

CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

City Council Meeting of May 18, 2020

Councilmembers –

Your agenda for Monday night is as follows:

NOTE: the May 18, 2020 City Council meeting will be held remotely utilizing video conferencing technology in compliance with Stay Home, Stay Safe requirements restricting public gatherings, including civic activities. However, this is still an open public meeting as defined by the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA). The City will be using Microsoft Teams to livestream the council meeting. Members of the public do not need to download anything to view the proceedings. Click on this [link](#) to join the live event at 5pm Monday, May 18th.

Item A, Public Comment: In compliance with Stay Home, Stay Safe restrictions, and consistent with new guidelines established for public meetings through the OPMA, in-person public comment has been cancelled until further notice. However, the public may still submit comments by emailing City Clerk Susan Duncan at susanduncan@cityofferndale.org. Comments received prior to 4:30pm Monday, May 18th will be included in the meeting record.

Item B, Consent Agenda, including approval of May 4, 2020 Council meeting minutes, authorization of May 5, 2020 payroll, Approval of April 2020 claims.

Item C, Capital Projects Update: Public Works Project Manager Katy Radder will provide an update on ongoing and upcoming City capital projects.

Item D, Presentation, Multifamily Property Tax Exemption Annual Report: Community Development Director Haylie Miller will provide the annual update on the City's Multifamily Property Tax Exemption (MFTE) program. The MFTE program, which was originally established in 2018, provides qualifying and participating multifamily developments with a property tax exemption for up to eight years. The program was established in and around the Downtown core and Griffintown neighborhoods to promote multifamily development in these areas consistent with the City's long-range plans and the Washington State Growth Management Act. No City Council action is required.

Item E, Resolution, Water Restrictions: The City Council is asked to authorize a resolution instituting mandatory watering restrictions beginning June 1st. Public Works Director Kevin Renz will present on the topic. As Director Renz has indicated over the last several years, changing weather conditions and the need to conserve the City's water resource make it necessary to institute these measures on an annual basis. The community has historically responding very well to these restrictions, significantly reducing water consumption during the summer months in both 2018 and 2019. The proposed resolution would make these conservation measures permanent, without the need to receive new authorization each year.

Item F-I: Mayor, Council, Department, and Committee Reports.

Final Thoughts.

Councilmembers -

Working in a small city is fascinating. At times, it allows us (or requires us, depending on one's view on any particular day) to engage with every part of ourselves: emotionally, intellectually, creatively, physically. These are neither the most difficult jobs in the world, nor are they the easiest. As with any job, there will be days that test us – and days that do not.

There are roughly seven dozen City of Ferndale employees here to serve the public. That is what unites all of our various disciplines within the City together, with one focus. We serve as stewards of the public's money, by providing peace and security through law enforcement, by regulating environmental protection and safe building, by protecting property values, by providing safe streets and utilities, by remaining transparent, and by promoting and protecting a high quality of life in the community.

One of the interesting inconsistencies about working in local government is that we serve not only the individual, but the overall community. As a result, there are times when the “right” answer for an individual is not the right answer for the community....the customer is not always right.

Except when they are, of course. Recently, the City did not meet its high standards for customer service or communications in our utility billings. A combination of factors – a new system of calculating bills, unknown limitations of the City's software vendor, a remote workforce, higher-than normal levels of outstanding bills related to the COVID-19 crisis, and more – had a role to play.

But the fact is, the City did not effectively communicate these issues to Ferndale's citizens. This could be the only line in this report that is read, and it would be true.

The City's service to the community is not to always communicate (or create) good news. Nor is it appropriate for the City to sugarcoat bad news. As an example, in 2019, at the beginning of the utility rate study process, the City made clear that that process would likely result in higher costs to our citizens. Very little could have been gained by suggesting something different, and it is our mission to make sure that the community has as much information available to it as possible, to understand the decisions that are made that might affect it.

So what are we going to do now?

- **Increase Communication.** In June, the City will be sending a utility-focused mailer to all of its utility customers. We understand that many in the community do not understand how their utilities are billed, and because of that, some may distrust their billing statement. Additionally, over the last few years there has been a lot of discussion in the community related to our water and sewer resources, and their history. This information requires more depth than a tweet or Facebook post, and we want to make sure all of our utility customers are informed, not just the ones who check our website.
- **Improve Our Processes.** There is always room to improve and become more efficient. Not only during the current pandemic, but at all times, our departments are asked to continue to seek

ways to improve. This could mean a tweak here or there, or it could mean the adoption of new processes or new technologies that can help us be more efficient, transparent, and accurate. While the smaller improvements may not be noticed and occur on a continuous basis, larger changes – such as changing technologies – will take more time, in order to do it right.

- **Focus on Customer Service.** Our citizens will not meet many of our staff on a daily basis; not every staff member has direct contact with the public. But this does not mean that customer service is not an integral part of each of our jobs. And customer service is not always saying “yes:” the City’s job sometimes includes the enforcement of rules and regulations, which can mean requiring that a citizen – one of our customers – must do something that they would not otherwise want to do. Our expectation is that all of our staff will treat each contact fairly, professionally, and consistent with our policies. And in turn, we expect that the public will treat our staff with the same respect – as public employees, not as public doormats.

Your City staff brings a lot to the table, and without question, our level of professionalism and expertise in all departments is at the highest level it has ever been. Part of that professionalism means learning from our mistakes, understanding the regulations that we are required to enforce, and always, *always* improving. Our citizens expect it of us, and we demand it of ourselves.

See you Monday - Jori