



Minutes
1388th Regular Council Meeting
February 23, 2022
(Teleconference)

6:00 p.m. Regular Council Meeting

Mayor Pro-Tem Keith St. Jeor called the 1388th regular meeting of the Coulee Dam Town Council to order at 6:00p.m. via teleconference.

Roll Call

Council members present: Kevin Black, Merv Schmidt, Dale Rey, Larry Hall and Keith St. Jeor. Mayor Bob Poch was excused absent.

Staff Present: Public Works Superintendent Mike Steffens, Police Chief Paul Bowden and Clerk/Treasurer Stefani Bowden.

Scott Hunter of The Star Newspaper was also in attendance.

Public Input

None

Updates and Modifications to Agenda

None

Consent Agenda

(m/s Schmidt/St. Jeor) to approve the consent agenda. Motion carried.

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Vouchers: Claim Vouchers and Checks:
 Claim Voucher No.'s 39992 through 40013 dated February 23, 2022 in the total amount of \$ 135,578.12.

 Manual Claim Voucher No. 39991 dated February 17, 2022 in the amount \$35.00 and 1 EFT dated February 22, 2022 in the amount of \$ 18.00.

Action Agenda

- a. AB 2022-02, Resolution No. 2022-02 Surplus Property
A resolution with an attached exhibit listing town property that was damaged, broken and unusable to the town was presented to the council. Councilman Rey inquired as to what the items on the list were. The Clerk stated that they were mostly broken office equipment and some old sewer plant equipment that needs disposed of. In order to dispose of the items, the State Auditor requires that they be formally surplussed by Resolution. (m/s Rey/Schmidt) to

approve Resolution No. 2022-02, surplus property. Motion carried.

b. Solar Power Policy

The Clerk provided the council with the net metering policy that the Town of Coulee Dam adopted in 2009. Since the Town already has a policy and it meets the requirements, the consensus of the council was to follow the existing policy. A new policy is not necessary.

Councilman St. Jeor had some questions regarding the recent paperwork submitted by a contractor of a property owner regarding installation of solar panels. He would like to get more information from them. They will be requested to complete the application included in the net metering policy.

c. Parks Maintenance Worker Open Position

Mayor Pro-Tem St. Jeor had spoken with Mayor Poch and stated that Mayor Poch was looking at a part-time Parks Maintenance worker for 30 hours or less per week. St. Jeor was unclear if Mayor Poch was wanting a seasonal employee or year-round and asked the Clerk for clarification. Clerk Stefani Bowden stated that she was told by the Mayor that he was looking at a full-time employee. The position is equivalent to 1.4 FTE. Mayor was interested in filling the full-time position with a possibility of a seasonal employee as well.

Councilman Rey was under the impression that the Mayor was leaning towards a seasonal employee. Rey made a recommendation to table the action until the Mayor is present and to obtain his input.

Superintendent Mike Steffens talked with the Mayor as well. He said the Mayor was under the impression that Steffens wanted a full-time and a seasonal employee. Steffens stated that a seasonal employee was never requested. A seasonal isn't needed. A full-time is needed to replace the employee that was lost. The 0.4 is filled in with a utility worker as needed. Councilman Schmidt agreed with Steffens as to what he interpreted from Mayor Poch.

St. Jeor doesn't feel that the Town can afford a full-time employee with benefits. He thinks there will be an increase in health insurance and wages before long. He estimated \$30,000 - \$40,000 increase per year and can't justify another full-time position.

Clerk Bowden reminded the council that the position was budgeted. Rey stated that the fact that it was budgeted didn't mean that they couldn't reduce to a seasonal employee and utilize that money elsewhere and then referenced that there was an item on the discussion agenda to hire an additional police officer. The Clerk reminded that council that the Parks/Utility Worker and the Police come out of different funds. Rey stated "that may well be but we can make a budget amendment to accommodate that". Clerk Bowden stated again that the utility funds can not be used for current expense, which is where the Police is funded from. A portion of the Parks Maintenance also comes out of Streets, Electric, Water and Sewer. Police is 100% Current Expense.

St. Jeor stated that it costs approximately \$100,000 per year for an employee including benefits. With a potential increase in benefit costs and wage increases, the overall increase to the Town could be \$50,000 next year. He feels the Town could consider a part-time, seasonal position.

Councilman Schmidt feels it is a sign of “how we are taking care of our city” and said we have always had this amount of employees. The city needs a certain amount of man hours to take care of city needs. Cutting out a full-time position is a pretty big loss.

