

The City Council of the City of Columbus, Texas met in regular session on Monday, February 22, 2021, at 5:30 p.m., in the Council Chambers of City Hall located at 605 Spring St., Columbus, Texas, with the following present:

|                     |   |                 |
|---------------------|---|-----------------|
| Mayor               | - | Lori An Gobert  |
| Mayor Pro Tem       | - | Chuck Rankin    |
| Councilman          | - | Keith Cummings  |
| Councilman          | - | Michael Ridlen  |
| Councilman          | - | Gary Swindle    |
| Councilwoman        | - | Sandra Frnka    |
| City Manager        | - | Donald Warschak |
| City Secretary      | - | Bana Schneider  |
| Asst City Secretary | - | Dinah Jacobs    |

Other City Staff present included:

|                     |   |                  |
|---------------------|---|------------------|
| Police Chief        | - | Skip Edman       |
| Code Enforcement    | - | Richard LaCourse |
| Code/Fire Assistant | - | Duane Naiser     |

**1. Call to Order.**

Mayor Lori An Gobert called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.**

Gobert led the Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.

**3. Consent Agenda:**

- a. Approval of Invoices
- b. Approval of Minutes of the February 8, 2021 Regular Meeting
- c. Approval of the October 2020 Financial Statements

Councilman Swindle made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Councilwoman Frnka seconded the motion.

The vote was as follows:

Ayes: Councilmen Cummings, Swindle, Rankin, Ridlen, and Councilwoman Frnka

The motion passed.

**4. Citizens' Presentations and Comments.<sup>1</sup>**

Debbie Damon presented a number topics to council. A copy of the topic presentation is attached to these minutes.

Chris Christensen thanked and praised all of the City personnel for their non-stop work to keep the City going during the winter storm. He stated he was discouraged by the lack of communication from the administration in reference to the boil water notification. He stated there has to be a better way to communicate things other than via social media.

**5. City Manager's Report Including Sales Tax, the Water Filtration Project, the Water Well Rehab Project, Transportation Alternative Sidewalk Application, and Winter Storm Updates.**

City Manager, Donald Warschak gave his report. A copy of the report is attached to these minutes.

Warschak stated the sales tax payment for February, was up approximately \$12,000 compared to the same time period last year. The February payment was \$174,926.24 compared to \$162,933.59 last year. The Cities of Eagle Lake and Weimar, as well as the County, all saw increases.

Regarding the Water Filtration Project, Warschak stated the filter media has been delivered to the Tait location. Anticipated installation was for last week, but the weather forced it to be pushed off and rescheduled for this week.

Regarding the Water Well Rehab project, the Tait contractor is anticipating installing the new liner, screen, and gravel pack this week.

Regarding the Transportation Alternative Sidewalk Application, Warschak stated a preliminary grant application is being submitted for a proposed sidewalk project to TxDOT. The MLK Street Sidewalk Project was previously funded this way. This application's target area will be Montezuma Street/Park Place Apartments and proceeding to the existing TxDOT sidewalk on FM806. This project would allow for connectivity between the apartment complexes, Oak Bluff Village, the high school campus, and the City park complex in the area.

Regarding the Winter Storm Update, Warschak reported it was the coldest weather event in recent history. The City experienced a drop in water pressure on Wednesday due to water demand and the loss of a water well when power was lost. Once AEP restored the power, the water well was able to be returned to service. The portable emergency generator was not able to be used due to a faulty disconnect. Wednesday night was spent monitoring the SCADA system. The next day, a query of data usage was reviewed to identify large usages that could indicate leaks. With the drop in pressure, this required the City to issue a boil water notice. The sanitary sewer plant had no real issues, and continued to function properly. It was a very long week last week. Public Works cleared areas, with special attention being given in the hospital area. Everyone was out working very hard. Office staff that could make it in were here and working.

Gobert added the City guys were exemplary. Donald Warschak spent the night at the well, and was there when it went down. When it went below the threshold, Donald called me. The Chamber was notified to help get notice out, as well as the Citizen (via their live stream and Facebook). The Police Chief was notified and it was placed on their Facebook page as well. We tried to notify everyone as quickly as possible. It was not an ideal situation because it was late at night, along with no power. Notices were distributed downtown the next morning. A lot went down very quickly in a short period of time. I'm defending the City administration. There was no full administration staff, either people couldn't make it in, as well as some being sick, leaving no one to post on the website.

