

**CITY OF MT. VERNON, ILLINOIS
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Monday, February 26, 2018
7:00 P.M.**

MINUTES

The Mt. Vernon City Council held a Special City Council Meeting on Monday, February 26, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. at the Rolland W. Lewis Community Building, Veterans Park, 800 South 27th Street, Mt. Vernon, IL.

Mayor John Lewis called the meeting to order.

ROLL CALL

Roll call showed present: Council Member Donte Moore, Council Member Jim Rippy, Council Member Mike Young, and Mayor John Lewis. Absent: Council Member Jeff May.

VISITORS/CITIZEN REQUESTS/ADDRESSES FROM THE AUDIENCE

Mayor John Lewis asked Wes Plummer if he wanted to speak now. Plummer requested to hold his comments until the pool management agreement is discussed.

CITY MANAGER

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel requested Council's permission to seek bids for a skid steer hydraulic breaker. Bechtel explained that there was a major water break on Route 15 under the railroad and the only equipment that the City had to break the pavement was a wrecking ball. The wrecking ball caused more damage than it helped the situation. A skid steer hydraulic breaker would enable the crews to go through pavements and hard surfaces more efficiently without damaging the water lines. The cost estimate is \$15,000. The cost will be divided between the Public Works and the Public Utilities Operational Budgets.

Council Member Jim Rippy motioned to grant permission to seek bids for a skid steer hydraulic breaker. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore. Yeas: Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis. Absent: May.

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel presented for Council's approval a Resolution Approving an Agreement with M.E. Simpson Company, Inc., for a Water Distribution System Leak Survey. Bechtel explained that on December 18, 2017, Wacha Water Services was awarded the bid to conduct the

Water Distribution System Leak Survey. The City and Wacha Water could not come to an agreement on conduct language regarding insurance. Wacha Water decided to remove themselves from the project. The next lowest bidder was M.E. Simpson Company, Inc. for \$ 25,500.00. M.E. Simpson has agreed to the contract language. Last year's water meter fee will finance this project. Council Member Jim Rippy asked that progress reports be supplied every two weeks or so.

Council Member Jim Rippy motioned to approve the Resolution Approving an Agreement with M.E. Simpson Company, Inc., for a Water Distribution System Leak Survey. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis. Absent: May.

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel presented for Council's approval a Resolution Approving an Agreement with Westport Pools Services for the Opening and Winterizing Services at the Aquatic Zoo. Bechtel reported that Parks Director Wes Plummer submitted his resignation a couple of weeks ago and she feels that there is not enough time to search for a new Parks Director and to have someone trained about opening and managing the Aquatic Zoo in ten weeks. Westport Pools Services was contracted last year for the spring opening and fall winterizing of the Aquatic Zoo.

Council Member Mike Young motioned to approve the Resolution Approving an Agreement with Westport Pools Services for the Opening and Winterizing Services at the Aquatic Zoo. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore. Yeas: Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis. Absent: May.

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel presented for Council's approval a Resolution Approving an Agreement with Midwest Pool Management of America LTD for the Management of the Aquatic Zoo. Bechtel explained that the reason for this Agreement is due to the recent resignation of the Parks Director. Currently the City does not have the expertise to do the interviewing, hiring, and training of the Aquatic Zoo employees. Midwest Pool Management will employ the employees, not the City. The company has been highly reviewed and recommended. The firm's management fee, which includes recruiting, hiring, training, supervising staff, general liability insurance, consumable first aid supplies, test kits and reagents is \$34,400. The firm submitted a "not-to-exceed" Salary Budget of \$185,425. Bechtel explained that the costs are like previous years expenses. Bechtel stressed that this is a one-year contract.

Former Parks Director Wes Plummer stated that he was taken aback by some of the comments reported in the newspaper about how the Aquatic Zoo was managed. Plummer explained that despite several attempts to discuss the Park Department's goals and activities, never once did he and the Mayor have a chance to meet. He stated that prior to building the Aquatic Zoo facility, there was a feasibility study. The study projected that \$20,000 profit be would generated and have 50,000 guests. The facility was constructed as a service to the community, not to make money. Plummer reported than during the four years of operation, there has been a profit in operations.

