The motion passed by majority, with Weishaar absent, and the meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Stephen A. Wood
Stephen A. Wood, Mayor

Attest:

Shelby E. Keys
Shelby E. Keys
Clerk-Treasurer