



**City Council Meeting
February 13, 2024, at 6 pm
Sturgeon Lake City Hall**

The following council members were present at the hall: Mayor Scott Helfman, Councilmember Ken Grey, Councilmember Adam Langhorst and Councilmember David Lingle

The following council members were absent: Councilmember Nick Dagle

The following city employees were present at the hall: Fire Chief Al Cekalla, and City Clerk/Treasurer Sandra Osterdyk

The following city staff members were absent: Public Works Superintendent Larry Coursolle

Members of the public that were present: Nicole Kloser, Mike Svacina, Chad Robbins, Judy Koch, and Tom Koch

Call to order: Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, Mayor Helfman called the City Council Meeting to order at 6:00 pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Fire Department Report

Fire Department Report: There was a total of 6 calls within the last month. There is one new volunteer firefighter, who brings years of experience to the department along with already having finished their Fire Fighter 1 & 2 training, which leaves their First Responder training to be completed. Fire Chief Cekalla asks the council to approve the hiring of Eric Witke, while his background checks are pending results from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and Minnesota Driver and Vehicle Services, as it can take up to three to seven weeks for these to be returned.

Councilmember A. Langhorst made a motion to hire Eric Witke as a volunteer firefighter for the City of Sturgeon Lake pending no issues being found in the final background results from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and/or the Minnesota Driver and Vehicle Services, Councilmember D. Lingle seconded the motion. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.

Fire Chief Cekalla stated the addition of Eric Witke will bring the department to 18 members, which is the most members it's had in 20 years.

There was a meeting with the grant writer. There was a new tanker grant written and sent the week of February 12, 2024. There was a total of two grants submitted and hopefully, the department will get funding for both.

To move forward with the Sturgeon Lake Fire Hall project a Feasibility Study is needed. The fire department is looking for the support of the city council to cover the cost of this study to explain what the needs are, the current conditions, repair costs, and what new costs would be. They are asking that the remaining ARPA Funds be used toward the Feasibility Study costs. Expected costs could range from \$15,000 to \$25,000.

Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to use the remaining ARPA funds to cover the cost of the Feasibility Study, Councilmember A. Langhorst seconded the motion. The motion carried with a roll call vote all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.

Councilmember K. Grey brought up the LMC topic of the conflict of interest around the Fire Hall topic and Councilmember A. Langhorst's involvement as a volunteer firefighter and council member. There was a discussion between the council on the perception that some in the community believe it creates.

Councilmember K. Grey stated that he recused himself from the Cathedral Pines Lease Agreement and that it is only fair the same be done here as well. Councilmember A. Langhorst stated that he does not have anything directly to gain from a new fire hall so there is no direct benefit for him. Councilmember A. Langhorst said he may or may not consider recusal from voting as a firefighter or a councilmember when the time comes to vote on a new fire hall. The City Clerk/Treasurer will send the issue to the City Attorney to look into it more to determine if there is a conflict of interest.

Councilmember A. Langhorst made a motion to send the topic of conflict of interest around the Fire Hall topic and Councilmember A. Langhorst's involvement as a volunteer firefighter and council member to the city attorney for review. Councilmember K. Grey seconded the motion. The motion carried with a roll call vote all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.

The City Clerk/Treasurer is to draft a letter to send to the other townships that the Sturgeon Lake Fire Department provides services to keep them informed. A draft letter will be for review by the Fire Chief before being sent.

Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to approve the draft letter to be sent to the other townships, Councilmember D. Lingle seconded the motion. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.

Approximately three meetings ago, there was a discussion around the Fire Hall project as well. Is the city looking at a Fire Hall or a Fire Hall with a City Hall complex? When talking about the Feasibility Study they ask the same question. Councilmember K. Grey feels we should wait until after the Feasibility Study results are back to answer. At this time he would say the Fire Hall should be its own separate entity. Mayor Helfman agrees, especially if we will be asking the local townships the Fire Departments support to help with the construction cost of the new building they will want to pay less. The City Hall could be a phase II project at a later date. Councilmember D. Lingle brought up that if we are looking at State Funding, it would be better to have the City Hall included to ask for the larger amount.

