

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
COMMON COUNCIL
October 25, 2021**

The Common Council of the City of Rensselaer met on October 25, 2021 in regular session in Council Chambers of City Hall. Mayor Stephen Wood called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. followed by invocation offered by Doug Harris with The Bridge Assembly of God Church and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Answering roll call were: Mayor Stephen Wood; Clerk-Treasurer Frieda Bretzinger; Council Members Russ Overton, Bill Hollerman, Noelle Weishaar, George Cover, Ernest Watson, Jr; City Attorney Jacob Ahler; Building Commissioner Kevin Cochran; Park Supt. Joe Effinger; Cemetery Supt. Tony Baltus; Police Chief Matt Anderson; Utility Office Manager Heather Smart; Street Supt. Andy Daniels; Project Coordinator Jerry Lockridge; Gas Supt. Carol Lockridge; and Electric Lead Line Foreman Lenny Larson. Harley Tomlinson with the Rensselaer Republican arrived after roll call. Fire Chief Kenny Haun was absent.

Also in attendance were Robert Schenk with Rensselaer Adventures; Doug Harris with The Bridge Assembly of God Church, Stephen Eastridge with JCEDO; Alex Hilt with BakerTilly; JoAnn McElfresh; David DelPrincipe; Edwin Buswell and Emily with KIRPC, Stace Pickering with C/I.

The minutes of the October 11, 2021 regular council meeting were presented. There was a motion by Overton and second by Hollerman to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Citizen Comments and Petitions: Wood asked if there were any citizens that had comments. JoAnn McElfresh with Jenkins Realtors said she is here in support of the tax abatement ordinance. David DelPrincipe with DelPrincipe and Allie, CPA's addressed the council to support the tax abatement ordinance. He said he's been attending tax abatement meetings for nearly two decades. He felt that a tax abatement standardization ordinance as being proposed is tremendous for our school system, for our citizenry at-large and new employers coming in. It lessens the burden on homeowners on their real estate taxes.

City CDBG Planning Grant Comprehensive Plan Public Hearing: There was a motion by Overton, second by Hollerman, to close the regular meeting and open the public hearing. Buswell said this is the public hearing regarding the city's application to Indiana's Office of Community and Rural Affairs for a planning grant to complete a comprehensive plan. The grant is for \$50,000.00 with a local match of \$5,506.00. The grant application is due November 12, 2021. He asked if there were any questions. Bretzinger asked what the comprehensive plan is for. Buswell said it is for the city to set goals for the future. McElfresh said she recently participated in a survey at the county level and because of Covid, it was done on-line. She felt that because it wasn't in-person that no one was listening to her. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Overton, to close the public hearing and open the regular meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Ordinance 17-2021, Tax Abatement Ordinance: Ahler said it's been brought to his attention that there are other tax ordinances on the books and they need to be repealed. He said if council wants to pass this tonight his recommendation would be to add the language to repeal and replace the other ordinances. Eastridge said he's spoken to several of us and would be happy to answer any questions. Watson said he understands that everything comes through the city but wants to know how everything is pushed out to him. How does the 3% get to him and what responsibilities do we have to get that from the companies coming in. Eastridge said he would work with Bretzinger's office in that JCEDO would get the packets prepared, make sure the paperwork is filled out correctly and all of the documentation and the 3% payment is there and file it with Bretzinger's office. Bretzinger said her understanding of the process for her office is that she collects the money and then pays it out. Eastridge said that is his intention. Hollerman asked if this was the same as outsourcing our responsibility. Eastridge said not necessarily. He said they want to strengthen their relationship with the city and do more work for us. The city would still have sole authority, JCEDO would only be making recommendations. This will only apply to new tax abatements. There was a motion by Weishaar, second by Overton, to approve Ordinance 17-2021 and repeal any previous tax abatement ordinances. The motion passed unanimously.

Resolution 21-2021, Transfer of Funds: Bretzinger said that this transfer is within the mayor's office of \$500.00, clerk-treasurer's office of \$2,000.00, building dept. of \$120.00, fire department of \$2,000.00, police dept of \$29,400.00, and park dept of \$4,400.00 for a total General Fund transfer of \$38,420.00; EDIT Fund transfer of \$32,006.80; Riverboat Distribution transfer of \$57,995.00 and Cumulative Capital Development Fund of \$13,565.65. There was a motion by Hollerman, second by Cover, to approve the resolution as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Final Gas Rate Report: Alex Hilt prepared a gas utility rate summary and the purpose is to come up with ways to provide revenue stability during periods of below average usage. Suggestions were a customer charge of \$8.05 for all connected and metered customers on the system, eliminate minimum bills, reduce usage blocks 1 and 2 to account for separate fixed customer charges and reset total revenue requirements based on current needs. Main issues driving the results in a fixed expense every month that is not influenced by customer usage is that customer charge is based solely on coverage of the debt payments. No other fixed costs of operations are included in that charge. Also, all other gas utilities in the state have a portion of their bill set as a fixed charge as certain portions of the cost of operating the utilities are not dependent on volume used. Two consecutive years of mild winters has illustrated that the utility's current rate structure relies heavily on large volume sales, particularly in the winter months to maintain financial stability. During average and high gas usage months customer bills will see very little impact from the fixed charge as the lower usage changes compensate. Only during extremely low use months when the bill is at its lowest will the change be more evident.

