

City Council Proceedings

Special Meeting/Work Session

July 20, 2005

Pursuant to due call and notice, a special meeting/work session of the City Council of the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota, was held on July, 20, 2005, at 7:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, Mayor Lehmann presiding.

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

Mayor Lehmann stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the repair of the ice making system at the Neilson-Reise Arena. The Council has toured arena facilities in Bemidji: Nymore Gardens owned by ISD #31, Community Arena owned by Bemidji Youth Hockey and the City's Neilson-Reise Arena. Lehmann commented the City's Arena is improved after the remodeling and it is a brighter and cleaner facility.

Lehmann read a letter received from Mitch Loomis, scheduler for Leech Lake Area Youth Hockey. Mr. Loomis stated that he would like the Neilson-Reise Arena reopened for 2005-06 hockey season.

Markeson stated it is appealing is working with the Bemidji Community Arena but the City has no idea how much the City would subsidize in a joint facility.

Downs commented that another joint meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 27 at 8:30 a.m., which will be moderated by HRDC at the School District headquarters and more discussion will be held about the savings and benefits of combining the rinks in one location. Downs stated that this is a missed opportunity if the City continues to put money into the City facility. Downs stated that the operation and maintenance costs that the City and school district currently spend could be a shared cost on one ice cooling system at the Community Arena.

Erickson commented that it is important to include the County in this venture and would like a joint agreement with all three entities – City, County and school district.

Meuers stated that the City is discussing something in the future, what about a short-term solution.

Downs responded that the BSU rink can be used from about September 15 and be available for public use according to the rink manager as a temporary situation.

Lehmann commented that the Council made a decision earlier this year to go forward and make the repairs to the City Arena. It was a task that Councilmember Hellquist had made a priority. The City has done these repairs and for about \$300,000 the City can put the ice back on-line and make it available year round. He stated that \$300,000 in the Community Arena is not going to put a dehumidifying system in to allow for summer ice.

Downs questioned if the money spent on operation and maintenance costs at the Arena is the best place. He stated that the City would subsidize less in the Community Arena as a partner.

Lehmann stated that other arenas in the northwest Minnesota area subsidize their arenas and they are community owned. An arena is not without cost to any community.

Markeson commented that because of loss of renters and income going down and cost going up, there is clearly not the demand at the arena.

Erickson stated that in Keith Huerd's letter he indicated that the total amount the City spends in the arena is approximately \$200,000 each year. Were the City to form a joint powers agreement with two other entities it would not be \$98,000 but closer to \$200,000 per annum if the City continued to subsidize as part of their support.

Johnson commented that perhaps the money is available from the sales tax which will be collected for parks, recreation and trails use. He stated it was not out of line to put money back into the City Arena as it is a good use.

Minke stated that the \$200,000 spent on the arena, over half of it comes from revenue from rentals. If the City did not operate the arena but gave \$200,000 to any other solution, it would be an increase cost to the City.

Erickson stated that the Community Arena would gain revenue if our facility was unavailable.

At 8:00 p.m., Mayor Lehmann opened the discussion for public comment.

Joyce Kramer stated that she represented Bemidji Figure Skating Club (BFSC) and is a Bemidji taxpayer and current treasurer of BFSC. She commented that the BFSC program has purchased all their ice from the City for the last 38 years. As of September 15, the BFSC is homeless and their program will cease to exist if the City's Arena is not repaired. She is in favor of long-term solutions but the City cannot forget about the short-term situation. The City needs to look at a short-term solution as the taxpayers have already invested in the arena.

Dan Haluptzok, Supt. of Parks & Recreation and an employee of City for 34 years stated that he has been attending the user meetings and much of the time has been used up by talking about the future. He commented that the future starts today and the programs that the City Arena serves are programs that cannot take a one or two year delay. Haluptzok stated that the ice at the arena can be put back on-line for very little money. However, that does not mean we cannot work on a long-term solution. There is a need this fall for a facility with a sheet of ice for the non-hockey players, i.e., church groups, birthday parties, open skating and figure skating.

Dennis Kramer suggested that the Council take a closer look at the schedule. Every night and in the morning the ice is scheduled, during the day the ice is open during the school year. If the Council does not move ahead with a short-term plan and then a long-term plan, a lot of people in the community will be frustrated. He is concerned that the community could possibly end up with two sheets of ice.

Tony Kramer, former City rink attendant and user, commented when he worked for at the arena it was used before school, after school and sometimes until midnight or until the last rental is done.

Discussion continued on the rental hours at Neilson-Reise Arena.

Tom Kaplan, representing the Oldtimers and a member of BYH, stated that the Arena brings people to town to patronize our businesses. Bemidji is a regional hub. Many of the surrounding communities use the Arena as there is no ice available in their communities. One of the reasons that some groups have moved was because the building was not well maintained from the City Arena. Kaplan suggested that the City market the Arena to the community. He commented that BSU has a pecking order to rent ice and it would be difficult for many groups to be accommodated. He stated the City should invest in the Arena.

Derrick Houle, citizen of Bemidji, stated that the Arena is important to Oak Hills Christian Academy as they have been using the Arena for the last two years. Mr. Houle stated that the Arena is an investment worth keeping.

Hugh Welle, Bemidji Youth Hockey, commented that he is not suggesting closing Neilson-Reise Arena but replacing it and that the City's personnel be transferred to the proposed two rink facility.

Downs stated that he would like to solve the long and short-term problem and focus on the needs of the City, County, etc.

Steve Johnson, Bemidji School Board member, stated Nymore is tied up with boys and girls hockey. Mr. Johnson stated the City needs to have the Neilson-Reise Arena. He stated that a year or two in the life of a kid is big. The City Arena provides a recreational skating rink in the winter time. He suggested the City sell advertising in the rink. In addition, he commented that the Nymore Gardens Arena is not "limping" but in good shape.

Bill Maki, Bemidji State University (BSU), stated that there is a pecking order for the BSU Arena. BSU is accountable to the students who pay 53% of the cost of the arena. Division I programs take priority. In the short-term, BSU is willing to be a good community partner and do what they can to work with groups that need ice.

Johnson commented if the Arena is fixed up now, perhaps in the future the Curling Club could be expanded. Discussion followed on the possibility of partnering with the Community Arena and the Curling Club.

Motion by Hellquist, seconded by Meuers, to spend \$300,000 to repair the Neilson-Reise Arena. Motion carried by the following vote: Ayes: Meuers, Hellquist, Lehmann, Johnson. Nays: Markeson, Erickson, Downs. Absent: None.

Discussion followed on funding the repairs. Minke recommended that the City do an internal loan and pay it off over 20 years at approximately \$15,000 a year, which would add approximately \$15,000 to the operating budget each year.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Meuers, second by Johnson, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kay Murphy-Schuett
Deputy City Clerk