SYRACUSE TOWN COUNCIL

REGULAR MEETING

September 19, 2023 @7:00 P.M.

Town Council President Cindy Kaiser called the Regular Meeting of the Syracuse Town Council to order at 7:00 p.m. Other Council members present were Paul Stoelting, William Musser, Nathan Scherer, Larry Siegel, Clerk Treasurer Virginia Cazier, and Town Attorney Jay Rigdon.

Cindy Kaiser opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comments – Michelle Owens, 704 E. Medusa St, had questions on the rate study for both the water and sewer. Michelle asked why the Town chose the maximum rates for both instead of tiering the water and sewer rate increase. Robert Reynolds, London Witte Group, explained that the Town was given three scenarios; the Town chose that the cost of borrowing would be more expensive for the Town, they chose scenario 1= five-year capital plan is funded through the 2022 BANs and cash generated from rates. The sewer rate increase is 42%, the average user (3000 gal) pays $37.07 with the rate increase it will go up $52.70. The reason the Town chose scenario 1 is because we need cash flow now not later. Jay Rigdon interrupted the public comments and asked if we should open the public hearing. The Town needs to have a record for the public hearing. Bill Musser asked if we need a motion to change the agenda. Cindy Kaiser asked if there was anyone else who wanted to speak under the public comments.

The minutes from the August 15, 2023, regular meeting presented for approval. Paul Stoelting moved to approve the minutes; Nathan Scherer seconded. All voted for the motion; none against. The motion carried.

Claim #'s 1046-1199 for $1,072,294.91 presented for approval. Paul Stoelting moved to approve the claims; Nathan Scherer seconded. All voted for the motion; none against. The motion carried.

Public Hearing Ordinance 2023-06 Sewer Rate Increase; Cindy opened the hearing. Michelle Owens questioned the funding on page 7. Robert Reynolds explained what is shown in the funding is to cover the expenses of operations, payroll, material, and supplies, and how the Town must set aside monies for current Bonds and BANs. Michelle voiced her opinion on how the increase is significant to a lot of residents in the Town of Syracuse. It could be a hardship on some residents. She asked why this wasn't looked at 10 years ago. Larry Siegel stated it was looked at 10 years ago, there were periodic rate increase, it is hard to anticipate how much inflation will be in 10 years. The Town has always tried to keep the rate down for the residents. Even with the increase the Town is still one of the lowest around. Cindy closed the public hearing for the Sewer rate increase.

Public Hearing Ordinance 2023-05 Water Rate Increase; Cindy opened the hearing. Michelle Owens asked about the metered rates going up 23%, why did the unmetered rates went down 41%? The Town does not have unmetered water, Michelle suggested taking it off the Ordinance. Cindy closed the public hearing for the Water rate increase.

Borden Waste Away sent us a notice of an increase rate adjustment; Town Manager spoke with Eric Ivory, Borden Waste Away, stating that they will not be raising our rates from our current contract. The contract expires next summer so there is no sense in increasing our current rates. Borden's has been charging the Town a fuel surcharge since 2017 which was not in our contract. There isn't anything that we can do to recoup that charge since the Town has been paying it all these years. Bill Musser suggested we table this discussion and move on.

Ben Plikerd, Indiana Telephone Network, asking for permission to rent space on top of the North water town. The old Sweetlic building by the railroad tracks, is where all their equipment is currently, their grain bins are going to be coming down. 10 years ago, Ben asked permission from the zoning board to put up a tower in downtown Syracuse. Ben is looking for a 5-year lease with the Town. The lease rent is not a lot, but it is revenue. Ben would rather put his equipment on top of the water tower than put up a tower downtown Syracuse. The tower would be placed in the empty parking lot, right across the street from Kelly Jae's restaurant. Larry Siegel asked for a proposed monthly fee. Ben currently pays Sweetlic's $120.00 a month, Town of Mentone, and Silver Lake $120.00 a month. The Public Works Director does not feel there would be an issue putting the equipment up on the tower. Jay Rigden suggested to Ben Plikerd to put a contract together for the Council next month.

Ordinance 2023-07 Outdoor Dining; Council discussed the ordinance and is going to table it for next month.

Public Hearing for the 2024 Budget; Cindy opened the hearing and asked if the Council would like the Clerk to read out loud the 2024 Budget. It was a unanimous no from the Council. Paul Stoelting moved to wave the reading; Nathan Scherer seconded the motion. Cindy closed the budget hearing.

ENGINEER – COMMONWEALTH

Jeremy Hardy, Commonwealth Engineer, was not present.

TOWN MANAGER

David Wilkinson asked if there were any questions in his report. The report is back on the Dolan Street property, MACOG did some testing on the land. MACOG is paying for everything so far.

POLICE

Jim Layne, Police Chief, asked if there were any questions in his report. No ADA complaints.

PARK

Chad Jonsson, Park Superintendent, in the packet there was a letter of recommendation for Kristin Abbs to be on the park board. Larry Siegel made the motion to approve Kristin Abbs to the park board; Bill Musser seconded the motion. All in favor. None against.

