

Mayor Diana Merdian called the Sterling City Council to order at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, October 16, 2023. Roll call. Present: Alderperson Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Joseph Martin, Kaitlyn Ekquist and Jim Wise. Absent: None.

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

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Tom Brackemeyer, 1512 5th Avenue, requested the City of Sterling to look into registering vacant houses. Brackemeyer provided the Council with an article from the Chicago Tribune about the City of Waukegan requiring vacant homes to be registered. The residence across the street from Brackemeyer has had two windows boarded up as well as the storm door broken, he is concerned about his property values. He stated there are a lot of vacant houses in Sterling that need to be cleaned up.

Randy Conkling, Rock Falls, asked the Council about the rental inspection agreement that is being considered. Conkling is concerned about a house he owns that needs a new roof. The proposed rental agreement ordinance will require the house to have combination storm/screen windows installed. Conkling stated he would not be able to afford to put a roof on as well as the windows and would ultimately fail the rental inspection. Alderperson Wise stated the proposed ordinance leaves the discretion to the Code Enforcement officer to work with property owners. Conkling stated he appreciated hearing the City would be willing to work with the property owners.

Brittany Stanley, 203 17th Avenue, stated she purchased her home in May of 2019. In 2022 there was a fire that caused damage to the second floor of her home. She was staying in a hotel. In June her insurance refused to continue to pay for the hotel, her family moved into a tent in the backyard, the City required her to take the tent down even though it is behind a privacy fence. Stanley stated on May 9th she received an electrical inspection from Rex Gaumer and he advised them they could put up walls, he stated he would not need to return until he had to do a ground fault test. The water was turned off at the residence and the City will not turn the water on until it is brought up to code. Stanley stated the plumbing was not affected by the fire, she has not been living on the property and she is upset that the building department is not treating her fairly. She would like to have an inspection and be able to return to her home. Attorney Zollinger stated the City did file a lawsuit against Ms. Stanley and Mr. Mothershed regarding the property, there is a court order that prohibits them from living at the residence. Zollinger advised that if the work has been completed on the property the City will make

arrangements for an inspection. There is a hearing on December 11, 2023, for all remaining issues.

Karen Scudder, 202 17th Avenue, stated she lives across the street from the Stanley/Mothershed property. Scudder stated there is a neighbor who harasses the Stanley/Mothershed family by playing vulgar music very loud when the children are getting on the bus. Scudder stated the police department does not respond to calls made by Stanley regarding loud music. Scudder stated she prefers not to live across the street from a vacant home.

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

- A. Approval of Minutes
- B. Approval of Bills and Payroll
- C. Resolution 2023-10-23 Accepting a grant from the Illinois Housing Development Authority Strong Communities Program
- D. Twin City Public Action to Deliver Shelter (PADS) to hold a bucket brigade on October 28, 2023

Seconded by Aldersperson Wise. Aldersperson Wise asked if 907 1st Avenue will be demolished prior to winter, Superintendent of Building and Zoning, Amanda Schmidt stated the closing documents will not be done until November, it will come down in the spring. Voting: Ayes – Aldersperson Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Martin, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Aldersperson Wise made a motion to approve the Actuarial Report; Seconded by Aldersperson Elston. Anthony Gedvilas with Lauterbach and Amen was in the Council chambers to answer any questions. The fire pension funding ratio increased by 8.49 points to 68.20% and the police pension funding ratio increased by 8.93 points to 74.33%.

The report recommends a minimum contribution to the fire pension fund of \$1,239,817, compared to \$1,379,460 for the prior year, a \$139,643 or 10.1% decrease. This amount represents 85.52% of payroll, down from 91.22% of payroll in the prior year.

