

**MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING  
COOK CITY COUNCIL  
FEBRUARY 22, 2007 – 6 PM – CITY HALL**

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PRESENT: Mayor Dick Edblom, Councilors David Danz, Karen Hollanitsch, Dan Manick and Elizabeth Storm

ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Administrator-Clerk/Treasurer Theresa Martinson, Deputy Clerk/Treasurer Lynda Hanninen, Ambulance Director Penny Buckingham, Jon Minne – RLK Kuusisto Engineers, The Timberjay, Cook News Herald, Steve Ratai, Stacy Ratai and Local 49 Operating Engineers Representatives Dale Long and Mike Fabish

Mayor Edblom called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Mayor Edblom stated that there are some changes that he would like to initiate at the monthly Council meetings. These include addressing the members of the Council as Councilor before their names and himself as Mayor to bring formality to the meeting, gentlemen need to remove their hats during the meeting in a show of respect and members of the public forum need to state their name and their reason for addressing the Council.

Mayor Edblom stated that he is eliminating the Setting of the Agenda. He will question each Councilor individually before the end of the meeting to inquire if they have any additional business they would like to address.

Jon Minne – RLK Kuusisto Engineers presented his Preliminary Engineering Report for the elevated water storage tank. Site selection and the storage tank size have been discussed. The storage tank will be a 250,000 gallon tank. Mr. Minne requested that the Council and City staff review the Engineering Report. He stated that a Public Hearing should be held to receive input before accepting the Engineering Report.

Steve and Stacy Ratai were present to request approval to drill a well on the property they have purchased to build a bar/restaurant. The City water line does not run to this property and the estimated cost to provide City water is \$100,000. A water meter will need to be installed to bill for sewer usage, as the sewer line does connect to this property. Steve and Stacy Ratai are hoping to build their bar/restaurant in the spring of 2007.

Motion by Manick, second by Hollanitsch to approve allowing Steve and Stacy Ratai to drill a well on the property they have purchased to build a bar/restaurant with the understanding that it will be metered and City sewer provided. **MOTION CARRIED**

Stacy Ratai questioned about a liquor license. Administrator Martinson stated that they would need to apply for a liquor license and complete a background check.

Dale Long, Representative of the Local 49 Operating Engineers was present to request voluntary recognition by the City Council for the maintenance and police departments to unionize.

Administrator Martinson stated that the City's attorney is still compiling information on unionization and that the questions the Council members have still need to be answered.

Dale Long asked Councilor Hollanitsch if she had the opportunity to review the information that he had provided. Councilor Hollanitsch stated that she had reviewed it and that she was waiting for answers to her questions from the City attorney.

Councilor Danz questioned Dale Long regarding what classification in the union the City employees will have. Dale Long replied that the City employees would be classified as municipality workers.

Councilor Manick questioned the possibility for other City employees to get the family healthcare coverage offered by the union. Dale Long stated that a person needs to be a member of the union to have the benefit of the health insurance offered by the union.

Dale Long requested to be put on the agenda for the March Council meeting.

Motion by Storm, second by Hollanitsch to accept the Consent Agenda as follows:

- A. Approval/correction of Regular Council Minutes of January 25, 2007
- B. Acceptance of the January Police Department Report
- C. Reporting of the January Liquor Store Sales

	<u>MTD</u>	<u>YTD</u>
2007	\$64,127.63	\$64,127.63
2006	\$60,367.32	\$60,367.32
(+/-)	\$ 3,760.31	\$ 3,760.31
- D. Bill Presentation

Paid since last presentation	\$46,690.88
Presented for payment	\$92,749.49
- E. Planning & Zoning Commission Minutes – January 25, 2007
- F. Parks & Recreation Committee Minutes – February 7, 2007
- G. Hwy 1 Meeting Minutes – January 10, 2007

**MOTION CARRIED**

Councilor Hollanitsch updated the Council regarding the Airport Subcommittee's recommendation regarding the airport operator job description and pay scale. The subcommittee reviewed and updated the job description for the Airport Operator, changing Tom Woock's position to Airport Coordinator to incorporate the more technical job responsibilities that have been performed and to compare these to where other employees are placed on the pay structure. The Airport Operator position was also reviewed and updated. Ernie Seppala will remain as the Airport Operator without the administrative duties of the Airport Coordinator. Administrator Martinson contacted Paul Ness, HR Consultant for his review. The subcommittee recommended placing both job descriptions in the fifth grade of the part-time pay structure (currently placed in the fourth grade) and placing Tom Woock and Ernie Seppala one step back from the current pay step that they are in. The subcommittee agreed that the number of hours currently worked are realistic.