St. Jeor stated that position came in after the town terminated the contract with Oasis to take care of the parks. After Oasis, the town hired a seasonal employee and then the Mayor at that time created a full-time position. The Clerk clarified that there was a huge miscommunication on that position and stated there has always been that 6th position for a utility person. It was just never filled back from 2014. It looks as though that position was created but it really wasn't since there was a vacant utility position.

The Clerk did some research last year and discovered that there have always been 6 public works positions as far as she could find, even when the Town had a contract with Oasis. St. Jeor responded, “now we have a sewer bill that is almost twice what it used to be...and water bills and power that is going up and that all comes out of that position”. St. Jeor stated that he is going to “stick my heels into the ground on this one”. Rey said, “I am with you, Keith”.

Schmidt said he is not there yet because he thinks the city needs the man hours. He would have to be convinced that the town could operate the maintenance crew on less man hours and still have the city looking as good as it has. St. Jeor referenced that Schmidt requested at budget time to have a tree expert come in prune trees and feels that a portion of that \$100,000 allotted to a full-time person could be used towards tree trimming. Not having a full-time person would free up that money to bring professionals in.

Rey suggested that a part-time employee be hired and the extra work could be covered in overtime by the existing full-time employees. He feels it would be less money to pay the overtime rather than benefits for a full-time employee. Discussion was held as to how many hours an employee can work as part-time before they have to be paid benefits. St. Jeor agreed that it would be cheaper to pay overtime to an existing employee versus pay and benefits for another full-time employee.

Councilman Black asked the Clerk what overtime is paid at which she responded is time and one half of hourly wage.

Superintendent Steffens said that if the council doesn't want to hire a full-time employees, he will come up with a list of day to day job activities and the council will need to let him know what to cut so that they have time to maintain the parks. He told the council that there is no way a 30 hour a week, seasonal worker, will come close to getting the job done that the council wants for the parks. We were getting along with the bare minimums as it was with a full-time employee. If he needs to pull a utility guy from another project to work in parks, the council will need to let him know which projects to pull from.

Rey asked Steffens how the work was accomplished during the time of COVID lockdown and employees were teleworking. Steffens stated that the parks employee did not telework. He still came to work every day. Rey also asked Steffens what work was assigned to the parks person when he was off-season and not working in the parks. Steffens replied that there is always stuff to do such as maintenance on equipment. Rey suggested a part-time seasonal employee be hired for the upcoming year and see if we can make it through next winter

without the extra employee.

Schmidt said he didn't understand why the town would want to cut back on the crew when the work they have been doing is efficient, the town looks great and the position has already been budgeted for.

Councilman Hall asked if when there was a full-time person in that position, was there any thought, at that point, that there were too many employees. Rey and St. Jeor both responded "yes".

Black asked Steffens what the dates were if there was a "summer hire". Steffens responded that a summer hire hasn't been done in a few years. That was a previous administration decision. He isn't in favor of having a full-time plus a seasonal employee right now. Black asked if there has been an increase in overtime since the loss of the full-time employee. Steffens said that there has been more overtime, but it is hard to decipher if it was due to shortage of staff or the extra snowfall this year. Black feels that it is helpful to have the extra employee to reduce the burden on the other employees during vacations, sick leave, etc. He asked Steffens when he would need a decision by. Steffens would like to start someone on April 1st.

St. Jeor suggested that an outside person be contracted to do a "desk audit" to see what each individual employee does and how many hours it takes to do it.

Mayor Pro-tem St. Jeor tabled the discussion until the next meeting.

Discussion Agenda

a. Police Officer – Additional Hire

Pro-tem St. Jeor asked Chief Bowden to fill the council in on the need to hire an additional officer. Chief said the Mayor brought the idea up to him as he was under the assumption that it wasn't in the budget.

Councilman Rey said that he had discussed it with the Mayor and with the Mayor's permission, has reached out to the Tribe, regarding the possibility of sharing an officer. The thought is the Tribe would pay for half, and the town would pay for half. Rey spoke with a tribal councilman to start the discussion. Chief Bowden said that Mayor Poch did mention that to him as well. Bowden has left a message for the person at the state in regards to the legalities of it but has not heard back yet. He doesn't think the state will allow it.

Bowden stated that the Criminal Justice Commission will not allow a part-time employee. Rey said that it would not be part-time. It would be a full-time employee that works part of the time for the town and part of the time for the Tribe.