Plummer spoke on the Parks Director's position and Parks giveaways. The first time that Plummer and the Park Board heard about giving away some of Parks was when they read the article in the newspaper. Nothing was brought before the Park Board for discussion. Plummer found this very odd, especially since at the last election, transparency was the top issue and the prior administration was suspected of holding secret meetings to sell off City assets. Mayor John Lewis replied that he

spoke to many groups and organizations over the past two to three months about the direction the community wanted to go due to the limited City finances. His options to the community were:

1. Increase taxes for the revenue stream needed to keep the parks up to the level our citizens expect;
2. Decrease the number of parks from ten to two, Veterans and Lincoln Parks, and stop maintaining the neighborhood parks;
3. Put to a referendum the formation of a Park District, and raise property taxes even further to fund a new taxing body

The feedback he received from a large majority was to go down to two parks and concentrate on those parks to give the citizens something they can be proud of, the City can afford, and eliminate the neighborhood parks. Mayor Lewis stated that the Park Department spoke on using a foundation to raise money.

Plummer asked what the City was going to save by getting rid of the neighborhood parks. He said that this was considered without any discussions with the Parks Director. For example, the City recently made a \$500,000 investment in A.L. Dawson Park. There have been no thoughts what to do with the new equipment. Mayor Lewis stated that nothing has been decided yet.

Plummer was concerned about the lack of transparency when the Mayor and City Manager attended the January Parks Board Meeting. The agenda did not state that they were there to discuss decreasing the number of parks. He assumed that the topic was not listed to keep the public from finding out what was to be discussed. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel explained that the discussion was to be with the Park Board on what to do with the Parks. Mayor Lewis reiterated that he spoke publicly on the Park's situation for two to three months throughout the community. Plummer said it was never listed on any agendas for public discussion.

Plummer stated that at the January Parks Board Meeting, the upcoming budget cuts were discussed. He said that the Parks Department's budget has been drastically reduced, more than any other departments' budget. Four years ago, the budget was \$900,000 which included a Park Director, Recreation Coordinator, Secretary, 6 full-time laborers, and 4 seasonal laborers. This year's budget is estimated at \$600,000.

Plummer understands that the current Mayor and Council do not understand the importance of Quality of Life projects. He wants Mt. Vernon to be successful and he does not want Mt. Vernon to backslide by eliminating Parks. Mayor Lewis explained that his administration is more focused on getting the City back on a solid financial foundation, so that no more layoffs will occur. Lewis realizes that Quality of Life projects are great, but he is interested in the finances of the City.

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel explained that the Park Department's levy was the only department that had enough money to fund the City's pension responsibilities. Without the Park Department's money, the tax levy would have been 8.9% instead of 4.99%.

Council Member Jim Rippy stated that he is not opposed to Quality of Life projects, but the basics must be taken care of first. There is only so much money. Revenue needs to be built up to take care of the Quality of Life projects.

Mayor John Lewis stated that reducing the number of Parks is an option, not a done deal and the administration is still working with people to determine the best solution. Plummer asked if a Park District was considered. Lewis stated that this has been discussed in the community and with the Park Board. He has been receiving feedback for months to determine what the community desires. This year the City was hit with a \$500,000 shortfall and he is doing everything he can from devastating families.

Council Member Donte Moore asked if Midwest Pool Management would hire the employees locally. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel replied yes, and the City's Human Resources Department is accepting applications. The former pool managers have both applied for positions this year. Moore asked that language be added to the agreement stating that they would hire the employees locally. Bechtel stated that the language can be added to the agreement.

Council Member Jim Rippy motioned to approve the Resolution Approving an Agreement with Midwest Pool Management of America LTD for the Management of the Aquatic Zoo. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis. Absent: May.