City Residential - Summer 12 CCF	\$8.79	\$12.59	\$3.80	43%
City Residential – Average 70 CCF	45.13	46.66	1.53	3%
City Residential – Winter 120 CCF	72.64	74.17	1.53	2%
City Large Commercial – 1,000 CCF	556.82	558.34	1.52	0%
Rural Residential – Summer 12 CCF	\$11.15	\$15.74	\$4.59	41%
Rural Residential – Average 70 CCF	57.39	58.32	.93	2%
Rural Residential – Winter – 120 CCF	92.47	92.71	.24	0%
Rural Small Commercial – 75 CCF	60.90	61.76	.86	1%

Monthly customer charge \$8.05

For customers living outside of the city limits, the proposed rates which includes the 25% surcharge are as follows:

First	800 CF	\$ 0.4688 per CCF
Next	1,200 CF	\$ 0.4813 per CCF
Next	4,000 CF	\$ 0.7964 per CCF
Next	494,000 CF	\$ 0.6878 per CCF
All Over	500,000 CF	\$ 0.6581 per CCF

Monthly customer charge \$10.06

This rate structure would be more aligned and would do away with minimum rates. He said the monthly gas tracker would also continue. Hilt said the base rate will increase. Hilt said there's a draft rate ordinance that's been prepared and will need to schedule a public hearing. The ordinance can be introduced at the next meeting. Then a public hearing would need to be scheduled.

Discussion on Trash Ordinance: Lockridge said they had BakerTilly look at the trash service over the last nine or ten months. It looks like we're in pretty good shape so he's asking to purchase 96 gallon totes and then for the elderly purchasing 35 gallon totes for trash pickup. They are getting the trucks equipped with tippers to pick up containers. There is another rate increase coming on January 1 from \$17.85 to \$18.40 per month. He said in the original ordinance the 96 gallon totes were not mentioned so there will probably need to be some changes to container size as well. As of January 1, if a residence has a 96 gallon tote, the monthly trash fee will be \$18.40. However, if they have the 35 gallon tote, the monthly charge will be \$9.20. He said letting a person choose the size of tote they want would be a nightmare so he thought maybe the city could say the 35 gallon totes would only be available to persons 65 and older. Weishaar had a problem with the 65 and older phrase because a single person living alone may also want a 35 gallon tote. Cover said Lockridge is right, that could become a nightmare. Bretzinger asked how that would work with a citizen 65 and older. You can't very well go door-to-door. Lockridge said the person wanting the 65 and older credit would have to fill out a form. His office would deliver the 35 gallon tote and if they find that the tote is overflowing they would go back to the citizen and tell them this isn't working and they have to go back to the 96 gallon tote. Smart said every day they are making work orders because people are putting out additional trash. There was a motion by Watson, second by Hollerman, to allow Lockridge to purchase the totes. The motion passed unanimously.

Gas Department Sale of Two Trucks: Lockridge said Alan Cooper has offered \$2,000.00 each for a 2003 Chevy 4500 and a 2005 Chevy 4500. Both units have been replaced and the dealers didn't want to take them as trade-ins. She had Troy White with White's Auto give her estimates on them. He set the actual cash value of the 2003 at \$1,800.00 and the 2005 at \$2,100.00. There was a motion by Cover, second by Hollerman, to approve the sale. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Relations Request: There was a request from the Public Relations Fund for flowers for an employee's father who passed away. The amount to be spent is between \$75.00 and \$100.00. There was a motion by Overton, second by Watson, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously.

Credit Card Activity Log: Wood asked council for permission to sign the credit card activity log. There was a motion by Overton, second by Hollerman, to approve the log. The motion passed unanimously.

Cemetery Deed Request: Bretzinger had a cemetery deed request for Myrtle Sullivan. There was a motion by Weishaar, second by Hollerman, to approve the request. The motion passed unanimously.

Administrative Comments:

Cover said he's been talking to Wood and Cochran about trash around town and the lack of mowing yards. Cochran said it's more than one man can handle; taking care of the building code and ordinance code. He would like to talk about hiring a code enforcer. Cochran said there are complaints daily. It's impossible to keep up with all of the complaints. He also thought a city court might be something we could look in to. He thought a city court could even do vehicle fines.

Watson wants to keep in mind about the next step as retirement approaches. He wants us to be ready for the future.

Bretzinger had nothing.

Wood had nothing.

Overton had nothing.

Hollerman had nothing.

Weishaar said we need to be forward-thinking.

Claims Approval: The claims were presented to council for its approval. There was a motion by Overton, second by Hollerman, to approve the claims. The motion passed unanimously.

Superintendents Reports:

Building Dept: Cochran said there is a survey on the table next to Mr. Schenk. He asked people who have not completed the survey to please do so.

Cemetery Dept: Baltes had nothing.

Electric Dept: Larson had nothing.

Fire Dept: Haun was absent.

Gas Dept: Lockridge said we are doing everything we possibly can to keep gas prices down.

Law Dept: Ahler had nothing.


Park Dept: Effinger had nothing but then added they have had their last baseball tournament.

Police Dept: Anderson said they are down to three police applicants. They are preparing for interviews.

Street, Sanitation, Water and Sewer: Daniels had nothing. Lockridge said at the Board of Public Works meeting they received three bids for the Main Lift Station and Unsewered Areas Project. It looks like the cost is in the mid \$7M. They have been working on chlorinating Well #6. They are getting ready to test it.

Utility Office: Smart had nothing.

There being nothing more to come before council, there was a motion by Weishaar, second by Hollerman, to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.


Stephen A. Wood, Mayor

Attest:


Frieda Bretzinger, I/MC
Clerk-Treasurer