

**City of Mt. Vernon, Illinois  
Regular City Council Meeting  
Monday, December 17, 2018  
7:00 p.m.  
MINUTES**

The Mt. Vernon City Council held a Regular City Council Meeting on Monday, December 17, 2018 at the Rolland W. Lewis Community Building, Veterans Park, 800 South 27th Street, Mt. Vernon, Illinois.

Mayor John Lewis called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Pastor Harold Quick of West Salem Trinity Church gave the Invocation.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**PRESENTATION OF JOURNALS**

The Journal for the December 3, 2018 Regular City Council Meeting was presented for approval.

Council Member Donte Moore motioned to approve the Journal as presented. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.

**VISITORS/CITIZENS REQUESTS/ADDRESSES FROM THE AUDIENCE**

Mike Bullard, Bluford Village President, provided an update on the grade separation project. On December 7, 2018, the Grade Separation Committee met with Carrie Nelson and Charles Stein from IDOT. The concepts of the project are: 1). to accommodate traffic flow which would not be stopped by rail traffic, 2). no or very little impact on local businesses, and 3). to look for other methods besides the 2005 Hanson Engineering proposals. IDOT proposed moving the Southern Railroad line east to run parallel with the Union Pacific on the Union Pacific right-of-way. This would create the need for one overpass. Next, a new two-lane highway would be built to the south and run-down Jordan Street with one overpass over both rail lines. The new highway would curve back north and connect with the existing highway. The current Broadway and Main Streets would remain exactly as they are today. Bullard believes that this project is more cost effective than any of the five Hanson Engineering proposals and it could be constructed with little interference with current traffic. Bullard discussed the proposal with Union Pacific Consultant Gordon Albers and USDA Rural Development Coordinator Abby Baker. Albers and Baker agree that the City's next step is to hire an engineer firm and apply for a grant that would pay for the project. Bullard explained that Union Pacific insists that all discussion be with the City's consulting engineer firm.

Mayor John Lewis clarified that the City is not part of the Grade Separation Committee to allow the Committee more freedom and not have to follow the City's guidelines. Lewis said that the City will support the Committee.

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel reported that she spoke with Carrie Nelson today. According to Nelson, there is not a formal grant for this project through IDOT or the Community Assistance Program. The City would need to ask the State Legislators to earmark funds in the Capital Bill for the City of Mt. Vernon for the various engineering phases. Mike Bullard asked Bechtel to speak with USDA Rural Development Coordinator Abby Baker about grants for this project.

Mike McDonough, 835 McCauley Road, spoke against the proposed Levy Ordinance. He stands opposed to any tax increase. He stated that recently an increase in Sales Tax was imposed for the water system and asked when tax increases will stop. McDonough stated that the City of Mt. Vernon has less than 15,000 residents of which 25% are below the poverty level.

Mayor John Lewis explained the Sales Tax increase replaced the \$10-meter fee and those funds which can only be used for infrastructure and debt reduction. It cannot be used for wages or pensions. Lewis explained that by raising the Sales Tax, the citizens are actually paying less tax. Ninety percent of the Levy funds are used to finance the pensions. Last year, the City was hit with a \$250,000 pension increase for Police and Fire. This year's pension increase is around \$60,000. Had the City increased the Levy last year to cover the pension increase, the City would have had to raise the Levy over 9%. Instead the City raised the Levy 4.99% and borrowed funds from other funds. This year's levy raise is 2.99% to cover the pensions. Lewis stated that the citizens need to pay the tax increase or tell the City to cut services. If the Levy is not raised, then the funds will come from the General Fund. The current Sales Tax revenue is not covering the General Fund expenses this year. Currently, there is only 3.2 months of funding for expenses in the General Fund. It is recommended to have up to 12 months of funding.