September is usually a slow month for the Parks department. Pavilion project is going well, dry walling inside of building soon. Larry Siegel asked if there was going to be Amish buggy parking. Chad stated eventually there will be.

Ballfield is competed, games are being played this fall.

Bill Musser asked Chad if he had several bids for the Community roof. Chad stated he has review 4 bids, they are all above the $115,000. The Park Board would like to review them more this year. Bill Musser asked if there could be a proposal next month for the Council to approve.

PUBLIC WORKS

Mark Aurich, Public Works Director, asked if there were any questions in his report. The street department has been busy with the 3 projects. Working hard on the Oakwood lift station, did not like the engineer's specs, there will be about a 2-to-3-week delay. Lakeside water main project, most of the residents are going to be hooking up. Four of the Street lights that the RDC funded are up today in the Industrial Park, 13 lights total. Most pumps are in, rebuilt pumps are installed.

FIRE TERRITORY

Mickey Scott, Fire Chief, is asking for two requests from the Council, 1st request is the purchase of the Paratech Rescue Struts Parts for $8,500.00. It is in stock. Larry Siegel made the motion not to exceed $8,500.00 to purchase the Paratech Rescue Struts Parts; Paul Stoelting seconded the motion. All in favor. None against. The 2nd request is to spend up to $15,000 for the painting and flooring for the new building. Paul Stoelting made the motion not to exceed $15,000; Bill Musser seconded the motion. All in favor. None against.

CLERK

The Clerk-Treasurer asked if there were any questions in her report.

TOWN ATTORNEY

Jay Rigdon, Town Attorney, did have a meeting with Scott Aites about a resident that Scott had some concerns about.

DISCUSSION FROM THE FLOOR

Nothing

DISCUSSION FROM THE COUNCIL

Larry Siegel stated there have been more conversations about services out of town without annexation. Larry has stated his opinion on this matter. Larry brought up the high-end resort right outside of town limits, we do have an opportunity to annex them. The corners are contiguous to the town. Steve Unger was invited on a zoom call with the Council, to discuss annexation. Mr. Unger advised the town not to extend water and sewer service outside of town limits without annexation first. It has gotten so hard to annex involuntarily. He gave an example from the city of Bloomington, Indiana. Larry Siegel asked Mr. Unger to discuss the financial aspects of being annex verses not being annexed. The town will not receive any property tax benefit on a development that occurs outside of town if it's not annexed into the town's boundaries. You are getting the utility rates but not the property taxes benefits. There was a lengthy discussion on TIF's benefits in town. Nathan Scherer asked about development outside of the town limits and not having an option to annex, then how can a town grow? Steve Unger stated that is his complaint to the legislature. Nathan said we have a limited opportunity, if we have a developer right outside of town stating we can develop this land because housing is really needed, your school district is declining because there is no housing in town, that has long term ramifications and if the town segregates itself off and not allow anything without annexation you set yourself of an economic imbalance that doesn't draw people into your town. Larry stated what Mr. Unger was stating is that if we give utilities outside of town without annexation we further block in the town. There are no agreements that are forcible outside of town limits. The more you extend utilities outside of town the more you guarantee that you will never be able to annex. There was discussion on the County running a TIF district right outside of Polywood and Polywood wanting to extend west. What happens with the County TIF by Polywood, would the County get 100% of the revenue? Steve Unger stated yes if bonds are outstanding. Larry asked if there was debt still there does the town get any revenue or does it all go to the county if there is debt outstanding? Mr. Unger stated the county captures everyone's rates, the school rate, township rate, library rate, the fire rate, the municipality was allowed to capture it rate as well. Larry Siegel explained how we annexed the tech park and how we annexed Kern's Crossing. The Council asked David to work with Steve Unger on the annexation of the High-End RV north of town.

David asked the Council what should I say to people/developers who want our water and sewer services outside of town? Larry Siegel suggested having Bose McKinney draft an ordinance that says we will not extend utility services unless they are annexed. Nathan asked why do we need an ordinance stating this? Larry stated that David needs direction on what to say to developers when asked. Paul Stoelting asked why do we need a resolution or ordinance if we could just give David direction? Nathan stated we can't predict the future, why set it in stone by setting up an ordinance. Larry thinks it would keep the future open for the town. Jay informed the Council several months ago Larry asked him to write up an ordinance on not extending our services out of town without annexation. The Council decided they were not going to approve the Ordinance. Larry Siegel stated that Cindy Kaiser wanted more discussion on the annexation, if that is our intent why not put it in writing. Cindy stated that every time Nathan speaks Larry interrupts him, I haven't heard everything Nathan was trying to say. Nathan stated that he is fine with the way it has been, we aren't closing any doors, we are keeping our options open. There is no downside risk to leaving it how it is. Paul suggested leaving it the same, there could be some exceptions in the future.

OLD BUSINESS

Nothing

NEW BUSINESS

Nothing

William Musser adjourned the Town of Syracuse Council Meeting; Paul Stoelting seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m. All in favor. Motion carried.

ATTEST:

Virginia Cazier, Clerk-Treasurer

Cindy Kaiser, Council President