Councilman Ridlen stated there is no community type board for posting like there was on cable years ago. If there are any new ways we are all ears. Technology has changed. Where do people go for news? Most go to social media.

Gobert stated the radio was sent information as well, but due to them being off the air, they could not pass on the information.

Warschak stated the boil water notice was lifted Saturday. Gobert stated the same procedures were done to rescind the notice. Ridlen stated a better system of notification is welcomed.

Warschak went on to say, as far as limbs and excess items needing pickup, we will look at this and devise a plan.

Councilman Rankin echoed Ridlen regarding communication needing to be addressed. As for the emergency generator, there are some things Donald needs to do to test it prior to needing it, and that will help. Regarding the sewer averaging, I'd like to request it be cut off on the 12<sup>th</sup>, not on the 15<sup>th</sup>, as any use during the cold spell is not within the normal range of things, and consideration be taken on those high bills.

City Secretary, Bana Schneider stated the bill cutoff is the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. They are still working on the bills, but the reads were already pulled in on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Census can go in and extrapolate the information, but there is a three day lag for obtaining that information. Ridlen questioned if there were daily timestamps for readings, to which Schneider replied yes. Rankin stated a decision needs to be made quickly as bills will go out soon. I also echo Chris Christensen here, the guys and Donald Warschak did a hell of a good job.

**6. Consideration and Action to Approve a Joint Election Agreement with the Columbus Independent School District, the City of Eagle Lake, Rice Consolidated Independent School District, and the Colorado County Elections Administrator.**

Schneider stated the elections administrator suggested doing a joint agreement with all of these entities. Rankin asked if this has been done in the past. Schneider stated yes, we've done it with the school and now it was suggested joining all of these entities to further share costs.

Councilman Rankin made a motion to approve the Joint Election Agreement. Councilman Cummings seconded the motion.

The vote was as follows:

Ayes: Councilmen Cummings, Swindle, Rankin, Ridlen, and Councilwoman Frnka

The motion passed.

**7. Consideration and Action to Approve Resolution 225-21, a Resolution to Select an Engineering Service Provider to Complete Application and Project Related Engineering for the 2021-2022 TDA CDBG Community Development Fund Program.**

Warschak stated this is for an application to apply for projects that target water, wastewater, and wells for the City. Four proposals were submitted. The Mayor, Bana, and myself scored the proposals and selected Strand Engineering. They also did the water study in the past, and are currently the consultant for the CDBG wastewater project. This selection is for the grant if we are awarded one. There is no payment or signing until we get a grant.

Councilman Rankin made a motion to approve Resolution 225-21. Councilman Cummings seconded the motion.

The vote was as follows:

Ayes: Councilmen Cummings, Swindle, Rankin, Ridlen, and Councilwoman Frnka

The motion passed.

**8. Consideration and Action to Declare a 2012 Chevy Tahoe Police Vehicle(VIN: 1GNLC2E06CR185719) and a 2007 Chevy Silverado Utility Vehicle (VIN: 1GCHC24U97E128348) as Surplus Property.**

Police Chief Skip Edman corrected the agenda item, stating the 2012 Tahoe is the Fire Marshal vehicle. Schneider stated she pulled the wrong vehicle information as well as the wrong VIN.

Councilman Rankin made a motion to amend item 8 to be a 2013 Chevy Tahoe Police Vehicle with the appropriate VIN, along with the 2007 Chevy Silverado Utility Vehicle to be declared as surplus property. Councilman Ridlen seconded the motion.

The vote was as follows:

Ayes: Councilmen Cummings, Swindle, Rankin, Ridlen, and Councilwoman Frnka

The motion passed.

**9. Consideration and Action, if Necessary, Regarding the January 2021 Fire Marshal Report.**

Before Richard LaCourse gave the Fire Marshal report in Brent Gorman's absence, Gobert asked LaCourse to give Council an update on Gorman's heroic actions during an accident Saturday night/early Sunday morning. LaCourse gave a synopsis of the accident and Gorman's split-second decision to jump in the Colorado River to save a victim and pull him to safety. He went on to say he will be nominating Gorman for an award through The 100 Club for his heroic actions.

