

Minutes of the General Government and Public Safety Committee meeting of Monday, July 8, 2013.

Prior to the meeting, the Mayor and two aldermen met informally to view the exterior of the Narraganset Building and determine the current state of its disrepair.

The meeting was called to order by Alderman Wilkins at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Grenke, Aldermen Magley, Simmons, Bormann, Angell, and Lee. Also attending were Lynn Behrns, Barry Stevens, Police Chief Larry Dudgeon, Fire Chief Denny Rusch, Officer Ron Bellamy, Jerry Parmeley, Jeff Grimes, and a large number of citizens interested in the topic of feral cats.

Those present participated in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Comments from Citizens

Mayor Grenke noted the attendance of Jacob Bentlage and Chris Cox—two Boy Scouts present to observe local government.

Economic Development

Barry Stevens presented a report on CREDI activities. CREDI continues to work hard to advance the Purchase with Purpose initiative. Their new intern is working with Bernie Andrews of REDI to develop contact lists of potential businesses which might be interested in coming to Centralia. Initial responses from gun and ammunition manufactures has been promising. Larry Dickerson, formerly of MU Extension, will also be spending time helping CREDI with economic development.

Park Department

The Park Board minutes for the June meeting were in the Committee agenda packet.

Cemetery Advisory Committee

No formal report. The Avenue of Flags has been taken down after the July 4th holiday, and volunteers are tending to damaged flags.

Tree Board

No report.

Library Board

No formal report was made, but an agenda for the next meeting was presented in the agenda packet.

Finance

Financial statements for June were in the agenda packet. One fourth of the way through the fiscal year, expenditures and financial resources seem to be as expected.

Bills over \$1,250

Committee received a preliminary list of bills over \$1,250. Magley asked about the bill from A. J's Collision for vehicle repairs. [After the meeting, he was able to examine the bill and was satisfied.]

Other

Behrns reported that he spoke with the owners of Carlan's Restaurant about the purchase of 105 N. Allen. The Hattons are only able to offer \$500 for the property, because the improvements they would like to undertake would otherwise tax their resources. After some discussion, most Committee members said that they would

rather accept the low offer and get the property back on the tax rolls, than have it remain as an unproductive site. Behrns was instructed to have the City Attorney prepare the necessary ordinance and other documents to implement the sale.

City Prosecutor

No report.

Fire Department

Fire Chief Rusch presented a report of June activities of the Fire Department. Aldermen thanked Rusch and the firefighters for the good job they did on the July 4th fireworks display at City Recreation Park. Rusch said they had some ideas to improve the show, which they may experiment with next year.

Rusch was asked about a traffic accident which caused a large amount of wheat to be spilled on the street at North Jefferson. He said that MFA had a vacuum truck which, despite its age, had removed most of the grain quickly and minimized the inconvenience to the public.

Police Department

Dudgeon presented a report of June activities and calls to the Police Department. Committee members had no questions.

Committee discussed a draft ordinance which would raise impoundment and boarding fees for animal picked up by the Code Enforcement Officer or police officers. Initial fees would go from \$10 to \$20. Thereafter, the change would be \$15 per day—up from \$10. Committee members and Chief Dudgeon said that this increase was perhaps enough to give people incentive to pay more attention to their pets. If not, the fees might be raised even more. Behrns will put the ordinance on the regular Board agenda. He will also check to determine the last time the fees were increased. [Subsequent to the meeting, he found that the impoundment fees were at \$10 since 1991. The boarding fees were at \$10 per day since 2005.]

Connie Kelly address the committee about feral cats. Referring to remarks from a previous meeting as reported in the newspaper, she wanted the aldermen to know that there was only one “colony” of feral cats in the City. It is in a pasture south of Tidball and east of Adams. At first there may have been as many as 14 cats. Some cats have been added or removed and the number is now about 8 cats. Over the last three years, she caught about 20 cats, which she had neutered and vaccinated by a vet and released back to the site. The colony is waning from attrition because the cats are territorial and also cannot reproduce. She argued that her actions were proven effective and recommended by several national organizations. It costs her more than \$85 to have each animal seen by a vet. This is not public money.

