

**BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP MINUTES  
SEPTEMBER 18, 2013**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Danielowski called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Council Members present: Dick Backlund, Raeanne Danielowski, Seth Hansen, and Mike Wallen. Council Member Nick Christenson arrived at 6:43 p.m. Also present: City Administrator Todd Bodem, Finance Director Jessica Green, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Public Works Director Mike Goebel, Police Chief Joel Scharf, and Liquor Store Manager Jan Muehlbauer. Also in attendance: Big Lake Library representatives, and Big Lake Township Board Supervisors Larry Alfords, Bob Hofer, and Steve Pflgebraar.

**3. PROPOSED AGENDA**

Council Member Wallen motioned to adopt the proposed Agenda with the removal of item 4B (Joint Session with Big Lake Township – Discussion of Joint Orderly Annexation Areas and Joint Projects). Seconded by Council Member Backlund, unanimous ayes, agenda adopted.

**4. BUSINESS**

**4A. Big Lake Public Library Discussion**

Mayor Danielowski recognized that this topic has been difficult for the Council.

Council Member Hansen explained that while he does support the Library, he does not support buying the MN Avenue building and doesn't support paying the high amount of the current lease when we are going to our tax payers for a substantial increase in our levy. Asked citizens to petition the Library to stay here and work with the City. Hansen discussed the option of putting dollars aside for the coming years in preparation to build a facility that can be used by all.

Mayor Danielowski stated that she wants to be sure that Council understands all the facts before a final decision is made. Danielowski reviewed the location checklist utilized by GRRL, and discussed the need for the City to touch base with the Space Needs Analysis that was conducted earlier in the year. Danielowski noted that the Library Board has said that they do want to work with the City, but that they have major concerns with relocating to the former Police Building. Danielowski noted that the MN Avenue site could be sold off in the future, and that the footprint of the former police building is too small to relocate the Library to.

Council Member Backlund stated that the worse mistake we could make would be to move the Library to the old police building. Backlund noted that our citizens deserve a good library space, and that he fully supports where it is currently located. Backlund also explained that the former police building isn't worth putting any further dollars into it.

Council Member Wallen discussed that he has had numerous contacts from citizens along with the rest of the Council. Wallen recognized that having a library is a quality of life benefit and enhances a community. Wallen reviewed the history of the library move to the MN Avenue site 4 years ago which the City has budgeted \$100,000 for each of those years with Big Lake Township participating in an additional 20% of the costs. Wallen explained that the MN Avenue property went into foreclosure and the City met in closed session to discuss purchase negotiations. The amount the City was willing to pay was very far off from the amount the bank was willing to accept. A Broker's Price Opinion was conducted which came in substantially lower than what either the seller or buyer had anticipated. At that time, negotiations went into stalemate and completely broke down. The majority consensus of the Council (3:2) was to look at other options. Wallen stated that he feels the building is a white elephant and isn't good for use for anything other than its current use. He explained that ultimately, the Bank wants to sell the property to the City, but the City gave away our negotiation ability when some Council Members started talking publicly about the negotiations. Wallen clarified that he would be in favor of purchasing the MN Avenue property as long as we have a net zero increase to our currently budgeted amount. Wallen stated his concern that we have painted ourselves in a corner. If the City can negotiate with the Bank that will amount to a net zero increase to our budget, he would support it. Wallen also explained that he is in favor of looking into various options. Wallen feels we should go back and have another discussion with the Bank. He would also like to have the library step up and increase their commitment to match our financial commitment. Their current contract allows for a 60 day withdrawal clause. Wallen stated that he would also like to discuss possible lease options with Bank.

Mayor Danielowski clarified that we have a very good bank in this community who has always been supportive of the City. The Bank is a tremendous asset to the Community. Danielowski disagreed with Wallen that the City was strategizing, clarifying that she feels the City was literally walking away from the MN Avenue site.

Council Member Hansen stated that the Council was being prudent with tax payer money and the Bank was asking too much for the property. Hansen explained that the City was in a time crunch and needed to make a decision. Hansen also noted that the Space Needs Analysis identified concerns with the MN Avenue property already.

Council Member Wallen clarified that he wasn't pointing a finger at the Bank. He felt the City needed to step back and consider our strategies. Wallen stated that he is not willing to overpay for a building.

Council Member Hansen noted that by the City purchasing this property, it will take a large chunk of tax dollars off the tax rolls. Hansen stated that would be in favor of the purchase of the MN Avenue site if we break even on what we currently budget for the Library.

Hansen also stated that the public was mis-informed and clarified that there were not 3 members of the Council who wanted to get rid of the library.

Council questioned if there is an option to have a longer Library term. Kirsti Smith from Great River Regional Library discussed the Library meeting they held last night, and reiterated that they are more than willing to work with the City and would be open to discussing an extended out clause.

Larry Alford from the Big Lake Town Board suggested Council consider what Plan C would be, explaining that it's basically too late to move by the end of the year now, so we need to continue to look at various options.

Laura Swanson (17173 – 232<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Big Lake, MN) – Discussed her concern with the breakdown in communication amongst the Council. Questioned why a Council Member sought feedback on Facebook without backing from the full Council. Swanson also asked if the City has considered purchasing the log cabin building located adjacent to the current Library site. Council explained that the commercial building is not large enough to accommodate the Library.

Council Member Backlund clarified that the newspaper called him seeking information. Backlund also questioned why the Library should move into that building if it was too substandard for our police department.

Council Member Nick Christenson arrived at 6:43 p.m.

Mayor Danielowski discussed comments she has received regarding the possibility of the Library being supported through user fees versus through tax dollars. Danielowski stated that the City's support of the Library serves a public purpose and that there are certain community services that should not be supported through user fees such as education, which is the type of service the Library falls under.

Court Appointed Receiver Larry Grell from Donnelly Development introduced himself along with Brad Veltkamp from Klein Bank. Grell informed Council that they weren't aware that leasing was an option that we had on the table, and indicated that they are willing to discuss leasing and continue negotiations for the sale of the property. Council Member Wallen acknowledged that the City has been knee jerky with the negotiations.

Duane Langsdorf (421 Highland Avenue, Big Lake, MN) questioned if Council will continue to look at other options. Langsdorf also questioned if the City has the funds to purchase the property. Todd Bodem indicated that the City would need to conduct a Scope of Work assessment to determine true costs for a remodel of the former police department site.

Staff reviewed that City Attorney Soren Mattick had previously been handling negotiations with Donnelly Development. The general consensus of the Council was to authorize the City Attorney to reopen negotiations with the Bank to engage negotiations with a net zero increase on our current Library budget. The general consensus of the Council was to also continue to aggressively market the former police department building. Council also acknowledged the Big Lake Township Board for their support of the Library.

5. **OTHER** – No other.

6. **ADJOURN**

Council Member Hansen motioned to adjourn at 7:12 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Christenson, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck  
Recorder

09/25/13  
Date Approved By Council