McDonough replied that if the profits do not cover the overhead, the overhead needs to cut. Lewis said that the cuts will be from personnel and the citizens that he spoke to, are not ready for a cut in personnel. Lewis asked McDonough where he would cut personnel. Council Member Jim Rippy stated that when the City starts speaking of cutting services, he considers it "fear mongering". Rippy asked what services would be specifically cut. Mayor Lewis replied that would be up to the Council. Rippy feels that the Levy should not be raised because there are funds available in the General Corporate Account.

Council Member Jeff May explained that forecasted expenses will rise faster than revenue. The community was outraged when the City had to lay off several employees a few years ago. He said Mt. Vernon is fortunate to receive Sales Tax revenue from interstate traffic, otherwise, the Police and Fire staff would have to be cut. May explained that the City has to by law, pay the pension obligations or the State will impound the City's money.

Council Member Jim Rippy stated that it is required that the funds come from the Levy. He does not feel that it is proper to raise property taxes at this time.

Council Member Donte Moore asked what services should be cut. The only places personnel cuts can occur are in the Police, Fire, or Public Works Departments. These employees provide everyday services which are used in a big way. Rippy stated that Mt. Vernon needs to compare its staffing with comparable communities. Moore explained that Mt. Vernon is a more diverse community than Marion and Effingham. Carbondale and East St. Louis are more comparable. He stated that Mt. Vernon is just one storm away (like the one in 2006) or major

water main break away from using up the General Corporate funds and that is the reason to have six to nine months of expenses in the fund.

Council Member Mike Young stated having \$300,000 in the Working Fund is not a lot of money compared to the total City budget and that is why the City needs to strive to maintain six to nine months of expenses in the fund.

Council Member Jeff May stressed that while he agreed with the layoffs a few years back, there is nothing is left to cut out of the budget. The City would not be able to provide services if staff is cut anymore.

Mike McDonough stated that all he asked is if that the Council consider every option before placing a new tax on the citizens.

### **APPROVAL OF CONSOLIDATED VOUCHERS FOR ACCOUNTS PAYABLE**

The Consolidated Vouchers for Accounts Payable were presented to Council for approval.

Council Member Jeff May asked if there was an increase on the use of on-line utility payments. Merle Hollmann stated that about 13% of the customers pay on-line.

Council Member Jim Rippy questioned the \$63,835.78 payment for Mt. Vernon Neon concrete services. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel explained that in 2012, the City made a written agreement with Neon to construct the entrances and parking lots for exchange of property. Rippy asked if this project was bid. Bechtel stated that it was part of the Industrial Park proposals.

Rippy asked about the \$46,613.29 payment for the Lift Station 14 design. He asked why the former design plans are not being used. Bechtel replied that Lift Station 14 is going to be completely new and re-designed. The former plans could not be used.

Rippy asked about the \$8,501.50 payment for construction inspection for Chesley Industrial Park. Bechtel replied that this cost is to help close out this EDA project. Rippy strongly urged that the next time the City should obtain a package deal that does not include every principle in the business.

Rippy asked for a status update on the water meter replacement project. Bechtel replied that the project is about 26% completed.

**Council Member Jeff May motioned to approve the Consolidated Vouchers for Accounts Payable in the amount of \$1,715,680.14. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

### **BIDS AND QUOTES**

No bids and quotes were presented.

### **CITY MANAGER**

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel presented for Council's consideration the approval of the Preliminary and Final Plat of Snow's Subdivision and the Supporting Resolution Granting a Variance on Lot Size, Width, and Setback

Requirements. The petitioning party is Charles and Carla Snow. This subdivision is located on Fairfield Road, approximately two miles east of the Airport. Marshall Davis of Round Table Design explained that the Snow's own three parcels in this area and they are hoping to subdivide one parcel to sell to their son.

