

**Nowthen City Council
March 14, 2023
Regular Meeting Minutes**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pilon called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.
All present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Mayor Pilon, Council Members Rainville, Breyen, Fladebo, Alders

Also in attendance: Administrator Lehner, Deputy Clerk Johnson, Lieutenant Jacobson, Assistant Fire Chief Schrag and Sheriff Brad Wise, Deputy Jeff Barrett and Deputy Chris Fjeld

MOTION BY COUNCIL MEMBER RAINVILLE, SECONDED BY BREYEN TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED. MOTION CARRIED. 5 AYES.

2. FLOOR ITEMS

None

3. CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION BY COUNCIL MEMBER FLADEBO, SECONDED BY BREYEN TO ACCEPT THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED. MOTION CARRIED. 5 AYES.

4. ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT: NONE

5. FIRE DEPARTMENT REPORT

Assistant Fire Chief Schrag presented the February 2023 report. For the month of February 2023, the Fire Department responded to 14 incidents (2 more than the previous month) with an average response time of 10 minutes and 47 seconds (1 minute 12 second decrease from January). The average number of firefighters attending calls for service was 4.85. The Fire Department reports a \$55,000 loss from the fires during the month of February.

Notable calls:

A structure fire on Feb. 19th.

A fully engulfed 2021 Dodge Ram with damages estimated to be \$55,000.

The Fire Department completed its annual run (NFIRS) reporting to the Department of Public Safety for 2022.

The fire chief met with the fire chief from Elk River to discuss Auto-Aid options between the two cities with Elk River Station 3 now fully operational.

The Fire Department is planning for a spring open house on May 24th designed specifically for recruitment.

A drawing of the new fire truck was provided to the city council although the actual delivery is still a significant time away, noting that if the Fire Department ordered it today, it would be at least a 3-year waiting period.

6. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT REPORT

Lt. Jacobson introduced the new Sheriff, Mr. Brad Wise.

Sheriff Wise introduced himself and told the city council about himself, his experience and how happy he is to be the new sheriff for Anoka County.

Mayor Pilon stated the city is pleased with the service the Sheriff's Department has been providing the city and the city is glad the Sheriff's Department is enjoying the sub-station as much as the city has. The sheriff stated recruitment is still tough using Coon Rapids as an example; 5 open positions and only 7 applications had been received. Sheriff Wise also stated the Sheriff's department intends to continue the relationship with the city with 12-hour service and 24/7 county back fill service.

Lt. Jacobson introduced the deputies assigned to Nowthen. First up, returning Deputy Jeff Barrett. Deputy Barrett introduced himself and the new council members were introduced. He told the city council about his experience and how much he enjoys being in Nowthen. He is still field training and confirmed applicants are lacking. Summarizing how it has been in Nowthen since he started last summer, he stated it's a pretty quiet community, always have runaways at Bar None, and the biggest issue is County Road 22 and County Road 5 are like racetracks. He felt speeding is the biggest issue Nowthen has. Even DUIs are not that bad, and the local establishments are welcoming. People around here seem to use sober drivers well. Second up, Deputy Chris Fjeld. This is his 12th year. He has been a recreational vehicle sheriff, drone pilot and a rescue diver. He likes Nowthen and has been making a point to stop into businesses and everyone has been welcoming.

Question asked by a Council Member: Are the officers applying for open positions experienced or new officers? Sheriff Wise responded that applicants are law enforcement officers from other locations with a less than liked management style. In order to recruit new, young people, law enforcement officers need to be regarded as an elevated profession such as doctors, dentists, lawyers. The professionalism in the Sheriff's Department is outstanding. It should be an honor to serve with the backing of cities, counties, and states. The culture in Anoka County is good. The reason officers leave departments is usually due to the culture or money. Another question: What do you do differently to keep deputies? The sheriff responded that he has three goals for every employee. 1. They leave on their terms, whether it is retiring or moving on. 2. They leave mentally healthy. 3. They leave physically healthy. He is sincere in wanting his staff's mental and physical health to be a priority. His administration is dedicated to getting young deputies to have bonds with senior deputies. He thanked the city for its commitment to and support for the Sheriff's Department.

Lt. Jacobson returned to the podium to give the February Sheriff's report. The Sheriff's Department responded to 82 calls in the month of February. 1 to Bar None, 6 Alarms, 11 Medicals and 8 Animal Complaints.