Tom Woock will be in pay step 3 at a wage of \$10.13 per hour with a \$770.88 annual increase including benefits based on 60 hours per month. Ernie Seppala will be in pay step 1 at a wage of \$9.63 per hour with an estimated \$770.88 annual increase including benefits as he is scheduled to work between 40 and 60 hours per month. Ernie Seppala's wages are donated to the airport.

Councilor Storm questioned why there are more duties being performed when originally the position was for maintenance at the airport. Councilor Hollanitsch responded that the subcommittee determined that the job is growing and that there are federal and state requirements that need to be met. There is also a higher level of responsibility than other part-time employees.

Administrator Martinson stated that the part-time pay structure has not been changed since it was instituted.

Mayor Edblom stated that the airport needs to be self-sufficient.

Councilor Hollanitsch stated that the airport is owned by the City of Cook and that the City needs to take care of it.

Councilor Manick stated that he agrees with the employees that raises at the airport need to be instituted, but suggested that it should be in the budget for 2008. He also stated that he feels that wages need to be raised on the lower end of the pay structure.

Administrator Martinson stated that the airport budget is conservative.

Councilor Danz questioned if the increases for the airport coordinator and the airport operator's wages would be added to the airport budget. Administrator Martinson replied that the budget would be increased.

Councilor Storm stated that there have been a number of people working hard at the airport and the work the subcommittee has done has been a real service. Councilor Storm also stated that after reviewing the technology needed, the job duties and airport regulations, she feels that the updated job descriptions are more accurate.

Mayor Edblom questioned whether increasing the hangar fee would cover the increase. Administrator Martinson stated that the Council could increase the fees. She also stated that Tom Woock has researched options to increase revenues at the airport.

Councilor Danz questioned if it is the recommendation of the subcommittee to motion to approve the increases. Councilor Hollanitsch replied that is the recommendation.

Councilor Danz asked Administrator Martinson if she agreed with this recommendation. Administrator Martinson replied that she was a member of the subcommittee.

Motion by Danz, second by Storm to approve the job description for the Airport Coordinator and the Airport Operator positions. Both job descriptions will be placed on the part-time pay structure in pay grade 5. Tom Woock, Airport Coordinator and Ernie Seppala, Airport Operator will be placed on the part-time pay structure one step back from their current pay step. Tom Woock will be in pay step 3 at a wage of \$10.13 per hour with a \$770.88 annual increase including benefits based on 60 hours per month. Ernie Seppala will be in pay step 1 at a wage of \$9.63 per hour with a \$770.88 annual increase including benefits, which is donated by another party to the airport.

Aye: Councilors Danz, Hollanitsch and Storm

Nay: Mayor Edblom and Councilor Manick

**MOTION CARRIED**

Councilor Manick updated on Parks and Recreation regarding \$14,000 that has been donated by the Congregational Church for playground equipment. The Rinne family is going to donate materials. Councilor Manick discussed the possibility of matching grants.

Councilor Storm questioned if the ground material needs to be rubber. Councilor Manick stated that it does not need to be rubber. Councilor Storm also questioned why the DNR completed an inspection at the park. Councilor Manick replied that he was pleased to see that the DNR was still inspecting the park as a follow-up grant inspection. The DNR addressed the ground material and there was an issue with the tunnel at the park.

Administrator Martinson stated that she responded to the DNR and they are satisfied with her answers. The League of Minnesota Cities will be here in the spring to provide playground safety guidance.

Administrator Martinson stated that approval needs to be given to transfer \$5,129.75 to the fundraising committee for the community center. The City had received a \$20,000.00 grant from St. Louis County. The City had approved additionally to pay for the slab and prep work for the slab for the pavilion at the park. In order to receive the monies from the County, all invoices have been submitted which included the slab work. These dollars should be transferred.

Motion by Storm, second by Hollanitsch to transfer \$5,129.75 to the fundraising committee for the community center. **MOTION CARRIED**

At the Cook Rural Fire Association Annual Meeting held on February 20, 2007 the Board reviewed fire calls, budget, financials, building issues and generating revenue from false alarms. The Fire Association was approached by Greenwood Township regarding Niles Bay and mutual aid calls. The Fire Association receives \$5,500.00 to cover unorganized areas and will be inquiring to St. Louis County to find out the population of the unorganized areas to review current charges. The Fire Association gets assistance from Greenwood Township for water access calls.

Councilor Storm questioned how often Greenwood is requested to assist the fire and ambulance departments. Ambulance Director Penny Buckingham replied that we call Greenwood Township for any assistance needed on Lake Vermilion. It takes Greenwood 9 minutes to respond to a call and 25 minutes for the Cook Fire and Ambulance. Some areas are accessible by water only. Penny Buckingham stated that there are places that Greenwood needs assistance in the winter because they cannot access them. Greenwood is a township fire department; therefore, has the ability to bill. Penny Buckingham also stated that the Cook Ambulance can bill for additional mileage and base rate.

