**OGLESBY CITY COUNCIL**

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2024**

The Oglesby City Council meeting was called to order by Mayor Jason Curran at 6 p.m. on Monday, December 16, 2024.

**ROLL CALL:** Commissioners Richard Baldrige, Don Finley, Gregory McDermott, Tony Stefanelli and Mayor Jason Curran were present. Attorney Pat Barry and City Clerk Becky Clinard were in attendance as well.

Baldridge introduced Sid and Saylor, winners in the VFW Lasalle Post “My Voice” essay contest. Baldridge also announced that Saylor’s essay had been chosen to represent the Post in the state competition. Baldridge congratulated both and wished Saylor well in the next competition. The pair read their essays.

**Public comment (agenda items only)**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY** Finley, **SECONDED BY** Stefanelli to approve the minutes from the November 18 and December 2, 2024, meetings. Stefanelli asked if any changes had been made to the minutes. Clinard said there were not. **AYES:** Finley, Stefanelli, Curran. **NAYS:** Baldridge, McDermott. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY** Stefanelli, **SECONDED BY** Finley to approve the minutes from the December 2, 2024, executive session.. **AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY** Stefanelli, **SECONDED BY** McDermott to approve the bills presented for payment in the amount of $814,288.25. Stefanelli noted that the reason the bills were so high was because the city’s liability insurance was due. **AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**BILLS PRESENTED FOR PAYMENT:** *(I will add this on Monday when Erin returns)* **Total, $**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY** Stefanelli, **SECONDED BY** Finley to approve the payroll for December 6, 2024, in the amount of $70,895.08. **AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli. **ABSTAIN:** Curran. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Stefanelli then added “some context” to the city’s levy of $1.6 million. He said that the change to a city manager type of government (salary and staff for that position) would cost between $250,000 and $350,000 annually, more than 10 percent of the city’s annual levy. Noting that it is unlikely that the cost of day-to-day city operations can be cut, Stefanelli said it would be necessary to increase the annual levy 10 to 20 percent, placing the burden on taxpayers. He said the question to the taxpayers is whether they want to pay more for the change. He told the council that he would be commenting further on the city’s financial position during the meeting.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY** Stefanelli, **SECONDED BY** McDermott to approve Ordinance No. 1275-121624, An ordinance Levying Taxes for all Corporate Purposes for The City of Oglesby for 2024-2025 Fiscal Year. **AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**A MOTION WAS MADE** by McDermott, **SECONDED BY** Baldridge to approve R-121624, which authorizes the City Clerk and Mayor to sign loan documents for the waste water treatment plant project. McDermott explained that this was required to move the loan application forward.  
   
Before a vote could be taken, Stefanelli shared financial projections with the council: Phase 1 would require a loan amount up to $30 million financed for 30 years at 1.4% interest with an estimated payment of $1,035,824 annually. The IEPA would forgive $4.8 million of debt. Phase 2 would require a loan amount up to $23 million, financed for 30 years at an interest rate of 1.4% with an estimated payment of $748,095 annually. The IEPA would forgive again $4.8 million of debt. (The project has been broken into two phases to capitalize on $9.6 million in loan forgiveness.)

Stefanelli told the council that the funds to pay for the project would have to come from the water and sewer funds, but noted that those funds are already struggling to put away $1 million a year for the project. The previous council had projected a 5 percent increase in user fees to pay the loan costs, but Stefanelli says a 5 percent increase per year is not sustainable and the city must come up with a way to raise the additional $750,000 shortfall without overburdening the residents of Oglesby. Stefanelli said he has met with the treasurer and clerk and believes that the most feasible solution is to raise the city’s sales tax and earmarked that money for the loan. Stefanelli added that he thought the conversation to add the cost of another position (city manager) would not be an easy one.

Baldridge added that he didn’t think it was a smart move for the mayor to say the city had an extra $130,000 to pay for a city manager given that the city will soon be negotiating union contracts.