The actuary recommends a minimum contribution to the police pension fund of \$1,093,200 this year versus \$1,275,963 for the prior year, a \$182,763 or 14.3% decrease. The new amount represents 54.25% of projected payroll, down from 59.04% last year. Voting: Ayes – Aldersperson Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Martin, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Aldersperson Ekquist made a motion to approve Ordinance 2023-10-24 Amending Chapter 6, Article II, Section 41, to increase the number of liquor licenses and provide a waiver of duplicate cost for multiple initial licenses within 18 months; Seconded by Aldersperson Strabala-Bright. Brandon McDaniel from Crafted Roots was in the chambers, he is asking for an additional license, he would like the fee waived as he recently paid the fee for his first license. Aldersperson Wise asked if this would be a tasting-type license or a full-service bar, McDaniel stated he would be a full-service tap room. Sonny Dilapi with LUXX was in the chambers, he is requesting an increase in the number of licenses to accommodate his restaurant to be located at the Mertes property on East Lincolnway. Aldersperson Strabala-Bright asked why there is a limit on the number of liquor licenses, Attorney Zollinger explained there is not a way for the City to place limitations on gaming establishments, if a business has a "pour" license they are allowed to have gaming. Placing a limit on the number of liquor licenses is a way for the City to control gaming. Voting: Ayes – Aldersperson Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Martin, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Aldersperson Wise made a motion to Approve Resolution No. 2023-10-24 Authorizing Letter of Objection to Whiteside County Relating to Request by Petition Nexamp Locust Street Solar LLC; Seconded by Aldersperson Martin. Jack Curry with Nexamp gave a presentation on the proposed facility. NexAmp has applied for a Special Use Permit (SUP) to the Whiteside County Building and Zoning Department to construct a 5-MW ground-mounted solar farm energy system in Sterling Township. The site totals approximately 42 acres and the proposed project will develop approximately 28 acres of the parcel. The parcel is located within the City's 1.5-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction and is zoned A-1, Agricultural District. The proposed improvements will include:

- Solar modules (i.e. panels) are mounted on racking that slowly rotate and track the sun; there are approximately 11,112 modules proposed to be installed;
- The height of the solar array will be up to 20 feet in height;
- The solar modules are treated with anti-reflective coating to minimize glare;
- The racking is mounted to metal piles. Concrete foundations are not anticipated;
- The system will be remotely monitored, meaning there will be little traffic generated;
- Electrical cables will be installed underground for the entire project with the exception of a series of poles necessary to interconnect with ComEd along Locust Street;
- Perimeter security fencing up to 8 feet in height will surround the array;
- Limited area of gravel driveway for site access and maintenance;
- The inverter and transformer will be located on a concrete equipment pad;

Aldersperson Wise asked if a LESA report was done on the property, and Curry stated it had not been done. Wise stated he supports solar energy; however, this location is not an ideal place. The property is prime for future development and the USDA has given it a LESA rating of 1. Wise would like to see Nexamp find another location that would be a better fit.

Aldersperson Strabala-Bright disagreed with Aldersperson Wise he stated that unless the City has intentions of annexing this property into the City it should be allowed to be a solar farm.

City Manager Shumard stated his concern is there is a limited amount of property located on a state highway that is prime for development. The City Manager is concerned about a forty-year lease on the property next to Wahl Clipper on a state highway.

Aldersperson Johnson asked if this property could be annexed without annexing Wahl Clipper, Attorney Zollinger stated yes, as long as the properties are contiguous. City Manager Shumard stated the City is not anti-solar and would be willing to work with Nexamp to find a better location.

Aldersperson Wise stated it is customary for the Council to take the Plan Commission's recommendation into consideration, Aldersperson Strabala-Bright stated that being a prior member of the Planning Commission he recognizes their recommendation however he disagrees with their decision.

Voting: Ayes – Aldersperson Elston, Martin, Ekquist and Wise. Nays – Aldersperson Strabala-Bright and Johnson. Motion carried.

Deputy Chief E. Pat Bartel reported Trunk or Treat will be held in the south east parking lot from 4 pm to 6 pm on October 25th.

Chief Dettman reported two firefighters have completed a leadership course. Engine 5 is in service, Engine 3 is having break issues and Tower 4 remains out of service, the fuel tank should arrive in November.

Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader reported crews are continuing to work on patching Lynn Blvd, filling potholes, and running the street sweeper.

City Clerk Teri Sathoff reported she has completed her three-year Certified Municipal Clerk training, she has applied for her designation and it will take a few months for that to be approved.

City Manager Shumard reported the company will be returning to make repairs to the mini-pitch court at Wallace. The installation was not up to company standards. The USEPA grant meeting will be held next week. There is currently no IT staff, both employees are out due to health situations, and they will be working remotely if needed. The scores for the shelter and engineering RFPs were received on Friday. Shumard stated he would be working with the companies to coordinate it into one project.

Aldersperson Strabala-Bright congratulated Janna Groharing on a successful Hops on the Rock on October 14th. Groharing thanked Aldersperson Strabala-Bright, Elston, Ekquist, and Wise for volunteering for the event.

Aldersperson Elston asked when the yard waste collection would end, Brad Schrader stated he would find out and let everyone know.

Aldersperson Ekquist stated she too enjoyed Hops on the Rock and congratulated Janna Groharing on a nice event.

Mayor Merdian reported she will be attending the Sauk Valley Career Pathways playground for the area middle school students on Friday, October 20th. The Police department and Public Works will be there as well.

The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Teri Sathoff

City Clerk