

CITY OF SULTAN COUNCIL WORKSHOP – July 1, 2021

Mayor Wiita called the workshop to order at approximately 7:02 p.m. The meeting was a hybrid with attendees both in person at City Hall Council Chambers and via Zoom Internet Conference Service. Mayor called roll and the following were in attendance:

Councilmembers in attendance: In person: McCarty, Aldrich, Sivewright, Beeler. Via Zoom: Walker, Vaughn
It was acknowledged CM Neigel would be late to the meeting.

Staff in attendance: In person: City Administrator Ibershof, Public Works Director Morgan, Interim Finance Director Erdman, and City Clerk Pevey. Via Zoom: City Attorney Evans

CHANGES/ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

None noted

DISCUSSION**Updating the policy on unpaid utility bills**

Ibershof explained the governor will lift the moratorium on utility shut offs. Discussion focus is unpaid utility bills and changing the payment arrangement policy to allow customers a payment plan of 12 months versus the current status of six months. If payment plan is not followed or customer fails to make the scheduled payment, current policy states the customer would be disconnected and would be required to pay the bill in full to be reconnected to service. In addition, late fees were suspended during the pandemic, and staff recommendation is to restart late fees on September 1st.

Discussion amongst council about the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, the number of outstanding accounts, owner versus tenant accounts, number of accounts past due prior to 2020. Ibershof confirmed 70% of the unpaid accounts are chronic late payers who were in this status prior to the pandemic. Discussion on requirements to set up a payment plan to include outreach with VOA before being allowed to set up a payment plan.

It was noted Councilmember Neigel joined the meeting at approximately 7:14 p.m. near end of the discussion.

Mayor confirmed council in agreement for 12 month payment plan, starting late fees September 1st, if not reached out to VOA for assistance begin turning off September 1st, and requiring full amount owed when turned off if payment plan fails. Council confirmed only one payment plan allowed per year.

It was noted that Councilmember Sivewright lost zoom connection and reconnected shortly thereafter.

ARPA funding and a grant to the VOA

Mayor explained the basics of the American Rescue Plan Act; Sultan is anticipated to receive \$1.5 million dollars over the course of two years from the Office of Financial Management. First installment of \$752,000 has arrived. City has three years to commit the funds and five years to invest the funds. Staff is limiting its recommendations to two, and awaiting State and County plans for the funds so there is coordination on funding.

Council discussion on grants given to the VOA in 2020 and the success of those grants. Current recommendation to extend an \$80,000 grant to the VOA issued in two installments. The first installment issued to the VOA would not guarantee the second installment. VOA Director Gagnon has stated if the city gives clear direction and criteria for allocation of grant funds, they will honor that criteria. Council confirmed they liked having the option to review performance before the second installment is issued.

Discussion then centered on stringent criteria, assisting those in debt with utility bills, ethics, and requiring accountability. Staff still working on reviewing and understanding a more in depth review of the grant funding

requirements to understand some of the restrictions in relationship to the grant. Recommendation to match funds from a customer; suggestion to have that managed as a potential requirement through the VOA before a payment plan can be established with the city on utility accounts. Discussed a potential percentage limit for a customer with criteria and define what is considered low income.

Mayor confirmed there was no consensus reached and more research from staff was needed on how much of the outstanding utility bills could be covered through this funding and to bring back better financial picture before making a final decision. If additional time is needed, suggestion on pushing dates for shut offs to allow time for implementation of policy and citizens to utilize the policy.

It was noted that Sivewright exited the Zoom meeting and entered the in person room at approximately 7:45 .p.m.

ARPA funding and a grant for the Chamber

Administrator Ibershof explained money was granted through the Chamber of Commerce in 2020 to assist twenty (20) struggling local businesses; each business was awarded \$2500. This was a successful event, and now 2021 finds businesses still struggling. This has prompted the city to again review potential business assistance with the ARPA funding, but to also look at the bigger picture of much needed downtown revitalization. Recommended \$200,000 grant to the Chamber so that a Business Development/Tourism Manager can be hired. Proposed contract of 30 months through the end of 2023. Manager would focus on business retention and growth and with qualified businesses on their business and marketing plan, marketing initiatives, and enhancing tourism. Discussion on Visioning Project Committee future input. Discussion on potential Manager being shared with other cities in the Sky Valley; and a request for quarterly report updates to council. Council in agreement on recommendations and requested staff bring forth parameters for action.

Discussion on an access control system and security cameras

Administrator Ibershof explained City Hall and public works are older buildings. The buildings have not been rekeyed in a long time. To provide added security to city assets, the recommendation is being brought for discussion on upgrading the key access and video system at both locations to enhance safety and security. Components of the upgrades discussed were based on quotes the city received. Discussion on whether to purchase as a 5 year or 10 year one time expense if council approves and funding sources. After discussion, council in agreement to bring forward to council for action with a 10 year plan.

2021 Budget Amendment

Interim Finance Director Erdman presented the budget amendments for the 2021 budget explaining that all increases were due to projects approved by council; all expenses have revenue, transfers, or fund balance to support them, and potential additions for future projects such as lobbyist, water leak detection, access controls and cameras were included in the proposed amendments.

Discussion turned to leak detection and Public Works Director Morgan provided details that it was added as the 2020 Water Use Efficiency Report recently released revealed a 31% loss in water which requires an action plan due to state mandates. In addition, the police department air conditioning system broke down during the recent heat wave; the system is over twenty (20) years old and at the end of its life. The city owns this building and is responsible for addressing the issue. Discussion also on retaining a lobbyist to work in Olympia on behalf of the city to secure potential funding. Council in support of amendments as presented and recommended it be brought forth for action.

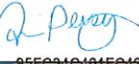
PUBLIC COMMENT


Connor Morgan, Loves Hill Drive: Presented additional data for review regarding utility bills and assistance to include a note that in 2019 bankruptcy hit a historic low and continued into 2020 during the pandemic. Suggested being as generous as possible and to provide VOA with a good standard while balancing concerns in the Cares Act; also suggestion on public outreach and advertising to let people know relief is available.

Shawna Morgan: Documents on file with city clerk and attached as reference regarding a sperate issue. Questioned if city has researched with other cities across the country and what they are doing with their utilities. Similar boat that a lot of people are in but a lot of times they do not know what the resources are.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Councilmember Walker, seconded by Councilmember Aldrich, the council meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:46 p.m. The Zoom meeting connection was disconnected shortly thereafter.

DocuSigned by:

95F634C401FC42E...
Tami J. Pevey, City Clerk


70379EAB00104E0...
Russell Wiita, Mayor