

Regular Meeting of the
Committee of the Whole
9/29/2014

The regular meeting of the Committee of the Whole was called to order at 7:05 pm September 29th, 2014 in the Council Chambers of the City of Rock Falls. Present were Aldermen Reitzel, Logan, Snow, Schuneman, Hand, Folsom and Watts. Also present were Mayor Wescott, Administrator Blackert, and Clerk Arduini.

Audience Requests

Catherine Gibson of 2502 16th Avenue in Sterling, IL asked the committee why a group should be singled out for rental inspections. She stated that if enacted this ordinance would lead to higher rent, landlords would have to ask for more loans, and more homes would be abandoned. She would like to see the landlords and city work together before it gets out of hand.

Rod Kleckler of 219 Avenue C Rock Falls, IL. stated that he took issue with item number 5 of the new ordinance. He feels that there is a discrepancy in funding for the program. He stated that the city charges \$50 for the housing authority to have inspections done, but he will be able to have one done for less. He would like to see that the program be fair. The landlord association has 75 members, owning 1000 units. He feels the city should talk to these landlords for input as how to implement a program like this. Mr. Kleckler does not want to pay for other people's problems, and to have the city tell him when it is time to fix property. Mr Kleckler added later in the meeting that \$12.50/ hour could not pay for a competent inspection.

Ernie Vallederas of 1801 Avenue K in Sterling asked the committee who would benefit from these inspections. He states that section 8 requires inspections, but also pays rent. He asks if the city will be paying rent. Mr. Vallederas feels that everyone should have to have the inspections, not just the landlords.

Discussion of the rental inspection program

Mayor Wescott gave an overview of the process that led the subject of the rental inspection program to be brought to the committee of the whole. He stated at the last Finance meeting the committee did not feel that with the rates set at the level presented, it was sustainable.

Building Inspector Searing handed a packet of figures for the rental inspection program to the committee to review. Mr. Searing stated that the original dollar figures were just placed in as a guide, and it would be up to the committees, and Council to decide what the fees would be set at. He stated that in response to a letter sent to the city by an attorney representing the landlord association there are 16 Illinois statutes that allows for the city to commence such a program.

Alderman Reitzel feels that the costs of the program will be taken by the tenants, and he sees no value to the program.

Alderman Logan stated that the fees needed to cover the costs of implementing the program are not close to what they need to be.

Alderman Snow stated that fiscal responsibility needs to be taken, and the costs need to be covered by the program. He also reminded the committee that the all other businesses are inspected in the city for life safety codes, and being a landlord is a business.

Alderman Schuneman would like to see the program revenue neutral, and it won't be unless the fee are changed. He feels that the ordinance leaves a lot of interpretation. He inquired about the presence of aCO2 detector being on this list for inspections. He applauds Inspector Searing for all of his hard work on this. He reminds the committee that the program is not to make money, it is only for life safety issues.

Alderman Hand stated that he was never in favor of this ordinance and the city should not be going into people's houses. The city should be fair and work with people.

Alderman Folsom doesn't think it should be done now.

Inspector Searing stated that there is a State law for CO2 detectors. He realizes that the inspection needs tweaking, and he re-iterated that this would be a part time job for inspections. Mr. Searing recommends raising the inspection fee to \$30-\$35. He also reminded the committee that every house will not be inspected right off of the bat. The inspections will not be done until the tenant moves out. The unit will be empty, and between renters.

Mayor Wescott stated that the council should work to take this to a vote either way next month.

Discussion of the 1/2 cent sales tax referendum

Mayor Wescott stated that he had made the Council aware of the 1/2 cent sales tax referendum during his state of the city address, at the Public Works committee, and at the Finance committee.

Mayor Wescott gave illustrations to the committee of how much MFT money is used for paying off a bond for repairs to West 2nd Street. He explained how the money left from MFT, and the previous 1/2 cent sales tax money is used for road repairs, but it also has to pay for asphalt, gravel, salt, emulsion, sidewalks, and handicap ramps. Each ramp costs at least \$4000, and to replace them on a 4 way intersection costs around \$20,000. He explained that the roads are in bad shape, and the city does not receive the money to fix them from property taxes.

Mayor Wescott stated that the schools in Whiteside County are asking for a \$0 .01 sales tax increase on the ballot in November of this year, and he believes the city should put it before the voters either way. This type of tax is a pass through tax, and it is assessed not just on the residents of Rock Falls, but on all who visit, and make purchases in the city.

Mayor Wescott has spoken with the county clerk, and the paperwork with a resolution will need to be turned in by December 8th to be added to the April ballot. He stated that Dixon does not need the increase currently, and Sterling may need to add this to the ballot for storm sewer improvements. Mayor Wescott stated that the city needs to catch up on street work. He feels it should be put on the ballot and let the voters decide if it passes, and we may need to put it before the voters even if Sterling doesn't.

Alderman Reitzel said that it is hard as he is a business owner, and also the Chairman for Public Works. He states that we need to do something with the roads.

Alderman Logan says that we all know the condition of the roads, and we don't have much choice but to let the voters speak. A pass through tax like this would benefit everyone in town.

Alderman Snow stated that he hears it all the time about how bad the roads are. A project like west 3rd street cost the city over \$700,000. This ½ cent will help to fix the long term problem. The city gets a very small amount of the tax bill. We should put it on the ballot, as it is a creative way to fund more road repairs.

Alderman Shuneman stated that he went to a class at IML about how to pass a referendum. He believes that the cities of Rock Falls and Sterling should have a joint Public Hearing about the proposed tax rate increase.

Alderman Hand says to let the public decide. The city has done the best it can with what it has. The city needs to get the word out about it.

Alderman Folsom agrees that we need to do something with the roads, and let the voters decide.

Mayor Wescott stated that he will meet further with Sterling about this.

Mr. Rod Kleckler (audience) stated that we should go for the sales tax increase no matter what other towns do. He feels a big problem with MFT is that the cost of gasoline is \$.10/ gallon cheaper across the bridge, and the MFT money is going to Sterling because of it.

With nothing else for the good of the committee a motion was made to adjourn by Alderman Folsom, and second by Reitzel.

Vote 7 aye, motion carried

Meeting was adjourned at 8:01pm

_____ Eric Arduini, City Clerk