Special Guests and Visitor Comment

Nicole Kloser from Lakes and Pines was present to go over the owner-occupied housing rehabilitation program. If residents stay in the home for 10 years, then it is considered a grant. The issue is that Lakes and Pines are not getting any applications from residents in the City of Sturgeon Lake for the replacement of windows, doors, and siding. They are asking for ideas on how to reach out to homeowners to promote the program. Back in 2006/2007, the program was filled. Fire Chief Cekalla will do a windshield survey to identify properties and provide the list to the City Clerk/Treasurer. The idea of putting a summary note on the monthly Utility Billing statements was suggested by Councilmember A. Langhorst. The City Clerk/Treasurer said she would look into this and work on this for the April billing cycle. Nicole mentioned she already had reached out to the applicants who had applied for Energy assistance.

Mike Svacina from Mike's Sewer and Chad Robbins from Robbins Septic joined the council to discuss the issues at the wastewater ponds. On January 25, 2024, Rural Water was present to poke several holes in the ponds to take readings. There is concern about the sludge buildup and what is organic vs inorganic. Mayor Helfman reached out to contacts to take samples to find out they are no longer doing that. There was a lengthy discussion about the effects of the dumping and the community. The estimated estimate to de-sludge the entire pond is roughly \$525,000 in 3-5 years to remove 24" of sludge. The City is still looking at alternate solutions, one of them being a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency approval of a HydroVac. Looking forward to getting a quote from a local vendor later this week. A potential special meeting could be called depending on the outcome of the meeting.

Chad Robbins explained that it's been a very stressful time, and that some clarity is needed now versus later. Mike Svacina talked about possible solutions they are working to implement when dumping. It was also discussed that they feel this was a problem that just didn't occur over the last year or 18 months. The council looked at readings from 2019 and January to compare the two.

Mike Svacina brought up that they are about to start their busy season soon. He asked if the dumper could be capped at their 2023 numbers for the remainder of 2024 and be allowed to continue to dump for the year with a reevaluation in the fall.

[Councilmember A. Langhorst made a motion to approve the Dumpers numbers set for 2024 at their 2023 numbers with a reevaluation in September/October 2024, Councilmember D. Lingle seconded the motion. The motion carried with a roll call vote all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.](#)

Judy and Tom Kock were present to continue discussions on the Cathedral Pines Lease Agreement. Confirm that written approval for non-residents will be required along with no weapons on the leased land will be in the lease agreement. Update the terms to a two-year agreement. Tim Sullivan has the language for the signage and the four residents will pay for all signage that will be posted. Once these updates are done the City Clerk/Treasurer will send the Lease Agreement to the City Attorney for review. If approved a Special Meeting may be called before the next council meeting on March 19, 2024.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the December 12, 2023, Regular City Council Meeting Minutes and January 9, 2024, Organizational Council Meeting were submitted for approval.

[Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to approve the minutes for the December 12, 2023, Regular City Council Meeting Minutes and January 9, 2024, Organizational Council Meeting, Councilmember D. Lingle seconded the motion. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.](#)

Financial Report

Claims Paid: The Clerk/Treasurer presented the claims paid to the council. Any questions the council had about the Claims Paid were answered satisfactorily by the Clerk/Treasurer.

[Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to approve Claims Paid, seconded by Councilmember D. Lingle. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.](#)

Unpaid Claims: The Clerk/Treasurer presented the Unpaid Claims to the council. Any questions the council had about the Unpaid Claims were answered satisfactorily by the Clerk/Treasurer.

[Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to approve the Unpaid Claims, seconded by Councilmember D. Lingle. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.](#)

Financial Report/Review: The Clerk/Treasurer presented the Financial Report/Review. Any questions the council had were answered satisfactorily by the Clerk/Treasurer.

[Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to approve the Financial Report/Review, seconded by Councilmember D. Lingle. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.](#)

Reports of Departments

Park Committee: The water at the park has been shut off at the curb stop.