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel requested a Motion to Move Forward with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Construction Grant for the Redevelopment of the Former National Guard Armory. Bechtel stated that the City needs to make the decision to keep or return the grant money. She spoke with the State of Illinois and they refused to allow the City to "white box" the grant money, then turn the facility over to the YMCA. The terms of the grant require that the City operates and owns the facility for twenty years as a recreational facility. Mike Corriveau, YMCA Director, reported that the YMCA has been looking at this project for over two years. The YMCA would need to raise millions of dollars to operate the facility. Without the YMCA having their name on the facility, it would be difficult to raise money for a building that it does not own. Corriveau stated that the location is positive, but without the \$1.25 million grant, at this point, the YMCA cannot proceed.

Bechtel stated that the City's options are to; 1). Let the property sit for a while, 2). Tear the building down, or 3). White Box it. The State will not let the City "white box" and not operate it under the grant guidelines.

Council Member Donte Moore stated that since the State will not allow the City to work with the YMCA, the City should not do anything more with the building, because the City does not have the capabilities to operate the building. Moore recommended that the City tell the State that it will not use the \$1.25 million grant. He remains hopeful that the City can work out an agreement with the YMCA in the future regarding the former National Guard Armory.

Council Member Jim Rippy stated that the citizens have no idea of the costs the City is facing with the infrastructure repairs.

Mayor John Lewis agreed with Council Member Donte Moore that the City should send the money back to the State and let the building sit. The City has tried everything to save this project. Mike Corriveau stated that the YMCA is still looking to do something with the building and hopes to discuss this option in the future.

Council Member Jim Rippy concurred with Mayor Lewis that the money be sent back and let the building sit for now.

Council Member Donte Moore stated that the City was trying to work with a private organization to better the community and it is a shame that it did not work out. Moore thanked the Council and the YMCA for the work completed. Corriveau stated that the YMCA has a partnership with every state except the State of Illinois.

Council Member Donte Moore motioned Not to Move Forward with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Construction Grant for the Redevelopment of the Former National Guard Armory. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis. Absent: May.

VISITORS/CITIZENS REQUESTS/ADDRESSES FROM THE AUDIENCE

Council Member Jim Rippy reported that he and Mayor Lewis attended the Rend Lake Conservancy District Meeting today. The District passed a 2.5% water rate increase which was unnecessary. When Mayor Lewis asked for a "Point of Order", the District would not allow him to speak. He gave thanks to Keshia Jackson for asking tough questions even though she did not receive any answers. Board Members were blaming Mt. Vernon for making money from the water system. Jackson told the Board that how Mt. Vernon operates, was not their business. The Board should only be concerned on how they run the Rend Lake Conservancy District. Rippy stated that he was on the Board for eleven years and knows that the rate should not have been raised.

Mayor John Lewis complimented Keshia Jackson for doing a great job asking good questions even though there were no answers. He stated that he was very disappointed when he was not allowed to speak. Lewis explained that the Board did not follow Robert Rules of Order, by not making motions to take a recess or to call the meeting back to order. He asked the Chairman for a clarification (Point of Information), but he was not recognized. The Chairman stated that he could not talk except at the beginning of the meeting. The fact that the Board kept bringing up Mt. Vernon was completely irrelevant. The Chairman kept saying how little this rate increase is going to affect anyone. Mayor Lewis said that the Board should not take more from the taxpayers than what is needed for their operations. No plans were discussed on how the funds from the rate increase will be used. Six months ago, Council Member Jeff May asked the Board for a capital projects plan, but only received a spending plan. Lewis said that Rend Lake Conservancy District is bringing in more than enough revenue to cover capital expenses considering that they are sitting on \$10.6 million of unrestricted funds. The Board did not justify the rate increase, but it was passed anyway.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

No Executive Session was held.

ADJOURNMENT

**Council Member Mike Young motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore.
Yeas: Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis. Absent: May.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Jo Pemberton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Jo Pemberton
City Clerk