Bar None: At the request of Anoka County Probation, a juvenile male was arrested on an outstanding felony warrant.

Notable calls:

A deputy responded to a suspicious vehicle/person call. The caller saw a female with her car parked in the middle of the road and sitting in the mud. The responding deputy recognized this was a mental health crisis

and assisted her by arranging transport to a hospital for care. This was a good job by our deputy. A deputy responded to a call where the reporting party indicated there were misc. tools and equipment stolen from an unsecured barn. The theft could have happened in June or July of 2022. A deputy responded to a report of a snowmobile crash with injuries. The driver lost control when she struck a deep ditch and suffered injuries to her shoulders and legs. She was transported to Mercy Hospital for care.

Administrator Lehner commented that he appreciates the relationship and communication the sheriff's office has with administration very much, along with the weekly reports of calls that are provided. The Lt. stated they are proud to be a part of this community and the City of Nowthen along with being very happy to be here.

7. PLANNING AND ZONING: NONE

8. ADMINISTRATOR'S UPDATE:

- a) Pay Equity Report: The city received notice that the city was in non-compliance with the MN Management and Budget department for not submitting the Pay Equity Report that was due in February of 2021 and not completed by the previous administration. Deputy Clerk Johnson is working on the report by pulling 2020 numbers and will get the report submitted noting the next time this report is due, February of 2024. To complete the report, the 2018 pointing system will be used. To complete the new report due in 2024, the city will need to have a 3rd party come in to write up actual job descriptions, create a step system, along with a points system based on the state job match points system for the new positions that have been created in the past year.
- b) MS4 Audit update: The audit was held via teams meeting Feb. 27, 2023, with the MN Pollution Control Agency. The city engineer, Shane Nelson, city planner, Liz Stockman, Public Works Supervisor, Joe Glaze, Mayor Pilon and Administrator Lehner participated in this audit. This audit went well. The city will have a few corrective actions, but nothing serious. There are a few minor violations and once the city receives the report, corrective actions will be put in place. The city is now more educated and will be better educated in the future going forward. Mr. Nelson had many answers to the questions as he has been the city engineer for over 20 years, but if he wasn't here, the answers need to be known by others. Moving forward, the city will be more thorough especially with educating the public and more specific education for Nowthen residents and contractors. The city will have to update our ordinance in place and will be following up with documentation & education as the City of Nowthen needs to have own information. Thank you to Mr. Glaze for putting in the work he did – he knows his stuff!
- c) Recycling Attendant Update: Both of the attendants are doing well and getting up to speed. They have both been trained initially on the baler by Eric Madson and are pushing hard to being fully confident in its operation. Administration is hoping to move to promised hours by April 1. Tuesday – Thursday 11:00 am to 7:00 pm will be handled by Amy, Wednesday-Friday 11:00 pm – 5:00 pm will be handled by Christy and alternating Saturday mornings 8:00 am - Noon. If you haven't stopped by, go check it out. Asst. Fire Chief Schrag noted when he was over there it looked and smells good. Council Member Breyen offered to help with the baler if the attendants needed any assistance.
- d) Snow Plowing Update: The city's maintenance crew has been out many days without a day off. Between plowing, sanding, and salting, and repairs, they are putting in many hours. THANK YOU for all the hard work and time away from your families. Sometimes they are discouraged by resident complaints but 99% of the time they are doing an exceptional job; they care about this city and its residents. The new truck is here and fully operational. Care is being taken to make sure it remains in great condition with weather tech flooring, seat covers and new wrapping coming soon to show City of Nowthen pride in our equipment. Thank you, council, for the approval of this new fully functional vehicle. Come take a look at

it. We started the season with 5 plow drivers, and we are now down to 3. We lost one due to money, stating he can make more money somewhere else. Mayor Pilon did a ride-along with Administrator Lehner while he was out plowing for 12 hours in blinding snow. Every road had to be done twice that evening. Mr. Glaze has been reliable and dependable. He watches the weather diligently and directs his staff appropriately when it's time to go out. Some gravel roads have been icy, an occasional mailbox goes down, that is just part of the job. Until you know what it is like to not get a good nights sleep, you don't realize how good of a job this department has been doing. Deputy Clerk Johnson recognized Administrator Lehner for being out on the streets beside the staff working as many hours there as in the office. The mayor appreciated the fact that Scott has built a team in the city that has not been there in years past. Even Deputy Clerk Johnson chipped in by feeding the plow drivers after a long night plowing. The staff cares about one another, and the team atmosphere is spreading from staff to residents.

