

OGLESBY CITY COUNCIL WORKING MEETING
MAY 18, 2023

The working meeting of the Oglesby City Council was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Mayor Curran.

Roll Call: Mayor Jason Curran, Commissioners Rich Baldrige, Terry Eutis, Greg McDermott, Tony Stefanelli, Attorney Pat Berry And City Clerk Becky Clinard were present.

Public Comment

Jay Querciagrossa addressed the Council, asking for clarification on just how a working meeting was different from a regular meeting. For example, Querciagrossa asked if the audience would be able to comment on issues as the Council worked its way through the agenda. Curran told Querciagrossa that he wanted a “more relaxed feel” to these meetings and that he encouraged residents to be involved in the conversation. Curran suggested that anyone wishing to comment raise their hand and be recognized before speaking. Curran also noted that he felt this type of meeting would allow for the commissioners to debate topics openly and at length, while his hope for the regular meetings was to keep them “as professional as can be.”

Drew Merriman then addressed the Council, asking that the city consider a burn ban. Merriman said he could not understand why the city has not outlawed burning or enforced burning rules in town.

Economic Developer: Mayor Curran discussed his plan to hire someone to fill the role of economic developer. All agreed that finding a person willing to accept a parttime position with parttime pay would be difficult, but agreed that the City should at the very least, post the job and see what applications come in. They also discussed the possibility of hiring a grant writer, preferably someone local who would be knowledgeable about Oglesby’s needs, as a backup plan.

Event Coordinator: The Council then moved to the position of Event Coordinator. Mayor Curran proposed hiring a parttime event coordinator to alleviate some of the work performed by the Clerk’s office staff and the parks director. Curran sees this position as someone who would work with the Economic Developer to bring more events to Oglesby. The Commissioners were less willing to hire someone for this position, asking that the current staff be allowed to continue, at least for the time being.

Nuisance Ordinance: The mayor and commissioners agreed, that after reviewing the current ordinance, it wasn’t a lack of ordinances that had resulted in a lot of the situations they hoped to address (weeds, cars parked in yards, etc.) but a lack of enforcement. Tony Stefanelli, who oversees the building inspectors, told the council one of his goals was to put into place a set of procedures for enforcing violations with the help of Commissioner Terry Eutis and the police department. Stefanelli outlined a series of steps that should be taken and talked a bit about what is being done now to transition to better enforcement.

They also discussed whether the current burning regulations were sufficient and what changes should be made. Eutis said that for the time being, the current rules should be enforced as the council continues to discuss the best way to address the issue. He promised to “look for common ground” that will take both sides of the issue into consideration.

Park Board: Curran asked the Council about getting the Park Board more involved in decisions concerning the parks, noting that he felt the board had been excluded from the process during the previous four years. He pointed to the now defunct Seneca Square Board, which dissolved when their suggestions were not considered. He suggested that the Park Board prioritize projects, for example – the dog park, disc golf, softball field drainage, etc. They discussed whether they should set aside a certain amount of money each year for parks improvements and let the board come up with a suggested list of items to address each year. Rich Baldrige, Public Property commissioner, who oversees the Parks Dept. said he would get an agenda together and schedule a meeting.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY Baldrige, SECONDED By McDermott to send a list of items to be discussed to the Park Board. AYES: Baldrige, Eutis, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. MOTION APPROVED.

Building Improvement Grant – Curran suggested that the current Building Improvement Grant be revised to create two classes of applicants – those who are remodeling an existing business and those who are renovating a vacant building to bring in a new business. Curran said that while the current program had done a lot to make downtown nicer, it had not brought new businesses in. The council was in agreement that the grant was a good way to invest in the downtown area. Audience member Ken Ficek said that he thought that there should be something in the new program that recaptured a percentage of the funding if the building was sold within a certain timeframe. The commissioners agreed. They agreed informally that the city should earmark at least \$100,000 for FY24 for the program. The council will send the issue to the Plan Commission for their input.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY Eutis, SECONDED By Baldrige to send the proposed changes to the Building Improvement Grant to the Plan Commission. AYES: Baldrige, Eutis, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran, MOTION APPROVED.

Incentives for Developers: The commissioners discussed ways of creating incentives for those looking for a site for a new business. Curran said he liked the idea of having incentives that are “published,” meaning that the offer (whether it be a utility rebate or something else) is not subjective or needs to be negotiated. Developers would be able to easily find the information and figure out what would be available to them without negotiation. Curran said that Redbud, Illinois, has several such programs and has found them to be helpful in attracting new business to their city.

Event Committee: The council discussed the idea of forming an Event Committee to help the city event planner do three things: review most recent events and offer suggestions for improvements, assist in the planning of upcoming events and provide ideas for new events. Curran felt that having a committee that represents the different demographics would make for better events. The commissioners were not in agreement for the need of such a committee and after discussion, agreed to “circle back to it,” at a later date.

Review of Municipal Code: Curran suggested that the council set about reviewing the current municipal code over the course of the next four years. He noted that there are many outdated ordinances that should be addressed. Attorney Barry cautioned the council that it would be a “monumental task,” but suggested that they perhaps look at it chapter by chapter, with the different commissioners assuming responsibility for those areas which fall under their authority.

Safe Routes to School Grant: Commissioner Greg McDermott told the council about something discussed at a recent IDOT meeting he attended. He said that bids for projects like the Safe Routes to School project were coming in much higher than anticipated because of the delay in awarding funds and

getting the projects started. He said the city might be better off to rescind the grant and modify the scope of work to keep it within the \$250,000 budget. It was agreed that the city should still go out for bids and see where they come in before doing anything further. There was some concern that rejecting the grant could jeopardize the likeliness of the city getting another grant.

Communication Plan: The council discussed the use of Facebook and Code Red for emergencies, with Curran asking Commissioners who wanted access to the communication tools. Currently, the City Clerk, Police and Fire Chiefs have user rights to CODE RED. Curran suggested that it might make sense for more people to have access. Not all emergencies happen during business hours, and in some instances, the person on the ground may be the best person to send out messages to residents. There was also discussion about who can and should be able to post on Facebook. Curran also suggested that the city look into a separate page for meeting live streams – saying that the current page is cluttered with meeting videos. He also thought that the city should work to having all meetings livestreamed. He also said that the current plan needed to be revised, as only certain issues were supposed to be communicated via CODE RED and that list should be looked at again.

Public Comments

Jay Querciagrossa told the council he hoped they would continue with the working meeting format, as he found it interesting and informative.

Drew Merriman complained about the SURF internet crews and the lack of traffic control. Eutis said he and McDermott will look into it.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY Stefanelli, SECONDED BY Eutis AT 8:17 PM TO ADJOURN. AYES: Baldrige, Eutis, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. MEETING ADJOURNED.