Curran “not wanting to rain on the parade further,” noted that the 1.4 percent interest rate could change and that he wasn’t sure where Baldridge’s $130,000 figure came from. Stefanelli said he was not as much worried about the interest rate as where the money to pay the loan would come from. Curran said that he’s been working on other avenues that might decrease the city’s costs. Stefanelli asked for clarification that the vote was to approve the loan application, not final documents. Baldridge too, expressed concern that the vote locked the city in. Curran said it was his understanding that this was just for the application.

**A MOTION WAS MADE** by McDermott, **SECONDED BY** Baldridge to approve R-121624, which authorizes the City Clerk and Mayor to sign loan documents for the waste water treatment plant project. **AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**Old Business**

Curran then offered an update on the petition to change the form of government. He said that this was in response to a commissioner’s concerns that the matter had not been discussed publicly. He then asked Barry to comment on the judge’s ruling putting the referendum on the April 2025 ballot.

Barry told the council he had attended the meeting remotely. He told the council the judge found that the petition had the required number of signatures and that all the requirements had been met to place the question on the ballot. He said that if the initiative was voted for by a majority of the residents, it would not go into effect until after the election in 2027. Giving the city two years to work out the details of switching from commissioner form of government to managerial.

Curran questioned when the change would occur, saying that he thought the change occurred after the election. Barry said that the council could vote to change over sooner, but that it would not be required until 2027. Curran then asked the commissioners to weigh in on the matter, if they liked.

Stefanelli spoke first, saying he disagreed with Curran. Stefanelli said that the petition process was done “abruptly” and excluded important stakeholders such as the business community, the citizens who make up the various advisory boards for the city, employees and appointed officials. He noted that none of those persons serving on the city’s advisory boards (such as the plan commission) or other elected officials were included in the discussions and that the alternative to appoint a city administrator – which would address some of the concerns without changing the form of government and mandating a position with an expensive salary – was not discussed publicly. He also noted the irony that Curran, who was empowered with control over two departments in his last term and voted for the 2020 Comprehensive Plan which eliminated the goal of discussing a different form of government, is now pushing the initiative. Stefanelli asked if the group pushing for the change had asked for an analysis of the financial impact the change would have on the city and if so, why this information was not shared with the public or elected officials.

Finley said he would like to see the Plan Commission be tasked with organizing and hosting the public meetings to inform the public about the measure.

McDermott said he also thought that the Plan Commission should be involved, and reiterated Stefanelli’s concerns about the cost of the change coming at the same time as the loan payments for the waste water treatment plant.

Baldridge said he agreed with the others, and asked for clarification about when the change took place. Barry confirmed that the change would take place in 2027. Baldridge then asked if that meant that “the problem” that some see (with the current form of government) would continue. Barry said yes, unless the council votes to go with the managerial form earlier. Baldridge then asked if the council could “explore other forms of government” during that time. Barry said it could not. That if the voters approve, it would be “set in stone.” Baldrige said he only wanted to make sure voters understood that it would not go into effect until 2027.

Curran said he disagreed with Barry’s interpretation of the statute, saying he understood that the council has a certain amount of time, subject to when a person is appointed to the position. Barry assured him that he had read the statute three times and was correct. Curran said he thought the staggered terms began in 2027 after talking with other mayors who had gone through the process. He also addressed Stefanelli’s concern about his vote for a revised Comprehensive Plan that did not include discussion on different forms of government as one of the goals. Curran said that vote was held at time when he was just coming back from a hospital stay.

**A MOTION WAS MADE** by Stefanelli, **SECONDED By** McDermott that the Plan Commission have full authority to organize and host any informational sessions on the proposed change to the form of government. Before the vote, Baldridge asked Barry if the voters approve the change in government, if the City Clerk’s position becomes an elected position. Barry said that was true. **AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Finley then asked the council to approve the purchase of a new telephone console for the Oglesby Police Department at a cost of $30,561.75, using a combination of ETBS and Drug Funds. Baldridge thanked Police Chief Margis for his efforts in finding outside funding for the purchase.

