

Mayor Lee called the Sterling City Council to order at 6:30 pm on Tuesday September 20, 2021. Roll call. Present: Mayor Lee, Aldermen Retha Elston, Josh Johnson, Joe Martin, Christine Wilen, Kaitlyn Ekquist and Jim Wise. Absent: None.

Also attending were City Attorney Tim Zollinger, City Manager Scott Shumard, Finance Director Cindy Von Holten, Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt (Zoom), Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader, Fire Chief Michael Dettman, Police Chief Alex Chavira, and City Clerk Teri Sathoff.

There were no communications from visitors.

Heather Sotelo with the Greater Sterling Development Corporation addressed the Council on the lack of housing and workforce in the City of Sterling.

Sotelo stated that the housing study that was done by the Council in the spring of 2021 shows that there is a lack of rentals in the area. The study shows our community is short 175 low income housing, 35 Senior housing and 20 market rate housing. Sotelo stated she contacted all of the major housing units and 2 landlords that have 55 or more rental units, all had extensive waiting lists. Sotelo emphasized that this shows there are no places available for a young professional to rent. Sotelo stated that the housing issue is something that needs to be City driven.

The second issue that Sotelo wanted to discuss was the lack of workforce, since the fall of 2016 the area was considered at full employment. The idea of recruiting from high unemployment places like West Virginia, New Mexico and Puerto Rico has been discussed. Sotelo emphasized that we need to recruit from outside the area, it is not wise to recruit employees from our neighboring communities. Currently, there are approximately 1,000 available jobs in Sterling. Sotelo stated we do not have people on unemployment, women have left the work force because of child care issues, people have left the area, people are COVID weary and baby boomers have left the workforce.

Alderman Wise stated that when he was with the City of Belvidere a partnership was formed with the economic development group and realtors, to create more housing, he asked Sotelo if she is willing and prepared to partner with the City in doing this because it will take all of the partners to work together. Sotelo stated that makeup of the City of Belvidere is different from the City of Sterling. The City of Belvidere has a housing and planning department, Sterling does not have that nor does Sterling have an assistant City Manager.

Mayor Lee asked Sotelo if this information has been presented to the local industries and if so what has the reaction from them been. Sotelo stated that only a couple of businesses have had this information presented to them, there will be a regional meeting in October to get the information out.

Alderman Johnson asked Sotelo what she needs from the Council, she stated she would like to see Council to make timely decisions when options become available.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- A. Approval of Minutes.
- B. Approval of Bills and Payroll.
- C. Purchase of Laserfiche Software.
- D. Proclamation for Fire Prevention Week October 3rd through October 9th 2021.
- E. Trick or Treat Hours.
- F. Petition to Waive Fees to rent Grandon for "Praying the Rosary for our Country" event.
- G. Pay Request #3 to Martin and Company for 1st Avenue in the amount of \$426,195.80.
- H. Pay Request #2 for Former National Training Building Demolition Renovation to Gehrke Construction in the amount of \$5,469.30.

Motion seconded by Alderman Wilen. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Martin, Wilen, Johnson, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Mayor Lee read and presented Fire Chief Dettman with the Fire Prevention week Proclamation. Fire Prevention Week is October 3 through October 9, 2021. The theme for 2021 Fire Prevention week is Learn the Sounds of Fire Safety. Mayor Lee thanked the firefighters in attendance for their service.

Interim Fire Chief Michael Dettman was promoted to the rank of Chief, Dettman was pinned by his wife Micki Dettman. Chief Dettman was congratulated by all the members of the Council.

Alderman Elston made a motion to Approve Pay Request #1 to Schindler Elevator Corporation in the amount of \$122,101.99; seconded by Alderman Martin. Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt stated that final measurements have been done, the parts are six to eight weeks out. The elevator will be down for approximately one month. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Martin, Wilen, Johnson, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Mayor Lee opened the public hearing for the Lincoln Highway Redevelopment Tax Increment Financing District at 7:06 pm. There were no questions or comments from the public, Alderman Wise asked the developer what the timeline is for the property to be occupied. The developer, Chris, stated the VA portion of the property will be approximately 60 days. The other retail space will be 18 – 24 months. Mayor Lee closed the public hearing at 7:08 pm.

