



**MINUTES
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
October 3, 2017**

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 pm.

Present: Mayor: Marty Schneider; Council: Tim Hultmann, Tom Skjaret, Jahn Dyvik, and Michelle Jerde

Staff Present: City Administrator: Scott Weske; City Attorney: John Thames; and City Clerk: Jeanette Moeller

Absent: None

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

APPROVE AGENDA

A motion was made by Jerde, seconded by Hultmann, to approve the agenda as presented. Ayes: all.

OPEN CORRESPONDENCE

None

BUSINESS ITEMS

Discuss "In God We Trust" Initiative

Mayor Schneider indicated that the "In God We Trust" initiative was tabled at the September 5 meeting for further discussion at a work session. The "In God We Trust" initiative is backed by a national organization that encourages display of "In God We Trust" at public buildings, and the proposal would be to consider posting the motto at City Hall.

Mayor Schneider indicated he doesn't believe that posting the motto is meant to be exclusionary but rather is based on the historical aspects of decisions made by Supreme Court in the past. He believes the majority of Council agrees the motto does not indicate favor for any one religion.

John James, owner of the property at 1605 Wayzata Boulevard W, explained that "In God We Trust" is the national motto. The initiative organization encourages display of the motto and is trying to get the county to revisit the values of its founding fathers, of patriotism, and be on a unified standing of the motto. It is not meant to be exclusionary and there are many religious out there that have a god of some type. The country's forefathers determined that they weren't able to establish a religion but encourage it.

Mr. James feels the country was founded on the ability of others to express their religious freedoms. He believes the founders, when they were establishing the country, realized the battle cry for fighting for patriotism and religion was "In God We Trust". The initiative organization wants everyone to remember the motto and display it in government and school buildings and to establish its initiative across the country.

Council member Jerde asked Mr. James to clarify if his request for consideration is based on religion or tradition. Mr. James replied "tradition".

Mayor Schneider asked if there are size and location placement specifications in place because few other cities and counties have approved the initiative. Mr. James replied there were not, and the City may not even need to be responsible for the expense because they would be able to take up a collection or utilize a fundraiser to cover the costs.

Council member Skjaret explains he opposes Mr. James religious view relating to the US Constitution. The only mention of religion is the 1st Amendment and which says no established religion and that allows anyone to practice whatever religion they choose. He stated that he and millions of other Americans have defended their country to protect freedom of speech and religion. The point is that the posting is not supposedly about religion; but this organization is not a secular organization and it promotes a conservative form of Christianity. By looking at the website and reading, their mission statement says "doing things that God intends us to do." Promoting a Christian religious brand is not inclusive in his view. These types of organizations have the right to do this sort of thing, but it does not have a place in City government. He added that when he came back to City Hall, he expected to be discussing City operations and not social matters. He explained he isn't denying Mr. James beliefs, but Mr. James is promoting this initiative and at his office building he flies a flag of the Christian Cross and has advertised group prayers in the past. It would be hard for anyone to believe Mr. James is coming to the Council in a secular way and not promoting his brand of Christian religion, and that is why he can't support it. He said his favorite motto that the United States has had was "mind your own business" when it used to be on the first minted coins. The "In God We Trust" motto has always been a devious thing in history, having been emphasized when it was the north versus south during the Civil war, the US vs communism, and the US versus Muslims after 9-11.

Mr. James said he doesn't count those as devious situations and the motto wasn't used incorrectly or negatively, and questioned Council member Skjaret if he was against slavery.

Council member Skjaret believes that Mr. James might have the intent misconstrued. He explained if you step back and look what the role is of City government, it is to improve people's lives. Having a devious motto posted at City Hall doesn't improve people's lives. Mr. James reiterated he doesn't believe it is devious. Council member Skjaret indicated he believes that this is nothing more but a dog whistle to promote Mr. James' Christian beliefs and values, and the posting could reflect that if you don't believe in the "In God We Trust" motto, you aren't welcomed. If he saw that and other people can see it, how is it going to improve people's lives?

Council member Jerde asked if other religions like Islam have a God. Mr. James explained they all have Gods including Atheists, whose God is "not believing in God".

Council member Dyvik explained a person can base their decision on motivation or for what it is and how it has been judged throughout history. The court has ruled "it is obvious that the national motto and slogan on currency "In God We Trust" has nothing whatsoever to do with the establishment of religion. Its use is as patriotic or ceremonial character and bears not true resemblance to a government sponsorship of a religious exercise." So no matter what Mr. James' motivation is, "In God We Trust" to most Americans is a patriotic statement and is tradition. He understands that Council member Skjaret has a strong opinion on it and can see how someone could get offended, but the Supreme Court has made a ruling and it isn't unconstitutional.

Council member Skjaret feels it is unconstitutional because of the Christian based organization pushing the initiative. His other issue is that Mr. James is only a business owner in Long Lake. If the

Council continues to allow this to happen, do they have to allow any non-Long Lake resident with ties to the City the same credence? He stated their duties are to the citizens of Long Lake and there isn't a group of people wanting the Council to put a motto on the wall, only one non-resident business owner.

Council member Hultmann explained the religious situation in Belle Plaine that has been going on for about a year and a half. What happens if that happens to Long Lake? He also explained that he has been part of the Long Lake government for a long time and continues to keep church and government conversations separate. He doesn't want to affect the community we live in, so would not want to go down the road of supporting the initiative.

Mayor Schneider explains that something he holds very high in the community is the fact that we can have different opinions and be respectful. He feels that the motto is more inclusive and that it is patriotic. He does not see the issue as being about inclination to support an organization such as "In God We Trust" or any of them like that, but rather sees it as support of the national motto.

Discussion of 2018 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Pavement Management Program (PMP)

Staff presented to the board the Capital Improvement Plan for the next five years. This plan schedules the replacement of capital items in the Public Works Department. For the year 2018, it is scheduled for the Public Works one ton truck to be replaced and upgraded. The truck is a 1996 model and is important for the department to function. It is used for plowing some of the smaller areas in town, and also used for hauling dirt and rock in situations such as water main breaks.

Staff explained the budget for the truck replacement is \$45,000. Staff feels if the decision is to buy brand new, the budget may need to be increased around \$10,000 to a total of \$55,000. The fund that would be used would be FUND 416 which has a balance of \$491,006 as the end of 2016. Staff feels the fund would not be compromised if extra funds were needed to fully set up the one ton truck chassis with the tilt bed and plow.

Pavement Management Plan

Staff presented the Pavement Management Plan. This plan highlights the schedule replacement of streets and the status of the condition all the streets are in. There are no street reconstruction plans currently for 2018. With the construction of Watertown Road and County Road 112, the City has a larger debt service amount than it has in the past. The current schedule has four streets set for reconstruction over the next five years, which would add more debt service to the City. The Council will want to be aware of the future debt expense and of cash on hand over the next five years.

OTHER BUSINESS

Temp Office Help

Council member Skjaret asked staff if they were able to find temporary office help. Staff explained a new temporary employee would be starting soon and will work around 20-25 hours.

Symes Street

A developer reached out to the Council members to talk about Symes Street. None will be able to meet.

ADJOURN

A motion was made by Schneider, seconded by Skjaret, to adjourn the meeting. Ayes: all. Mayor Schneider adjourned the meeting at 6:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Weske
City Administrator