

MINUTES
Eveleth City Council Special Meeting
9:30 a.m., March 24, 2020
Council Chambers, City Hall, Eveleth, MN

A. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Vlasisavljevich called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Councilor John Rauzi, Present
Councilor Brad Hadrava, Present
Councilor Brian Lillis, Present
Councilor Joseph Koivunen, Present
Mayor Robert Vlasisavljevich, Present

Also present: City Clerk Administrator Jackie Monahan-Junek; Deputy City Clerk Stephanie Friebe; City Attorney Mitch Brunfelt; Police Chief Tim Koivunen, Deputy Police Chief Jesse Linde; Public Works Director Jerry Rosati; Assistant Public Works Director Mark Karpen; EMS Operations Supervisor Therese Elverum

C. NEW BUSINESS

1. COVID-19 Emergency

Updates from Emergency Management Director Police Chief Koivunen, EMS Operations Supervisor Therese Elverum, and Department Heads

Police Chief Koivunen said a lot has been changing since the Council's meeting on Friday, March 20th. Two cases of the Coronavirus have been reported in St. Louis County; however, the State does not have rapid testing available so the actual number of cases is more than likely higher. Governor Walz is in self-quarantine due to being exposed to the virus. Koivunen made a recommendation to the Council on March 20th to declare an emergency. Minnesota's Attorney General has told Minnesotans to prepare for a bad week as the numbers will start multiplying. If Governor Walz issues a stay at home order, only essential employees will be allowed to work.

Councilor Hadrava questioned if the resolution declaring an emergency was to acquire funding. Councilor Koivunen also questioned if there is a way to inform the public that nothing is going to change, but this will allow the City of Eveleth to apply for funding.

EMS Operations Supervisor Therese Elverum explained that Federal FEMA funding would reimburse the City for wages and supplies incurred as a result of COVID-19.

Elverum said the monies have already been freed up so once the City submits the expenses we will be reimbursed up to 75 percent for costs associated with COVID-19. She said that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) costs have been very high.

Mayor Vlasisavljevich said he is not seeing the numbers, and does not want to create panic.

Councilor Hadrava asked what the City would do if half of the police force is out with COVID-19. He asked if the resolution would give Chief Koivunen authority to make changes. Chief Koivunen said the area police departments have been meeting to discuss possible coverage issues to a shortage of workers. Public Works Director Rosati has also been meeting with representatives from the other Quad Cities to discuss the possible shortage of workers due to the Coronavirus outbreak. If needed, they would join forces to help cover for each other. He gave examples such as the Wastewater Operators covering for each other or garbage truck drivers working together to continue offering refuse pick up services.

City Attorney Brunfelt said the resolution declaring a local emergency may be a criteria for cities to acquire funding. The resolution also gives department heads the discretion and authority to move forward if the pandemic explodes without coming back to the Council. This would eliminate the step of posting for a meeting and holding a Council Meeting. Part of the obligation of the City staff is to keep the Council up to date on what is happening.

Councilor Koivunen said he supports the decision of the department heads. He said he has listened to them for many years and they “haven’t let me down.”

Mayor Vlasisavljevich asked what the time line is on declaring the emergency. City Attorney Brunfelt said that when you declare an emergency you are giving the staff the opportunity to move quickly if things develop. Basically all of the communities are passing this resolution and most people understand that this is part of the process. Brunfelt said he does not see any harm versus the potential benefits.

Councilor Lillis wondered what would happen if the City Council becomes ill and are not able to have a quorum.

Therese Elverum provided the Council with a St. Louis County Projection of COVID-19. Mayor Vlasisavljevich said there are going to be a lot of variables to the numbers. He said that FEMA is swamped so we should not look at a quick return of funds. Vlasisavljevich is concerned about alarming people.

Councilor Hadrava asked if the Council can vote by phone. Attorney Brunfelt said there is a provision in state statute that allows for telephone votes in a pandemic situation. The Mayor or City Attorney would determine that it is not advisable to meet in person.

Mayor Vlaisavljevich asked what the cut off is for applying for funds. Attorney Brunfelt said it is a moving target. Vlaisavljevich asked what costs have been incurred above the usual. Therese Elverum said that the Ambulance's costs are up high.

Councilor Koivunen said if we pass the resolution nothing really changes and we get funding. He said he did not understand why we would be reluctant to do that.

Mayor Vlaisavljevich said, "All people see is emergency. They do not read the fine print."

Councilor Lillis said he is an advocate for having a plan in place and empowering the department heads to do their jobs. Lillis would like to get ahead of the game now in the event something does happen to the Council.

EMS Operator Supervisor Elverum said, "We are already in a crisis." She referred to a potential shortage of ICU beds as VRMC only has six available beds at a time.

Councilor Rauzi said he has to count on the department heads to do their job and their recommendations carry a lot of weight. Rauzi also understands the Mayor's concerns on not wanting to cause panic.

City Attorney Brunfelt discussed the possibility of Governor Walz declaring a Shelter in Place which would require the City to determine essential and nonessential employees.

2. Consider Declaration of Local Emergency

Motion by Councilor Lillis, second by Councilor Koivunen to adopt Resolution No. 2020-08, "Resolution Declaring a Local Emergency" and authorizing the City Council to meet via teleconference in the event it is not advisable to conduct City business in person due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Roll call vote: Rauzi – Aye; Koivunen – Aye; Lillis – Aye; Hadrava – Aye; Vlaisavljevich – Abstained. Motion carried.

D. ADJOURN

The Meeting adjourned at 10:28 a.m.