**Council Member Mike Young motioned to approve the Preliminary and Final Plat of Snow's Subdivision and the Supporting Resolution Granting a Variance on Lot Size, Width, and Setback Requirements. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel presented for Council's consideration the approval of the Preliminary and Final Plat of Robinson's Subdivision. The petitioning party is Norman and Geraldine Piercy. The subdivision is located at 10882 E. Richview Road. Marshall Davis of Round Table Design explained that the Piercy's desire to split one parcel into two lots. The Planning and Zoning Commission requested that Piercy's dedicate an additional twenty feet of right-of-way along 42nd Street in case of future road improvements.

**Council Member Donte Moore motioned to approve the Preliminary and Final Plat of Robinson's Subdivision. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

#### **CITY ATTORNEY**

City Attorney David Leggans presented for Second Reading of an Ordinance Concerning the Levy and Collection of Taxes. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel reported that overall the City is proposing a 2.17% levy increase. The total Levy is \$2,964,827. Bechtel explained that the levies for the current tax year authorized by Ordinance 2010-37 and 2012-37 are abated so that no tax levies shall be extended for the current tax year for 2010 and 2012 Bond payments. The bond payments will be made from other funds. The levies are for IMRF (\$440,000), Firefighters' Pension (\$954,479), Police Pension (\$895,148), Parks (\$279,700), ESDA (\$9,700), Social Security (\$301,000), and Special Service Area #1 (\$84,800).

Council Member Jim Rippy commented that this Levy is not necessary or needed and the only reason this is happening is because it can be done.

Finance Director Merle Hollmann explained that there is a chance if the EAV goes up over 2%, this will absorb the Levy tax increase. He stated that 87% of the Levy pays for pensions and 13% pay for operations. The total tax increase over last year is \$62,927.58.

Council Member Donte Moore explained that the public does not understand that the pensions are not set up by the City. The amounts are set by the Illinois Department of Insurance. Moore stated even though the State does not tell the City where to pay pension costs from, at any given time, something can happen causing the City to draw from its General Corporate Fund.

Rippy reiterated that this is "fear mongering" because no one will define exactly what needs to be cut to avoid raising the Levy. Even though the Council makes the final decision to cut services, someone needs to inform the Council of the options. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel stated that many unforeseen things happen, like dredging the Park Lake for \$150,000. The City would not have to dredge the lake, but it is the right thing to do to take care of City property.

Council Member Mike Young stated that in the two weeks between the First Reading and the Second Reading of the Levy Ordinance, a lot of this discussion could have been done and out of the way.

**Council Member Donte Moore motioned to adopt Ordinance #2018-45, an Ordinance Concerning the Levy and Collection of Taxes. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: May, Moore, Young, and Lewis. No: Rippy.**

City Attorney David Leggans presented an Ordinance Approving the Rezoning of Property at 10882 E. Richview Road from A-G; General Agriculture to R-1; Low Density Residential. The petitioning party is David Robinson.

**Council Member Jeff May motioned to approve Ordinance #2018-46, an Ordinance Approving the Rezoning of Property at 10882 E. Richview Road from A-G; General Agriculture to R-1; Low Density Residential. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

City Attorney David Leggans presented for First Reading an Ordinance Declaring Surplus Municipal Property. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel explained that the property to be sold is a 2010 Dodge Charger Police Vehicle. Mayor John Lewis asked how many more Dodge Chargers are in the Police Department's fleet. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel replied that several Chargers still remain in service.

**Council Member Jim Rippy motioned to suspend the rules to vote on an Ordinance. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis. Council Member Donte Moore motioned to approve Ordinance #2018-47, an Ordinance Declaring Surplus Municipal Property. Seconded by Council Member Jim Rippy. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

City Attorney David Leggans presented a Resolution to Approve an Agreement with SO\_TEL Systems for a City-Wide Phone Service. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel explained that this is the agreement for the monthly service charges. The new monthly service rate is \$468.85 compared to the current \$3,800 monthly service rate. Council Member Donte Moore asked if this new system will solve the telephone problems occurring now. Bechtel replied, yes.