- e) Administrative Assistant Adrienne Christensen will be moving to part-time beginning tomorrow and has turned in her resignation with her last day to be April 11, 2023. She will be attending the next council meeting to say goodbye and express her thanks to the city council for the opportunity she was given to work for the city. Administration is asking for authorization to post the position on the website and the League of MN Cities website, along with the city bulletin board. The city has received one application so far and has an interview set up. The mayor then explained the process that needs to be followed stating the personnel committee will do the interviewing with staff and will make the recommendation to city council, the city council then takes the recommendation in consideration, then will vote to hire or not to hire based upon recommendations. If the committee disagrees on a candidate, they will present their recommendations and the city council will decide on which candidate to hire or not to hire. Discussion whether the city should offer Karen Engh a part-time position (temporary) again to help out during the transition and if Madeline Greenberg could work additional hours up to 40 during this time.

MOTION BY COUNCIL MEMBER RAINVILLE, SECONDED BY ALDERS TO AUTHORIZE STAFF TO OFFER KAREN ENGH PART-TIME HOURS TEMPORARILY BASED ON PREVIOUS TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT UP TO THREE (3) MONTHS.

DISCUSSION ENSUED. COUNCIL MEMBER RAINVILLE'S MOTION AMENDED TO OFFER MADELINE GREENBERG UP TO 40 HOURS A WEEK DURING THIS TRANSITION, NOTING THIS IS STILL A PART-TIME POSITION WITH NO BENEFITS. MOTION CARRIED. 5 AYES.

MOTION BY COUNCIL MEMBER BREYEN, SECONDED BY MAYOR PILON TO APPROVE THE POSTING OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT POSITION ON THE CITY BULLETIN BOARD, WEBSITE AND LEAGUE OF MN CITIES WEBSITE. MOTION CARRIED. 5 AYES.

- f) City Office Improvements Update: Many things have changed. Deputy Clerk Johnson has gone above and beyond to have these improvements made. The city now has a conference room to be proud of to hold meetings and trainings in. There is new carpet throughout the office, the center island has been moved, new countertops installed, a new mail station, a stairway to the mezzanine in the shop to be code compliant, the old storage closet has been cleaned out, old documents purged, and a new workstation is being created along with a smaller storage room. If you haven't stopped in recently, stop in and see the changes along with the new equipment. A past council member had stopped in and stated the office looked great and she had never been in the shop – please know you all are welcome in the city offices.
- g) Update regarding 181st and Baugh: Planner Stockman and Administrator Lehner have received correspondence expressing interest in this piece of property using 85 acres for solar panels. Discussion ensued. Council Member Rainville asked if the property had been sold and if the city was working with

the current owners for this project? Is the city paying for time and efforts with someone who doesn't even own the property? Questions were asked if there is a benefit to the city? Do current ordinances allow for this type of project? Much discussion. Administrator Lehner stated that there is no ask at this time. This information was just for your information to keep the council up to speed that there was some communication so council members would not be surprised if they heard about this out in the community. There is no action required at this time. Planner Stockman will be reminded to keep the city council apprised of larger projects, developments, commercial development, and business development inquiries in the city.

9. City Council:

- a) Council Member Fladebo stated the LMC class she attended was good information, especially being a new city council member. She completed internet-based classes first, then attended in person with a hands-on approach. She made some connections with other city council members with cities close to Nowthen's size and the networking was great. The commute, however, was tough due to the winter conditions with black ice.
- b) The mayor announced that the Elkin's Bill was in hearing. Met Council is trying to repeal the City of Nowthen's exemption. Things are moving very quickly in the current MN legislation. Mayor Pilon and Administrator Lehner met with both our Representative and Senator about this issue when they attended "City Day on the Hill."


MOTION TO ADJOURN BY COUNCIL MEMBER FLADEBO, SECONDED BY RAINVILLE. MOTION CARRIED. 5 AYES.

Meeting adjourned at 8:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Scott Lehner, City Administrator



Jeffrey M. Pilon, Mayor