

Mayor Diana Merdian called the Sterling City Council to order at 6:30 pm on Monday, July 19, 2023. Roll call. Present: Aldermen Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Joseph Martin, Kaitlyn Ekquist and Jim Wise. Absent: None

Also attending were City Attorney Tim Zollinger, City Manager Scott Shumard, Finance Director Cindy Von Holten, Police Chief Alex Chavira, Fire Chief Michael Dettman, Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt, Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader, Superintendent of Waste Water Cory Bradshaw and City Clerk Teri Sathoff.

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Mary Carlson, 2004 15th Avenue, Sterling, addressed the Council, she stated she is upset that 6th Avenue is being tore up by a utility company. Carlson said this road was just resurfaced recently and was one of the nicest roads in the City, and she doubts it will not be returned to the same condition. Carlson stated she knows the City attempts to schedule road work with utility companies but this should not happen, her hope is that this doesn't happen with LeFevre road and 2nd Street when they are done. Carlson also addressed the Council about a sitting Alderman applying for the position of Economic Developer in Rock Falls. Carlson stated she hopes that something will be done about this.

Karen Sunday, 905 West 15th Street, Sterling, asked for direction on a dead Emerald Ash tree that is on her neighbor's property. The tree is hanging over her pool and deck. Sunday spoke with Code Enforcement Officer Reglin about the tree and after he spoke to the resident at 1407 Avenue I, however, the tree is still there. Sunday is concerned about the damage this tree could do to her pool and deck.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- A. Approval of Minutes.
- B. Approval of Bills and Payroll.
- C. Petition to Close Miller Road for the Sterling High Schools Boosters Back to School Fund Raiser.
- D. Pay Request #1 to Nicam Construction in the amount of \$305,226.00.
- E. Change Order #1 for Public Works Building Addition Project - Phase 2.

Seconded by Alderman Strabala-Bright. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Ekquist, Martin and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

City Clerk Sathoff administered the oath of office to firefighters Andrew Scroggins and Dakota Simmons.

Deputy Fire Chief David Northcutt was pinned by his wife, Tracy Northcutt. Deputy Chief Northcutt was appointed to the position of Deputy Chief in March of 2023.

Angelica Dornes was introduced to the Council. Angelica was hired May 3, as the administrative assistant for the Fire Department.

Alderman Elston made a motion to award the Bid to Sterling Commercial Roofing for Roof Replacement at the Fire Department Substation located at 1510 East Lynn Blvd. in the amount of \$55,370.00; Seconded by Alderman Martin. Chief Dettman stated two companies looked at the roof, Sterling Commercial Roofing was the only company to submit a bid. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Ekquist, Martin and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Alderman Wise made a motion to approve \$58,250 in ARPA funds for addressing the negative economic impacts caused by the public health; Seconded by Alderman Martin.

1) \$10,000 for additional funds to the Whiteside County Healthier Communities Partnership for their Sterling Truancy Program. Nicole Oberg, the Sterling Truancy Caseworker, reported that the Sterling truancy caseload for the 2022-23 school year was 130 students from approximately 115 families and estimated another 130 siblings she worked with unofficially. The WCHCP Truancy Program, funded by previous Sterling City Council ARPA money has helped 115 families since the beginning of the school year.

2) \$25,000 toward the Sauk Valley Impact Program. Sauk Valley Community College established this program to address declining population, workforce participation and college enrollment. Under the program, the College has established an endowment fund to enable students who are enrolled in a career or transfer program to earn tuition and fees at Sauk for up to 3 years or until they earn their degree, whichever comes first. The Cities of Dixon and Rock Falls each committed \$25,000 as well.

3) \$12,250 for 2 informational kiosks in the downtown. These kiosks would contain maps of the downtown and changeable bulletin boards for downtown events sponsored or coordinated through the City, Chamber of Commerce or Main Street. The first 2 are tentatively planned for the Farmers Market area and the Shoppes at Grandon area. The WACC program would build them for the cost of materials and be made to fit with the current streetscaping.

4) \$11,000 for historical signs in the downtown. City staff has been working with the Main Street Design Committee for several years on plans for historical signs on select downtown buildings to commemorate their significance and enhance pride in the history of the

structures. The proposal is to have historical signs, as seen in many other communities. Upon approval of language and locations, the City staff have identified possible locations and will work with building owners on final mounting locations.

Alderman Strabala-Bright stated he is in support of designating the ARPA funds however since he is an employee of Sauk Valley Community College he will be abstaining from the vote. Alderman Martin stated the Impact program is amazing. He has met young adults from all over the County that have been volunteering and the work ethic of these students is nice to see. Alderman Wise said he is grateful for the informational kiosks as well as the signage, he is hopeful that music in the downtown area will be a priority as well. Mayor Merdian agreed with Alderman Martin in regards to the SVCC Impact program.

Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Johnson, Ekquist, Martin and Wise. Nays – None. Abstained - Strabala-Bright. Motion carried.

Alderman Strabala-Bright made a motion to Ordinance 2023-07-13 Fixing a Time and Place for Public Hearing with respect to the Northland Mall Business Development District. The public hearing will be held at 6:35 pm on August 17, 2023, at City Hall; Seconded by Alderman Martin. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Ekquist, Martin and Wise. Nays – None. Motion carried.

Chief Chavira reported National Night Out will be on August 1st at Central Park, Stock the squad will be on August 3rd on the south parking lot and August 4th will be Hot Dog Days.

Chief Chavira thanked Chief Dettman, Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt as well as Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader for the assistance with the fatal fire investigation. Chavira stated there was a lot to do and everyone was able to work together to get it completed.

Chief Dettman agreed with Chief Chavira in regards to the fire investigation, he thanked staff as well. Chief Dettman reported the floors continue to be resurfaced. The Deputy Chief's vehicle will be delivered in the next week and the Chief's vehicle will be delivered in August.

Superintendent of Waste Water Cory Bradshaw reported they have been pressure washing and prepping areas for paint. The dry weather means the flows are down. The crews continue to work on the weekly and monthly preventative maintenance items.

Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt stated the CDAP housing grant will be awarded to 3 applicants, the paperwork is a challenge on a grant that is over 30 years old. Schmidt stated she has submitted paperwork for the Stronger Communities grant and she is

waiting to hear back on that. Schmidt is looking into a grant for owner occupied homes, this will be a first for the City. Schmidt advised the Council that Jason Williamson started as Code Enforcement Officer on July 10th.

Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader reported IDOT made connection on the splash pad that they failed to connect when the road East 4th Street was resurfaced. There should no longer be water running in the alley. Public Works crews are working at Tori Pines they are approximately 2/3 of the way done, once they have that completed they will move on to Platt Park pavilion.

Finance Director Cindy Von Holten reported the auditors were in last week.

City Clerk Teri Sathoff reported she has given a draft ordinance for food trucks to Attorney Zollinger and she had a couple of other ordinances she is currently looking into.

Attorney Zollinger reported that he has been working with Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt on two different properties that have required court appearances and paperwork has been signed on an additional property that will be filed on Tuesday. Zollinger stated the Code Enforcement Department is being as proactive as they can.

City Manager Shumard thanked staff for all of the behind the scenes work that was done in regards to the fire located on East 3rd Street. Shumard stated he completed the USEPA Brownfield grant and it was submitted last week.

Alderman Strabala-Bright reported he had the opportunity to be interviewed on Facebook Live by Bud LeFevre, they discussed several items occurring in the community. He stated that he enjoyed the conversations they had and urged everyone to watch the interview.

Alderman Elston thanked City Manager Shumard and Mayor Merdian for all of the email updates and keeping everyone informed with the East 4th Street fire. Elston reminded everyone to attend the Municipal Band Concert on Wednesday evening.

Mayor Merdian thanked City staff she said this has not been an easy week. The Police and Fire Departments had to continue to handle emergency calls while still handling the East 3rd Street fire. Mayor Merdian thanked the clerical staff, they were fielding several phone calls from citizens as well as media. Mayor Merdian thanked the following businesses; WIPFLI, The Factory, Dietz Drainage, Pat Burke Excavating, Bubble Carwash, The Salvation Army, Sandy Cavazos from US Bank, Air Play, Back to Health Chiropractic, Cheryl Sharp with New For You Wellness. The

Mayor apologized for those that she may have missed, she wanted to formally thank everyone that came together to support our community. Mayor Merdian stated her heart goes out to the families that have been affected by this.

At 7:02 Mayor Merdian adjourned to the study session for the rental inspection program.

City Manager Shumard stated the rental inspection program was first discussed in 2008 and then again in 2017 and as recently as January of this year.

Shumard stated since the first discussion we have had two fatal apartment fires, regardless of the cause of the fires, lives could have possibly been saved had code violations been addressed.

Goals of the program.

- Health, Life and safety.
- Create minimum standards of living for Sterling residents.
- Uniform standards for all landlords to a level playing field.
- Encourage landlords that care about the community to continue to invest in the community.
- Reverse downward trend of neighborhood conditions and values.

Reasons for the Program.

- Proactive vs. reactive.
- Top goal for council is to improve neighborhoods.
- Improve perception of the community.
- Eliminate the City from landlord/tenant disputes.
- Eliminate illegal apartment conversions.
- Eliminate tenant's fear of reprisals for reporting substandard living conditions.
- Deterioration of neighborhoods.
- Broken window theory.