**Council Member Jim Rippy motioned to approve the Resolution to Approve an Agreement with SO\_TEL Systems for a City-Wide Phone Service. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

City Attorney David Leggans presented a Resolution to Approve an Agreement Between the City of Mt. Vernon and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for the Mt. Vernon Flood Hazard Mitigation Project. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel explained that the total cost of acquisition of the properties (appraisal, legal, title, home value) is \$635,029.81 and the total estimated cost of demolition and site restoration (asbestos testing, demolition, grading) is \$198,900.00. Total for all expenses is \$833,929.81. The funds will come from the General Corporate Fund; however, the City will be reimbursed the costs by the State after the demolition and closing on the properties is completed. If expenses are over \$833,929.81, the City will be responsible for the expense. Reimbursement may take up to two years. The State would donate the property to the City for parks or natural areas.

**Council Member Jim Rippy motioned to approve the Resolution to Approve an Agreement Between the City of Mt. Vernon and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for the Mt. Vernon Flood Hazard Mitigation Project. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

City Attorney David Leggans presented a Resolution of Support for the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) Housing Rehabilitation Grant. City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel stated the project is for the South 12th Street Asphalt Overlay. The Project consists of new 5,510 linear feet of Asphalt Overlay from the railroad to Veterans Memorial Drive including milling, patching and new box culvert at Forest Avenue. Bechtel stated that the overlay project will be scheduled after the water and sewer lines are updated.

**Council Member Mike Young motioned to approve the Resolution of Support for the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) Housing Rehabilitation Grant. Seconded by Council Member Jeff May. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

#### **MAYOR**

Mayor John Lewis presented for the advice and consent of the Council the appointment of Monica Young to the Downtown TIF Advisory Board.

**Council Member Jim Rippy motioned to approve the appointment of Monica Young to the Downtown TIF Advisory Board. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, and Lewis. Abstain: Young.**

Mayor John Lewis presented for the advice and consent of the Council the appointment of Lance Cusumano to the Fire and Police Commission.

**Council Member Jeff May motioned to approve the appointment of Lance Cusumano to the Fire and Police Commission. Seconded by Council Member Mike Young. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippy, Young, and Lewis.**

Mayor John Lewis reported on the November 2018 statistics from the Fire and Police Departments.

*Mt. Vernon Police Department handled 1873 calls for service which equals to about 62 calls each and every day. 109 people were arrested during the month. There were 123 criminal charges and 28 warrants served. They also conducted 402 traffic stops resulting in 178 citations, of which 7 were for use of cellphones. 17 people were arrested for D.U.I., they had 29 drug charges, responded to 101 traffic crashes and they answered 101 alarms. The Detective Division was assigned 67 new cases, cleared 9 cases with arrests, referred 10 cases to the States Attorney and had 1 crime scene call out. The Tactical Unit was not deployed and our K9 team had 11 deployments. There was a total of 8,817 non-emergency calls and 1766 emergency calls into our telecommunication department.*

*The Fire Department responded to 248 alarms of which 171 were recorded as EMS related, 77 of the responses were recorded as fire related, 6 of the responses were recorded as hazard related and 23 were recorded as false alarm or false call. They responded to 11 motor vehicle accidents, 4 building fires, 4 gas leak reports, 1 passenger vehicle fire, 1 outside rubbish fire, and 2 mutual aid received. The Fire Inspection Dept. conducted 93 10A Inspections, 3 plan reviews, and 7 business site inspections.*

## **CITY COUNCIL**

No comments were heard.

## **VISITORS/CITIZENS REQUESTS/ADDRESSES FROM THE AUDIENCE**

Odie Farris, III requested that the City Council forgive \$80 on his utility bill. His utility bill was higher than normal because of a toilet stool running constantly. The City will contact Farris after the meeting.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

No Executive Session was held.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Council Member Mike Young motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Council Member Jeff May. Yeas: May, Moore, Rippey, Young, and Lewis.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Mary Jo Pemberton  
City Clerk