Public Works: The council discussed reducing the Public Works employee hours during the winter as there is not enough work without snow to keep him busy every day. They decided on two days a week, those days being Monday and Thursday, for a total of 16 hours per week as stated in the original employment ad he applied for. This will take effect starting on February 14, 2024.

[Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to reduce the Public Works Employee to two days a week for a total of 16 hours per week starting February 14, 2024, seconded by D. Lingle. The motion carried with a roll call vote all members present voting in favor, N. Dagle absent.](#)

Mayor Helfman shared that Lift Station inspections will be scheduled soon. The goal is to coordinate with Nelson's Sanitation to have them vacuumed before the inspections. More information to follow at the next meeting.

The PLC panel at Lift Station #3 is acting up again and keeps crashing again, this may need updated firmware.

[Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to address all sewer issues and schedule repairs seconded by A. Langhorst. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagele absent.](#)

Roads: Nothing new to report.

Solid Waste: Nothing new to report.

Storage Facility: The City Clerk/Treasurer confirmed that there are currently 4 vacant small storage units and 4 vacant large storage units as of February 12, 2024. The Storage Maintenance note was put on all the storage utility cards for the month and so far, only a few responses stated no issues. Councilmember A. Langhorst stated that if responses are received timeframes are not to be promised.

Water/Sewer Operator: Nothing new to report.

Zoning: Nothing new to report.

City Clerk/Treasurer: Wellhead Protection Plan Contingency Strategy Plan email to Mayor Helfman for his review and edits to fill in the missing information, need to up Caleb Anderson since he left Pine County. The question was presented to the council if we wanted to reach out to the Minnesota Department of Health and move the Lead Service Line Contract from JPJ to Widseth so it remained with our City Engineer, Joseph Pelawa, since he has changed companies, the council had a brief discussion and decided it would be best. The City Clerk/Treasurer will reach out to Sabrina Sutter with the Minnesota Department of Health and get this updated. At this time there are 13 users signed up with online UBPAY. Still in need of election judges and just a few weeks away from our first election the Presidential Primary Election on March 5. The Lakes and Pines News Release has been added to the City of Sturgeon Lake website with a hyperlink to the Lakes and Pines website. As of February, there are already 7 reservations on the calendar, in 2023 there was a total of 13 reservations all year. Two new accounts/transfers were set up last month - 3160 Laketown Road (as of 2-8-24) and 8977 1st Ave (as of 1-30-24). Have one report left for Year-End Reporting at this time and continuing to work on reporting for the Audit on April 29 & 30, 2024. Completed a PS2002 form for Bob Linc on the 2002 Chevrolet he bought from the Fire Department in December 2023 to try to get the title on 2-8-24. This is after a Statement of Fact was already filed and an earlier PS2000 on 1-17-24 along with a Lost Title on 1-9-24. Hopefully, this time he will be successful. Completed the Renewal Application for 2024-2025 LMCIT Workers' Compensation Coverage: City of Sturgeon Lake. The City Clerk/Treasurer said that she would like to attend the upcoming Minnesota Municipal Clerks and Finance Officer Association (MCFOA) Annual Conference from March 20-22 in St. Cloud.

[Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to approve the City Clerk/Treasurer attending the Minnesota Municipal Clerks and Finance Officer Association \(MCFOA\) Annual Conference seconded by D. Lingle. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagele absent.](#)

Mayor: Nothing that wasn't already discussed.

New Business

Horvath Towers V, LLC presented the City with an offer to acquire a 99-year easement under and around the communication tower located on the premises at 3188 Green Leaf Road, Sturgeon Lake, MN 55783, and all related assets and improvements, including interests in tenant leases and all other related property (collectively, the "Assets") owned by The City of Sturgeon Lake in exchange for \$116,000 in immediately available funds. The council discussed the offer and decided to decline this offer and not make a counteroffer but continue with the current contract. The City Clerk/Treasurer will send the original contract from September 20, 2028, to all council members for review on 2/18/24.

[Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to reject Horvath Towers V, LLC offer for \\$116,000 with a 99- year easement under and around the communication tower located on the premises at 3188 Green Leaf Road, Sturgeon Lake, MN 55783 seconded by A. Langhorst. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagele absent.](#)

Resolution No. 2024-13 Setting Pay for Election Judges Pay Rate Training 2024 Presidential Primary General Elections. There was discussion on how hard it is to get election judges every election and that the pay rate is a large part of that. The City Clerk/Treasurer brought this up and the rate was adopted on the 2024 Fee Schedule. This resolution is setting the adopted pay rate for election judges as officially approved.

Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to approve the increase of the election judge pay to \$14.00 for regular election judges and \$16.00 for head judges and to pay all election judges \$14.00 for training which was adopted during the Fee Schedule update on January 9, seconded by D. Lingle. The motion carried with a roll call vote, of three in favor, 1 abstained, and 1 absent.

Resolution No. 2024-14 Amending Meeting Schedule for the date of August 13, 2024, to August 20, 2024, as it conflicts with the Primary Election.

Councilmember A. Langhorst made a motion to approve Resolution No. 2024-14 Amending Meeting Schedule for the date of August 13, 2024, to August 20, 2024, as it conflicts with the Primary Election seconded by K. Grey. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagele absent.

LMCIT Insurance Appraisal – HCA Asset Management is scheduled to be onsite on 2/14/24 to appraise all the city buildings. This appraisal takes place once every seven years. This is needed to ensure property premiums and coverage limits are accurate. Mayor Helfman will reach out to Fire Chief Cekalla to confirm if he will be available to walk them through the Fire Hall for the inspection.

The city had an inquiry to buy empty lots from a local investor. The City Clerk/Treasurer only knew of the two properties. The council confirmed those are the only two city-owned properties. The City Clerk/Treasurer will contact the investor to let them know.

Pine County Animal Welfare Society Clinic reached out about hosting animal wellness clinics at City Hall. They are a local charity organization and have done it here in the past. The council discussed it and approved all the dates the PCAWS had been looking at for the fall of 2024, which are 8/21/24, 9/18/24, and 10/16/24. All the hall rental fees have also been covered by members of the council or employees. The City Clerk/Treasurer will contact the Pine County Animal Welfare Society Clinic to let the organization know so they can start planning.

Old Business

The Cathedral Pines Lease Agreement discussion continued. Some other questions and items need to be ironed out for the contract and then sent to the council for review before being sent to the city attorney for final review. The questions at this time are; If someone were to sell, is it transferable or would it go to the other three? Written approval for access to the property must be received before anyone can access the land. No weapons are to be brought onto the land. Tom and Judy Koch will be the primary points of contact for the lease. Signage wording is to be sent to the City Clerk/Treasurer for review before being sent to the council for final approval.

The council discussed the Cannabis Ordinance and decided to table this topic until it was needed.

Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to table the Cannabis Ordinance until needed, seconded by Councilmember D. Lingle. The motion carried with a roll call vote all members present voting in favor, N. Dagele absent.

Announcements

Councilmember K. Grey presented the council with his formal resignation.

Councilmember A. Langhorst made a motion to accept the resignation of Councilmember K. Grey, seconded by Councilmember D. Lingle. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagele absent.

Councilmember A. Langhorst suggested that a Notice of Vacancy be posted in the papers.

Councilmember A. Langhorst made a motion to advertise a Notice of Vacancy on City Council in the local newspaper and Evergreen until the next City Council meeting, seconded by Councilmember D. Lingle. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagele absent.


The next Regular City Council Meeting will be on Tuesday, March 19, 2024, at 6:00 pm.

A Special Meeting may be called before then, depending on when Feasibility Studies are received from Engineering firms.

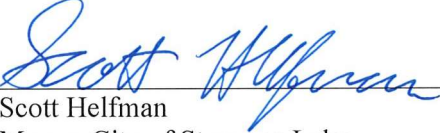
Adjournment

Councilmember A. Langhorst made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Councilmember D. Lingle. The motion carried with all members present voting in favor, N. Dagele absent. The meeting adjourned at 8:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Sandra Osterdyk
City Clerk/Treasurer, City of Sturgeon Lake



Scott Helfman
Mayor, City of Sturgeon Lake