Terry Danish said the property owner of the pasture is her neighbor and is supportive of the colony since it helps with vermin control. Behrns noted that the property is zoned “R-1” single family residence, not agriculture. There is not an agriculture zone in the City. Such uses are generally allowed with all zones, if the property is large enough.

Parmeley spoke of his past support when he was on the Board of Aldermen. Behrns presented a written report from the Code Enforcement Officer. She has trapped cats at several locations about town, but there have not been significant numbers or problems in any one location. When the City last talked about the issue, the Board took no formal action to either be more aggressive toward cats nor changing ordinances to increase the number of animals allowed per household.

Magley said his remarks had been triggered by complaints that someone was feed cats in the downtown alley, west of Allen Street. To him, this was a clear problem. Dudgeon said that he would investigate who was involved.

Jack Hargis said that he supported Kelly's actions and also thanked Dudgeon for his cooperation.

Some aldermen said they found no reason to make any changes in City policy, but they acknowledged Kelly's offer to conducted more investigation. Wilkins said the City always welcomes additional information. Kelly suggested that Centralia examine ordinances adopted by the City of Hermann.

Emergency Management

No report.

Protective Inspection

Alderman discussed the status of what to do about the Narraganset Building. There was some skepticism that Mr. de la Rosa could have devoted as much time to repair work as was shown in his work diary. All aldermen said they had no desire to acquire the site, nor become responsible for future cleanup. There may be environmental issues remaining from past uses. Lee added that de la Rosa did have a small business on the property and Lee had no interest in driving a business out of town. Magley said he was concerned that, if the City did not deal with the building, it would be assuming a large liability.

Behrns had included a memorandum from the City Attorney, referring to an unofficial schedule for repairs the de la Rosa had agreed to. The schedule has not been achieved and was no legally binding. Also included were copies of past citations of his notices to de la Rosa and the sections of the dangerous structure ordinance which had been applied. He said that if the City did not want to bear the expense of demolishing the building, then it might alternatively charge to owner in court with repeated violations, until the owner found it cheaper to actually deal with the physical issues. No one thought that the building could be salvage, but based on the City's experience with cleaning up 105 N. Allen, no one wanted a repeat of the financial loss. One alderman said that even if the City does nothing, the building will likely collapse on its own in the next year or so. Angell reported that he spoke with a local contractor and learned that just trucking away the bricks could cost more than \$40,000. He said he could not think of any favorable outcome for either the City or de la Rosa. Magley wanted the City to set a firm schedule for work which could be monitored from outside the building.

Mayor Grenke suggested that Behrns prepare a list of the building's deficiencies which was more specific than those in the last Declaration and focused on exterior problems. Simmons agreed. The committee asked for the establishment of clear milestones.

Behrns said that a complication is that the structure contains many items that are not owned by de la Rosa, but there for repairs.

As May Arise

Wendell Wright asked that the City work quickly to improve pedestrian access on Jefferson Street near the High School. Behrns told him that adding sidewalks would need to be done according to plans for a more complete upgrade of the street. Otherwise the work might have to be redone later. The responsibility for future street work was with the City. Several years ago, the developer of the Emerald Point Subdivision had been able to forgo work on Jefferson in exchange for connecting the east end of Emerald Drive to Howard Burton Drive (work that was outside of the subdivision). The City and public benefitted from this. In the time since, work on Jefferson

had been postponed so that the City could instead do work at the new Intermediate School and work on Switzler. Funding has not been sufficient to do all the deserving projects.

Dudgeon publicly thanked Eagle Scout Candidate Patrick Bentlage for his work with the School Resource Officer to put on the recent bicycle safety event.

The Committee then adjourned at about 8:15 p.m.

[After the meeting, the ad hoc subcommittee met informally and quickly agreed that Behrns should attempt to negotiate a contract with Simon Associates for the architectural work on the City Hall and nearby city properties.]