



Minutes
Special Council Meeting
April 7, 2020
(Teleconference)

2:00 p.m. Special Council Meeting Teleconference

Mayor Poch called the Special Council Meeting of the Coulee Dam Town Council to order at 2:00 p.m. via teleconference.

Roll Call

Council members present by phone: Fred Netzel, Mervin Schmidt, Dale Rey, Larry Hall and Keith St. Jeor.

Staff Present: Attorney Mick Howe, Police Chief Paul Bowden, Public Works Superintendent Mike Steffens, Wastewater Operator/Union Steward Rich Coffey and Clerk/Treasurer Stefani Bowden.

Labor Union Representative Decorah Anderson was also in attendance.

Mayor Poch asked all in attendance to identify themselves before speaking and stated the sole purpose of the meeting was to address employee leave during the COVID-19 issue.

Action Items:

a. **Emergency Paid Leave / Employee Leave during COVID-19 Pandemic**

Mayor Poch asked Superintendent Mike Steffens to relay the feelings of his employees regarding the COVID-19 situation. Steffens stated that the employees had approached the Labor Union Steward, Rich Coffey, regarding the use of leave during the COVID-19 pandemic. The crew is often is confined spaces together and use shared restrooms. A few of the employees had some concerns regarding social distancing and asked if there was a possibility to be available on an on-call basis. A couple of individuals do not have much sick leave available due to prior illnesses and scheduled medical issues.

Mayor Poch turned the discussion over to Attorney Mick Howe. Howe stated that this is all new and we are all trying to figure out how to work through it. He said he would try to give his best interpretation of the new laws in effect but asked that anyone who interprets it differently to please contact the Mayor, Clerk or himself. Summit Law Group provided an interpretation that was given to the councilmembers in a handout from MRSC. There is an expansion of the Family Leave Act to specifically address the COVID-19 issue. The Emergency Paid Medical Leave Act allows employees to take up to 80 hours of leave for

issues relating to COVID-19, effective April 1, 2020. The Act pertains to Essential Workers. After the attorney reviewed the definitions of essential workers, his opinion was that all city employees would fall under that category.

Councilmember Dale Rey agreed with Attorney Howe and had some ideas on how to implement some flexibility in working arrangements and leave use. Councilman Mervin Schmidt asked what the minimum amount of help is needed per day. Superintendent Steffens said that 2 were crucial – the Water Operator and the Wastewater Operator. He suggested rotating a 3rd person in to assist with everyday tasks. Schmidt felt that a rotating schedule should be implemented with all employees available on a call-out basis.

Mayor Poch asked Union Steward Rich Coffey what the crew's feelings are regarding the situation. Coffey said the employees were concerned about how they would get paid. Would they have to use sick leave or Emergency Paid Leave?

Mayor Poch suggested the idea of “front-loading” the monthly accrued sick leave. Attorney Howe also mentioned the use of shared sick leave.

Councilmember Keith St. Jeor also interpreted that all city employees are classified as essential. He said “we need to worry about their health and well-being”. He would like to see the use of teleworking versus being on-call when possible.

Councilman Fred Netzel is not in favor of having people collect unemployment and would like to have as many telecommute as possible.

Discussion continued on the option of front loading sick leave. The council had a general consensus that employees could address that on an as needed basis with the Mayor and it could be re-addressed at a future meeting depending on how the situation changes. If an employee contracted the COVID-19 virus, then the Emergency Paid Leave would kick in.

Union Representative Decorah Anderson stated the union would be in favor of teleworking. She also asked how well stocked on cleaning supplies the town was. Her concern was with rotating shifts, the need for disinfecting and sanitizing would increase.

After much in depth discussion, Keith St. Jeor moved with Mervin Schmidt seconding to give the Mayor authority to allow teleworking. Motion carried.

Keith St Jeor moved with Dale Ray seconding to offer non-elected city employees the option to advance up to 80 hours of sick leave up until December 31, 2020 with approval of their supervisor. Motion carried.

Keith St. Jeor stated he realizes this is a changing situation and wants to keep employees. Larry Hall feels the city should help employees and families through this.

Attorney Mick Howe took a moment to commend the council on the great discussion and stated he was very proud of the council and staff for giving the issue a lot of thought.

No public comment was taken and no further business was discussed.

Adjournment

Keith St. Jeur moved with Dale Rey seconding to adjourn the Special Council Meeting at 3:14pm

Mayor Bob Poch
Bob Poch

Clerk Stefani Bowden
Stefani Bowden