After recommendations from the ambulance billing company, Penny Buckingham requested the current base rate of \$500.00 and the current loaded mile rate of \$10.00 be raised. The Ambulance Board approved raising the base rate to \$550.00 and the loaded mile rate to \$11.00 and will review these rates again in September. Medicare and Medicaid reimburse a percentage of the base rate. The area that the Cook Ambulance Department assists is considered to be super rural and receives more mileage. A two-line billing invoice was recommended to include all supplies in the base rate and mileage. Medicare and Medicaid will not reimburse disposable supplies. Medicaid has a higher base rate but lower mileage rate than Medicare.

Councilor Storm questioned if the recommended base rate and mileage rate are enough to support the ambulance and also questioned what other townships and towns are currently charging. Penny Buckingham stated that other towns are also in the process of raising rates. Penny Buckingham stated that if the ambulance responds to a call and uses equipment and supplies but is told by the hospital to stop, the ambulance does not get reimbursed. If a patient refuses transportation they sign a release and do not get charged.

Administration Martinson stated that the Ambulance Board wants a cost analysis done to determine if rates need to be raised higher and the Ambulance Board has the authority to recommend changes. Councilor Storm stated her opposition to raising the base rate and loaded mile rate until the costs are known.

Motion by Danz, second by Hollanitsch to accept the recommendation by the Cook Ambulance Board to raise the base rate to \$550.00 and the loaded mile rate to \$11.00.

Aye: Mayor Edblom, Councilors Danz and Hollanitsch

Nay: Councilors Manick and Storm

**MOTION CARRIED**

Administrator Martinson stated that Penny Buckingham attended a conference and the Minnesota Ambulance Association recommended using the Minnesota Recapture Program which was approved to be initiated by the Ambulance Board. Once the collection process has been initiated and the patient has not made payment, the ambulance service will record those unpaid debts with the MN Department of Revenue. Should the patient receive a property tax rebate, income tax refund or gambling receipt, it will be reduced by the amount owed to the Cook Ambulance Service. The State of Minnesota will include their fee of \$15.00.

Councilor Danz stated that his experience with Fire and Ambulance is that you respond to someone's tragedy and bill if money can be received from an insurance company.

Administrator Martinson stated that the Fire Department bills insurance companies for fires, but they also have other revenue from pull tabs. The Ambulance Department has run revenue and is currently within budget. Penny Buckingham stated that a comparable ambulance service who had \$60,000.00 in uncollected receivables has already received \$15,000.00 after initiating the program.

Motion by Manick, second by Storm to approve initiating the Minnesota Recapture Program.

Aye: Mayor Edblom, Councilors Hollanitsch, Manick and Storm

Nay: Councilor Danz

**MOTION CARRIED**

Councilor Hollanitsch questioned if the Ambulance Board could meet sooner than the September meeting if the increases to the base rate and loaded mile rate are determined to be insufficient.

Councilor Storm thanked the Ambulance Board for their hard work.

Administrator Martinson reminded the Council of the upcoming Board of Review set for April 24, 2007 at 6 PM at Cook City Hall. This annual meeting gives the taxpayers the opportunity to review their property valuation with the County Assessor who the City contracted with. The City Council serves as review authority. A Quorum is needed and there is mandatory attendance by one member of the Council who attended the Board of Review training. Mayor Edblom stated that he would be in attendance.

Administrator Martinson presented the Council with the League of Minnesota Cities 2007 Annual Conference and Marketplace that will be held June 27 – 29, 2007 in Duluth. Councilor Danz and Councilor Hollanitsch both stated their interest in attending this conference.

Motion by Storm, second by Danz to approve any member of the Council to attend the 2007 League of Minnesota Cities Annual Conference and Marketplace June 27-29, 2007 in Duluth, MN. **MOTION CARRIED**

Councilor Danz asked what the status was regarding the newspaper bids. Administrator Martinson replied that there was no legal notice to publish. She stated that the Public Hearing notice for the water tower would be printed. The total dollars expended for publishing this notice will be reviewed at the next Council meeting.

Councilor Storm stated that all employees should receive an annual review and that she would be willing to construct a format.

Councilor Hollanitsch stated that she wanted to publicly thank City Hall – especially Candi Nylund for her work at making City Hall look more professional.

Councilor Manick wants to explore summer water rates (May – September). Administrator Martinson stated that she would inquire to other cities for what their rates are in the summer.

Motion by Manick, second by Storm to adjourn the meeting at 7:31 PM. **MOTION CARRIED**

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda Hanninen  
Deputy Clerk/Treasurer