

**CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS**  
**BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA**  
**Regular Meeting/Work Session – February 13, 2006**

Pursuant to due call and notice, a regular meeting/work session of the City Council of the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota, was held on Monday, February 13, 2006, at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, Mayor Lehmann presiding.

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

Staff Present: Minke, Eischens, Preece, Sathers, and Murphy-Schuett  
Other Present: Terry Diffley, Russ Hiltz, and Donna Anderson

Mayor Lehmann stated that at the Council should consider appointing a council representative and other city representatives to discuss library issues. He recommended the Council appoint Councilmember Meuers to the local library board and appoint Meuers, Minke and Felix to represent the City in discussions with the County and City of Blackduck on the library steering committee.

Motion by Johnson, second by Hellquist, to appoint Meuers to the local library board to fill an unexpired term and to represent the City on the KRL Library Board. In addition, appoint Meuers, Minke and Felix to the Library Steering Committee. Motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Lehmann stated that the purpose of the meeting to discuss the Rural Fire Association contract with the City of Bemidji. Currently, the Rural Fire Association has an extended contract for six months or until the end of June 2006.

Minke provided a summary of the history of the relationship with the Rural Fire Association (RFA). He stated that the City began meeting with RFA over the summer and fall of 2005. For many years the negotiation has been that the City would approach it from the perspective of how do we negotiate to get the most money and RFA would approach it from the perspective of how do we limit what we have to pay. A couple of years ago, there was some substantial language changes based primarily upon advice from the City Attorney in getting the contract to align with some of the recommended language from the League of Minnesota Cities as well as good contract language. Typically, in the past the City Manager was not involved in the negotiations. When the City did the significant language changes, Minke stated he began to get more involved in the negotiations as well as the Finance Director. The City's goal has been to get a basis upon which to distribute the cost as opposed to just having a number. He noted that the Brainerd model as a way to distribute costs based on number of calls, value and population. It has been discussed with the RFA at a number of meetings that Minke felt were productive, but based on what we know now it does not appear that the RFA felt the same. The RFA did some research on what would be a fifth factor somehow accounting for the lower ISO rating. After a couple months RFA came back with no definitive recommendation of how to incorporate that.

Minke stated that there has been discussion on medical calls. He noted that the Fire Department no longer uses the large fire engines with the new Kodiak vehicle on-line to

respond to medicals. In addition, the City has agreed to include medicals call on a two for one basis. Minke stated that there was a disagreement as to how to reasonably breakdown the costs between the City and Rural for medical calls.

Minke stated that RFA has raised several points in their January 11, 2006 letter that he felt were beyond his ability as they making a request to have the Council involved. Therefore, Minke asked that for Council's direction on how to proceed. The list is as follow:

1. Fair and reasonable cost for rural property fire protection.
2. Long term planning for equipment purchases.
3. Long term planning for building/housing needs.
4. A joint powers agreement for fire protection ASAP.
5. The return of the "chief" position.
6. The fire department to no longer be run from the Public Safety Director and run from a board set up in the joint powers agreement.
7. The fire department's budget to be independent.
8. Inclusion of City Council members in the negotiations.

Erickson commented that there she sees no advantage in having a separate budget for the fire department. Minke stated that by removing it from the general fund there would be no potential for confusion as to how much was spent and the expenses. Erickson wondered if creating a separate fire department fund was allowable under accounting rules. Eischens stated that the Council could designate a separate fund if they wanted to and there is nothing wrong with that necessarily but it is not common practice.

Minke stated the important items for the Council to weigh in on our #4 and #8. How these items are decided will chart the course on how the other items requested by the RFA are answered.

Erickson stated that she is not in favor a joint powers agreement where the City loses control of its own fire department. She stated that it was no different than the sewer and water services that are located outside city limits and felt it would erode City authority.

Johnson commented that he would like to see a formula in place and a funding mechanism that makes some sense.

Erickson stated that it is imperative that the City look at substation for adequate protection and quick response.

Minke stated that the struggle with the substations is that unless we have a long term relationship with RFA it is hard to plan. There are many factors to consider in locating a substation, simply having a substation does not increase response time.

Downs commented that the City should explore ways to help lower the rural ISO rating. Minke stated that ISO is looking at improving rating based on building codes.

Downs stated he would like to see the return of the Fire Chief position with direct communication to the City Manager.

Lehmann asked why is it critical that there be a fire chief when there is a fire captain. He felt by eliminating the administrative side and spreading this person thin.

Chief Preece commented that his responsibility is overview the budget and research and development of the department, i.e., grants. The Fire Captain sees to the day-to-day operation of the fire department. He stated that the fire department and police department work very well together sharing resources.

Minke stated that the fire and police work very well together in Bemidji and has less to do with the structure but the commitment of the people. He commented that cooperation can be there regardless of the structure. Are there other things that can be put on the table.

Markeson can the formula be blended to get to an acceptable result.

Minke stated that they would be satisfied with a contract, find a way to make it agreeable.

Erickson stated that the RFA should look at it from the position that they are getting the best possible service for their money.

Minke stated that after hiring a fire captain he has found that the City needs a fire chief. The City is not competitive in attracting firefighters to the fire captain position due to the pay and title.

Minke stated that he is concerned that there has been a lot of communication between the Council and fire department personnel. He cautioned Councilmembers to limit communications with fire personnel as it could undermine negotiation of the contract.

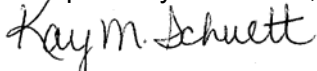
Consensus of the Council was that they are not interested in a joint powers agreement and that staff negotiate the contract with RFA.

Lehmann directed staff to continue negotiating with the Rural Fire Association.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, motion by Downs, second by Erickson, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kay Murphy-Schuett  
City Clerk