LaCourse gave the Fire Marshal report. A copy is attached to these minutes. There were four inspections, a consultation with Lil' Einstein Learning Center for new construction, one fire investigation of a residential structure which was ruled to be accidental, along with twenty one fire calls for service.

No action was needed.

**10. Consideration and Action, if Necessary, Regarding the January 2021 Code Enforcement Report.**

LaCourse gave his report. A copy is attached to these minutes. There were thirty three total permits issued. Changes were submitted to the Mayor and still need to go to the attorney for review for the changes for the Code of Ordinances for horse staking. I've started the review of Lil' Einstein's Learning Center for new construction, which will be a full custom facility. The Code Department also spent time with the Utility Department helping to locate leaks. One of the largest leaks was located by the Police Department at the Dollar General location. A 4" main connected to an 8" main line broke in the back of the location. We could have been notified sooner if the fire alarm had been working, but it was connected to the Bealls property, and when they closed, that ceased. Dollar General will need to be monitored prior to reopening. It should have been monitored by the owner, not Bealls. A Knox box will also be required.

Rankin suggested going through all of the systems within the City and checking them.

LaCourse distributed a pages of substandard properties. A copy is attached to these minutes. The first item has been completed. Regarding the second item, the owner is dismantling herself, but we will be monitoring the progress. Regarding the third item, this property has been surveyed as a GLO house replacement. Regarding the fourth item, we are writing a letter for them to have that property removed.

Ridlen asked about the status of A Brighter Day Daycare. LaCourse stated this is still with the prosecutor. The company she has hired has been in contact with Gorman. Rankin stated we need an official statement from Gorman for the record. LaCourse stated the prosecutor is working on a fine. Gobert asked to add a Fire Marshal report on A Brighter Day Daycare to be added to the next meeting agenda.

No action was needed.

**11. Consideration and Action, if Necessary, Regarding the 2021 Police Report.**

Police Chief, Skip Edman, gave his report. A copy of the report is attached to these minutes. Edman reported on the officer's training, in particular noting there was tazer certification so the Police Department can do it themselves versus waiting on the Sheriff's Office for certification. The Police Department received accreditation from the Texas Police Chief's Association for the Department of Justice, certifying their policies are up to date, as well as barring choke holds.

No action was needed.

**12. Items from Council members.<sup>2</sup>**

Gobert stated Colorado County was not originally in the winter storm disaster list. Ridlen stated another 77 counties have been added and Colorado County has now been included.

Councilman Cummings – I have been in contact with the Fire Marshal concerning my question from the last meeting. The question was answered and it is a non issue now.

Councilman Ridlen – I'd like to see some kind of daily updates to Council from administration during emergency times; something put into the Standard Operating Procedures, so that all Council members are on the same page; the City did an awesome job during the winter storm

Councilman Swindle – kudos to the City on keeping us informed

Councilwoman Frnka – stated citizens do call Council members looking for answers; I cannot say enough about the City workers; Donald never came home, and I knew he was out working on things; thanks to all for working so hard during this time

Councilman Rankin – echoed all of the others

Mayor Gobert – there are lots of accolades coming through, and I'd like to see Council do a nice meal for the City workers; Ridlen stated there were also a lot of private citizens who went above and beyond and wondered how we could possibly identify them, so that accolades could be passed on to them as well; Gobert suggested the newspaper could put something out as well as on Facebook asking for citizen recommendations for outstanding citizens during the winter storm; I am hoping council will help with a donation/meal for the City employees

**17. Announcements.**

Warschak - none

Schneider – none

Jacobs – wondered if there was an option for Columbus for CodeRed like the City of Weimar had; emergency information and alerts were sent out 3-4 times per day in Weimar during the storm period, as well as boil water notice and the rescinding of the notice; Schneider stated the City pays for this, but the problem is getting people registered

**18. Adjournment.**

The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 6:23 p.m.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor Lori An Gobert

ATTEST:



\_\_\_\_\_  
Bana Schneider, City Secretary

<sup>1</sup>During this agenda item, citizens may comment for the record on items, which are not on the agenda. However, the Council may not participate in discussion or deliberation on any item that is not on the agenda. Citizens may request that a topic be added to a future agenda.

<sup>2</sup>Limited to statements. Issues raised by council members under this item cannot be deliberated by Council. The Open Meetings Act does not allow Council to deliberate items that don't appear on the agenda.