**A MOTION WAS MADE** by Finley, **SECONDED** by Stefanelli to approve the purchase of a telecommunications console using department funds. **AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. **MOTION CARRIED.**

The council then discussed the slate of 2025 meeting dates. **A MOTION WAS MADE** BY Stefanelli, **SECONDED By** Baldridge to approve the 2025 meeting dates with one change: January’s second meeting date will be moved to Tuesday, January 21, because Monday is a school holiday. **AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**Commissioners Reports:**

* **Commissioner Stefanelli, Accounts and Finance**
* Wished residents a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.
* Went over the city’s financial report, touching briefly on fund balances and the recent audit which encouraged the city to keep the fund balances positive and able to meet ongoing needs:
  + **Electrical:** Is used for daily operations of the Electric Department and ongoing capital improvements (like the Mallick Substation). The Electric Fund also supplements the General Fund.
  + **Water Fund:** Is used for maintenance and repairs of water system and TEST’s fee. to operate the water plant. The Water Fund also supplements the General Fund.
  + **Sewer Fund:** Is “pretty obligated” for the future cost of the waste water treatment plant.
  + **TIF and Hotel/Motel Funds** are used to fund the city’s portion of grant projects (when applicable).
  + **Motor Fuel Tax:** Pays for Roads and Alleys
  + **IMRF, Social Security, Insurance Funds** are restricted funds.
  + Credited then-Commissioner Curran with increasing utility rates to enable the city to meet future costs of operating and maintaining utilities, but stressed that increasing fees and taxes should not be a regular practice.

Responded to a recent Facebook post by Curran that accused the council of “wasteful spending and lack of training or experience to be in these positions.” Rather than take to Facebook, Stefanelli offered these examples of what the different commissioner have done:

* **Finance Department**: Resolved payroll reporting issues (from the previous administration) and convinced the IRS to waive $45,000 plus in fines; applied for and are in final consideration for a BRIC grant to update city building codes and the technology to administer and enforce codes; installed all of the technology in the council chambers and conference room to provide for interactive meetings and private settings for meetings for less than $4,000, improved overall morale in the department.
* **Police Department:** Paid for a portion of the cost of a new patrol car and a telecommunications console without using city funds; applied for and received more than $100,000 in grants in 2024.
* **Streets and Water:** Has spent countless hours looking into ways to reduce and pay for the waste water treatment plant; staggered the purchase of necessary equipment to spread the cost over several years.
* **Electric Department:** Reduced costs of the Mallick Substation expansion project by having work done in-house when feasible. Filled a vacant position in the Electric Department with an apprentice and a training program to bring the employee up to journeyman status, resulting in an employee who understands the city’s system; installed electric chargers in the downtown area with a 100 percent grant;
* **Parks Department:** Completed both the Starved Rock Dog Park and Disc Golf course, two projects that stalled under the past council; explored grant opportunities and applied for a grant to upgrade and renovate the city’s parks.
* **Commissioner Don Finley, Public Safety**
* Thanked everyone involved in the Christmas festivities, noting
* Read a letter commending Officer Paul Petersen for his efforts to assist a local resident in securing placement in a VA Home.
* Announced that he would be retiring after the next meeting, saying that it made sense to vacate the seat to Hillary Moyle, who is running uncontested in the April election to fill the seat. “It’s time for her to step in and take over,”
* **Commissioner Greg McDermott, Public Safety**Said he has filed for two more grants for the waste water treatment plant.
* Thanked the participants for the Oglesby Christmas event.
* **Commissioner Richard Baldridge, Public Property and Electric**
* Thanked We Are Oglesby for a great Christmas event.
* Thanked the various city departments who played a role in the event.
* Read a letter from WAO’s Angie Partridge about the Winter Wonderland event.

**Mayor’s Report:**

* Explained that his comment about the city’s number of qualified candidates addressed the city’s size compared to Ottawa, which has a much larger population and the same number of seats to fill on a commissioner-led council. In relation to the wasteful spending comments, Curran said he had examples, but preferred not to discuss them at this time.
* Praised the organizers and participants of the Winter Wonderland event and thanked the Dickinson House Foundation for allowing him to ride on their parade float.
* Wished everyone a very merry Christmas.

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY** McDermott, **SECONDED BY** Baldridge to adjourn at 6:49 p.m.  
**AYES:** Baldridge, Finley, McDermott, Stefanelli, Curran. **MEETING ADJOURNED.**