City Manager Shumard stated this program has discussed in the past, he said before the City staff commits to further research of the program and prior to scheduling site visits he would like to get the Council's opinion on the program. Shumard stated he is trying to gauge what the Council support is or what needs to be done to gain Council support.

Alderman Strabala-Bright thanked everyone that has worked on the document, the checklist that was presented are the minimum standards of livability for any structure. Strabala-Bright stated he is in full support of the program.

Alderman Johnson agreed with Alderman Strabala-Bright, he stated it seems logical and capable.

Alderman Ekquist stated this is a human rights issue, she would like to see this addressed sooner than later. Ekquist stated the ordinance is well written.

Alderman Wise stated he is in favor of the ordinance, we need to be able to provide safe, clean housing to everyone in our community no matter their income. Wise stated he likes the classification system that has been integrated into the ordinance. Wise asked City Manager Shumard if he is willing to add additional staff to the Building Department. Wise stated his main concern is the budget and stress on the Building Department.

Alderman Elston stated this has been tried twice in the past and it was met with opposition. Elston stated she is for safe living conditions for all people. She would like to have additional information on the cost to the City. Alderman Elston stated that it would be nice to have a rental inspection program that the landlords and City both agree on.

Alderman Martin stated his concern is judging the success of the program. Martin has concerns about the landlords having the ability to hire contractors in a timely manner as well as and getting supplies. Martin states he is for safe living conditions however, he feels that no matter what is put into place some things are out of our control. Alderman Martin stated his main concern is judging the success of the program as well as how well it can be implemented.

Alderman Strabala-Bright stated he understands Alderman Martin's concerns, he stated this ordinance can be amended and adjusted over time if needed. Strabala-Bright stated he would like to see all of the rental properties graded out on a spreadsheet. That could be a good indicator of the success of the program.

Alderman Wise stated that some of the communities they have looked at in the past have progress reports on the properties, Wise asked Schmidt if that was something she would be doing, she answered yes.

Mayor Merdian asked if it would be possible to waive the registration fees for landlords that register their properties within a certain period of time. Mayor Merdian would also like to add terminology that would discourage landlords to find a loophole by calling their property an Airbnb. She stated it would be nice to be able to publicly acknowledge "Class A" landlords, the City could recognize the contribution to they are making to the community.

Alderman Martin asked Amanda Schmidt who would take care of the evicted tenants. Schmidt stated for a property to be condemnable the situation has to be severe. The City has worked with Tri-County in the past to assist with housing, ultimately this is not a responsibility that would fall on the City.

Randy Conkling is a board member of the Landlord's Association, he stated he is not opposed to the rental inspection program, he is in support of safe housing. Conkling asks that prior to approving the ordinance he would like to have a small meeting between Amanda Schmidt and a few of the landlords. Conkling states that the landlords would like to have a voice in the ordinance, he has some concerns about gray areas in the ordinance.

Rod Kleckler, Rock Falls, stated he is concerned about the registration fees don't add up, Kleckler stated the City of Sterling will get a lot of corporate housing with those prices. Kleckler stated that you will only be inspecting 20% of the rental properties and he feels that is a bad program. Kleckler stated that if the City is going to implement a program find one that will work, don't do this to have a headline in the paper that states Sterling has a rental inspection program.

Alderman Strabala-Bright thanked the citizens for their comments, he stated that no one on the Council is doing this to have a headline in the paper and he felt the comment was not productive nor was it appropriate.

Alderman Wise thanked Mr. Conkling for requesting to be a part of the discussion on the program.

Rich Cook, stated he is in favor of the program, he asked the City Manager if he was committed to expanding the Code Enforcement Department, in his opinion that will need to be done for the program to be successful. Cook stated that you will be able to measure the success of the program by fewer police calls, less people will be stealing. Cook stated he didn't think that a short-term rental would be an issue as they are reviewed on line. Cook stated that maybe this program will spur more contractors to do business in Sterling.

Mayor Merdian stated that to physically do the inspections it will take time, she asked if it would be possible to work on the registry this year and could it be a possibility to waive the fee for anyone that registers originally.

Alderman Johnson would like Shumard and Schmidt to visit other communities and determine what it will take for staff and if they can be budgeted for. Johnson stated he agrees that a preregistration and waiving of the fees.

Randy Conkling would reiterated that he would like to have a lot of clarification on the gray areas in the ordinance and he would appreciate the landlord's association being a part of the discussion. Amanda Schmidt stated that would not be an issue, they will set up a meeting with Mr. Conkling and a small group of landlords.

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 pm.

Teri Sathoff

City Clerk