

**CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS**  
**BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA**  
**Work Session – March 24, 2008**

Pursuant to due call and notice, a work session of the City Council of the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota, was held on Monday, March 24, 2008, at 5:30 p.m. in the Conference Room of City Hall, Mayor Lehmann presiding.

Upon roll call, the following Councilmembers were declared present: Lehmann, Markeson, Hellquist, Johnson, Erickson, Downs, Meuers.

Staff Present: City Manager John Chattin, City Engineer Craig Gray, City Attorney Alan Felix, City Engineer Brian Freeberg, Public Works Director Andy Mack, Deputy City Clerk Shawn Swenson.

Mayor Lehmann stated that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss proposals received in response to the City's Request for Proposals (RFPs) for the operation of the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Amendment(s) to Agenda

**Motion by Markeson, seconded by Johnson, to add discussion regarding the Birchmont Drive project. Motion carried unanimously.**

Birchmont Drive Project

Gray stated that Northern Township directed that a survey be sent to the Birchmont Drive residents. There were 216 assessment units/property owners sent surveys. Eight-six (40%) were opposed to the project and seventy-eight (36%) were in favor of the project and 52 (24%) surveys were not returned. The Town Board stated that a non-response would be considered a yes vote, which was spelled out in the survey. He noted that the 86 no votes are a lot of negative votes going into a project. There was much discussion regarding the SAC/WAC fees. If the assessment is challenged, there is no City financial contribution toward the project. There are some challenges/costs the City may have to deal with.

Felix stated that because of the delay of the project there is not enough time for folks to connect. Residents who may be sitting on the fence would like the City to look at the imposition of the SAC/WAC fee and consider extending the connection date.

Gray suggested the Council consider giving residents with an existing residential structure until January 1, 2011 to connect to the City's system, which would give them two seasons, without paying a SAC/WAC fee.

Councilors discussed the SAC/WAC policy and possible financial impacts on bonds. Eischens stated that deferring the SAC/WAC fees for another year would not have any impact on the bonds.

Erickson stated that there will be an ongoing problem from those who do have water or sewer currently available and will have to pay the SAC/WAC fee at the time water and sewer is extended.

Mayor Lehmann suggested that the SAC/WAC policy be amended to allow two construction seasons upon completion of a project in which to hookup before being assessed the connection fee. Those that have the system now have until January 1, 2010 which has given them two construction seasons.

Gray commented that the City will not collect as much SAC/WAC fees with the proposed policy. Eischens stated that this will take staff more time to administer and watch.

**Motion by Markeson, seconded by Downs, to amend the City's Sewer Access Connection/Water Access Connection (SAC/WAC) fee policy to allow currently existing structures a deferral of two construction seasons, from the date of the completion of a project, to connect before the SAC/WAC fee would be imposed. Motion was unanimously approved.**

RFP – WWTF

Chattin stated that the City received Request for Proposals for the operation of the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant from four firms. Through this process, the City learned a lot about our plant and are provided staff an opportunity to assess operations. Chattin stated that the City is capable of operating the plant just as efficiently as the private sector. If the City contracted the operations, it would still be responsible for ensuring that the facility meets or exceeds effluent standards.

Chattin stated that one of the issues staff has with continuing city operations is securing a plant superintendent who is capable of assessing the future needs of the plant and the community. With the retirement of Tim Whiting, Chattin stated the City should attempt to recruit such a person before considering outsourcing operations. There are other caveats that must also fall in place: 1) total staffing for the plant be reduced from 8 FTEs to 5 FTEs; 2) the union contract would have to be reopened and amended to allow for such things as 8 hour shifts and on call provisions; 3) the chemist position would have to be eliminated; 4) job descriptions would be expanded to allow for the cross training needed to operate with fewer FTEs; 5) antiquated and inoperable control systems would have to be replaced to allow for more efficient operations; and 6) layoffs would be negotiated with the union but would be based on operational needs and not necessarily on seniority. If the City is unable to accomplish these tasks, then he would recommend contracting for plant operation.

Mayor Lehmann commented that contracting out may be less expensive in the beginning but the cost may go up later on. He stated that the City has good employees that can help start cutting the costs at the plant.

The Council discussed changes in duties for the superintendent, eliminating the chemist position and re-negotiating the union contract.

**Motion by Markeson, seconded by Erickson, directing staff to work towards the following outcomes at the Wastewater Treatment Plant:**

- 1. Reduce staffing from eight to five full-time employees.**
- 2. Eliminate the chemist position.**
- 3. Reopen the union contract and amend it to allow for eight-hour shifts and on-call provisions.**
- 4. Expand job descriptions to allow for cross-training needed to operate with fewer full-time employees.**
- 5. Replace antiquated and inoperable control systems to allow for more efficient operation.**
- 6. Negotiation with the union so layoffs would be based on operational needs and not necessarily on seniority.**
- 7. Advertise the WWTF Superintendent position.**

**Motion carried unanimously.**

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, motion by Johnson, seconded by Downs, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Shawn M. Swenson  
Deputy City Clerk