The Clerk thinks it will cause a big issue with the State Auditor as well. When there is a "shared" anything with another entity, it creates an audit issue. She said she is not saying that it is not doable, it will just create some difficulties. The Auditor wants to make sure that any money the town contributes to the payment of the employee, must be proven went directly for the work of the Town. The Town can not fund services for another entity.

Rey stated that it would be the Town's full employee, but the Tribe would "back-fill" for their portion of the officer.

Councilman Hall asked why would the Tribe want to do that? Rey responded that it would make it more affordable for the Town to hire a 3rd Police Officer. The Clerk said it sounds like a good deal for the Town but why would the tribe want to pay us for it.

Rey feels it would be a benefit to both parties since there are several Tribal Officers that live in town and could get dual jurisdiction to work both sides of the Town. Hall spoke up and said that a Tribal Officer can not work the west side of the river. Rey feels if the Tribe agrees, then he can. Hall had lots of questions such as who would be in charge. He feels the Tribe will not give up their authority over the shared employee. Hall told the council "this is a can of worms".

St. Jeor said that the biggest issue is just recognizing that there is a need for another officer as the two we have, have been working a lot of overtime and would probably like some time off. Rey stated that there are times that there is not any police coverage in town and the town relies on Grand Coulee and the Tribe to provide back-up coverage. He asked, "what's the difference"?

As far as budget goes, St. Jeor looks at it as we are not hiring a full-time. We are already covering half an officer through overtime so the additional would equate to about an additional half time officer. This is without the idea of a shared officer. The Clerk has looked into the budget and, over the past couple of years, the general fund has gained around \$100,000 each year, which would almost cover a new hire. She feels it might be tight to hire right now but thinks it is doable. The Clerk stated that it will take some time if the council does decide to move forward with hiring a third officer. The Civil Service will need to be reinstated before anything else can be done.

St. Jeor had some questions regarding what portion of the fines that the town receives back from the counties. He would like to look into bringing back a municipal court. The Clerk and Chief said that the counties are working at doing away with municipal courts in the small towns so that may not even be an option anymore. Grand Coulee is being forced into eliminating their municipal court and contracting with Grant County.

Rey asked what the percentage is that the town gets from fines. The Clerk said it varies dependent on type of fine, but it is very little. The State and Counties get the biggest portions. Chief Bowden said that Okanogan County is the only one that Coulee Dam contracts with and is the only one the Town receives fines from. The Town doesn't get anything back from Grant and Douglas Counties. Okanogan County also charges \$35 per ticket to process it.

St. Jeor stated he's in favor of having another Police Officer on the force. Rey asked the council if they would like him to continue discussions with the Tribe. St. Jeor stated he wasn't knowledgeable enough in the police area to make a decision. The council was in favor of gathering more information. Hall says he is 100% against it. Schmidt and Black are in favor of gathering more information, but Black tends to lean towards agreement with Hall.

Schmidt asked Chief Bowden if there is still such a thing as cross-deputizing. He didn't believe so but is waiting on that answer from the state. Rey asked how the counties could do it and why Grand Coulee could work in the town as back-up. Hall responded that it is mutual aid. The Clerk clarified that the Tribal Commission is not the same as a Washington State Commission. Grand Coulee and the Counties are the same Washington State commission as Coulee Dam which is why they can work in the town.

Council would like to continue the discussions after the Mayor returns.

Staff, Council & Committee Report

Clerk

Clerk Stefani Bowden informed the council that the Town has received the AWC WellCity award again this year. The award was based on employee participation in the wellness program, wellness activities and AWC WellCity requirements that were met in 2021. The Town will receive a 2% discount on employee medical insurance premiums in 2023. This is the 8th year in a row that the Town has received the award.

Public Works

Superintendent Mike Steffens wanted the council to know that he will do the best he can with or without filling the vacant parks maintenance position but job descriptions may need to be revised as the labor union might have an issue with using a utility worker to cover the park maintenance.

Police

Police Chief Paul Bowden reported that he has received the new pepper ball guns. Officer Watkins attended training to become an instructor for use of the guns and has trained Chief Bowden.

Public Input

Scott Hunter stated that he and his wife walk through Cole Park very frequently and they have noticed that it is not as well maintained now that the Town does not have a Parks Maintenance employee. He said that there were things getting done that are not now and improvements were happening. He also reminded the council that Fiddle Creek was a fire issue that was brought to the Town's attention a couple of years ago. The Parks Maintenance employee was helping to keep it maintained.

Adjournment

(m/s St. Jeor/Rey) to adjourn the meeting at 6:24pm.

Mayor Pro-Tem


Keith St. Jeor

Clerk


Stefani Bowden