Alderman Ekquist made a motion to Approve Ordinance 2021-09-24 vacating and rescinding prior grants of usage given to the railroad in the area of the riverfront and declaring abandoned and owned by the city by virtue of adverse possession any such claimed spurs or track rights, all of which are presently claimed by the Union Pacific Railroad Company; seconded by Alderman Johnson. City Attorney Zollinger stated that this occurred when Union Pacific required the City to purchase three spurs in the area of Avenue B. Alderman Johnson asked if there was a timeline on this, Zollinger was not able to commit to a timeline. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Martin, Wilen, Johnson, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Alderman Johnson made a motion to Authorize the Mayor to sign the Fiber License Agreement and Understanding of Cooperation Agreement with Surf Air Wireless; Seconded by Alderman

Martin. Cesare Baratta, the Sr. Vice President of Surf Broadband Solutions gave a presentation to the City Council. Baratta stated that Surf Broadband Solutions has been in business since 1999 they would like to make the City of Sterling a gigabit community. They are currently working 25 different communities. Baratta stated that there will be no expense to the City, they have a strong investor that covers the expenses. Surf Broadband asks the City to partner with them to get the fiber rolled out, they ask for streamline permit processes, the ability to collaborate on construction projects and assistance with marketing. The fiber will all be underground so when the city does road construction they would like to collaborate with those projects so fiber can be installed at that time. Alderman Ekquist asked what the timeline for the project would be, Baratta stated that it will take 2 months to have a full city design. Alderman Wise asked if there was a specific area that they would start working in, Baratta stated that the Whiteside Area Career Center will be the “head in” and they will branch out from there. Mayor Lee asked about the white PVC pipes and if they will be sticking out of the ground, Baratta stated that those pipes are temporary and for installation only. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Martin, Wilen, Johnson, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Mayor Lee asked Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader if the alley behind the Sterling Rock Falls American Legion is on the agenda for repair. Schrader stated that there is a drainage issue in that alley and it is on the list for repairs.

Chief Alex Chavira advised the Council that Officer Brian Schmidt will be retiring Wednesday September 22, 2021 with 23 years of service. Chavira thanked Schmidt for his years of service.

Finance Director Cindy Von Holten advised the Council that she spoke to City Manager Shumard and the employees of the finance department and she recommends that on October 1st the finance department start charging the 1.5% monthly service charge on the past due utility balances, the Council agreed.

Alderman Johnson said there was a great turnout for the parade.

Alderman Wise thanked Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt and the code enforcement staff for addressing all the issues they encountered the last few weeks.

At 8:05pm Alderman Elston made a motion to adjourn to executive session as provided under 5ILCS 120/2a for the purpose of setting a price for sale or lease of property owned by the public body; seconded by Alderman Martin. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Martin, Wilen, Johnson, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

At 8:39pm Alderman Wise made a motion to go back to open session; seconded by Alderman Elston. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Martin, Wilen, Johnson, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Mayor Lee started the study session for the development of a committee for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Mayor Lee stated that the City will receive approximately \$2 million, half of the funds will arrive in the next 30 days and the second half will be received next year.

City Manager Shumard stated that there are strict guidelines for what the money can and cannot be spent on. Several ideas include, downtown tourism, downtown WIFI or security, the Mural Society and the meadowlands detention pond.

Alderman Wise would like to nominate Alderman Ekquist to the committee, Mayor Lee stated he had previously asked Alderman Ekquist if she was interested and she stated she is. Mayor Lee would like to have the economic development group on the committee as well as City Manager Shumard and Alderman Ekquist. Alderman Martin stated he would like to see the Council and the community have input.

Mayor Lee started the study session for the developing a framework for a formal committee to define and advance the priorities of the riverfront from the existing Riverfront Plan using public engagement, develop an order of operations and identify funding sources.

City Manager Shumard stated that this is not starting over, this is forming a committee to prioritize the projects and ideas and developing an order of operations. Shumard stated that he would like to hear from community, we have heard from the different groups as to what their ideas are. We need to have input from the voices that we have not heard from.

Shumard stated the committee should have representation from the Council, Plan Commission, staff and members of the public. Alderman Wise stated he has two individuals that he would like to submit for consideration. Mayor Lee stated he would like to hear from the voices we haven't heard from. Alderman Martin would like to have someone on the group that has connections to tourism.

Alderman Johnson stated that Kris Noble from the Chamber is forming a committee as well, Johnson stated he will be representing the Keystone group on that committee. Johnson asked Mayor Lee how the two groups will interact, Lee stated he spoke with Kris Noble and the two groups will work together and share information.

The meeting adjourned at 9:26 pm.

Teri Sathoff
City Clerk