

MINUTES
BUHL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
3/18/2025

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

6:30 P.M.

1. CALL TO ORDER by Mayor Matthews at 6:30 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL:

Councilors: Kealy X Loeffler X Teska-Erickson X Towner
Mayor: X Matthews

Administrator: X Jeffries
Public Works Foreman: X Pink
Attorney: X Kearney
Engineer: Jamnick
Fire Chief: Lehman
Police Chief: Manner
Finance Manager: X Thronson

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA/COUNCIL ADDITIONS TO AGENDA:

Motion by Teska-Erickson to approve the agenda as presented.

Supported by Loeffler.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

Administrator Jeffries discussed several minor alterations to the agenda, including a change in Consent Agenda item B.ii.- additional claims of \$190.68 were added to the claims list, bringing the total claims amount to \$110,905.86 –

These additional claims are reflected as item B.iii. on the consent agenda –

Noted that there was an inaccuracy on page 3 of 4 on Exhibit B (Existing and Proposed Rates) of David Berg's Utility Rate Analysis report, and distributed the corrected information -

Motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORTS FROM DEPARTMENT HEADS:

City Public Works Foreman Trent Pink:

Noted that there are streetlights on Forest St; Pennsylvania Ave., and Memorial Drive which have been on all day and night recently – this is due to an electrical contactor issue which is in the process of being repaired (awaiting replacement parts) -

Noted that he some concern related to (prior) discussions regarding attendance at the Minnesota Rural Water Association (MWRA) Water & Wastewater Technical Conference –

Noted that he was confused as to what appears to be his not, or no longer, being asked to be involved with or being invited to (city) meetings regarding and related to city streets and utilities, and public works or infrastructure activities and projects –

Noted that it appears that meetings which historically had been conducted regarding possible projects and issues on streets and utilities are no longer occurring, and is unsure why this practice appears to have stopped -

The Administrator indicated that this is absolutely not by design nor by intent – and that Mr. Pink's presence is, in fact, more than welcome, if not essential, at any time, however in some instances the scope of conversations which may have occurred did not appear to be, nor was, at a level of detail or design that was perceived or determined to be pertinent to impacting Mr. Pink's position or role with the City – that it has been inadvertent at best -

Additional sensitivities to proactively modify this will be implemented – and that council and staff do desire Mr. Pink's presence and input at any or all times -

Administrator Jeffries:

Offered several comments, including:

1. Offered congratulations to MI-B High School winter sports teams on their collective successes this past winter sports season -
2. Offered congratulations to Cherry High School basketball team for reaching the MN State High School League State Boys Basketball Tournament -
3. Offered congratulations to the Buhl Curling Club for another successful Blarney Bonspiel and a great curling season!

5. CITIZENS FORUM:

None.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes:

- i. City Council Workshop Session – February 24, 2025 – deferred until 4/1/25 and removed from Consent Agenda -
- ii. Regular City Council Meeting – March 4, 2025

B. Claims:

- | | | |
|------|------------------|------------------|
| i. | Payroll #5 | \$ 14,864.69 |
| ii. | A/P | \$ 95,850.49 |
| iii. | Additions to A/P | <u>\$ 190.68</u> |

TOTAL \$ 110,905.86

Motion by Towner to approve the consent agenda as amended.

Supported by Teska-Erickson.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

Motion carried unanimously.

7. BUSINESS:

A. Conduct Stubler Beach Campground Potential Expansion Public Input Session.

The City operates the Stubler Beach Campground as a rustic (primitive) amenity offered to residents and non-residents alike for overnight lodging during the months of April through October of each year.

The City has been investigating the possibility of expanding this facility with assistance from Community and Economic Development Associates (CEDA) for preparation efforts connected with applying for a Mn Department of Natural Resources (Mn DNR) grant by end of March 2025.

As a portion of this grant application-related work for the Mn DNR, a public input and feedback campaign was created.

The public has been invited to comment on this proposed expansion through written and/or oral input; the public comment period opened on February 21, 2025, and will close on March 26, 2025.

A public workshop was also scheduled to allow for in-person feedback and comment; this public input session was now conducted at this City Council meeting.

For reference, the City has met with representatives of the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) regarding the campground facility as it presently is configured, as well as how it may be configured under an expansion proposal – the City is awaiting any findings from MDH regarding the potential expansion, as well as the operation of the facility at present.

As previously communicated, it is anticipated that the facility will need to be licensed by the MDH in 2025 regardless of potential expansion initiatives.

Informational only.

Discussion:

The Administrator indicated that the potential licensing of the campground is independent of and not contingent upon any expansion plans – and suggested that information related to this from the MDH may be received within the next month or so –

Noted that the public input campaign created for this initiative provided for written comments to be able to be received, whether on-paper or electronically, and indicated that no comments were received on-paper, and that ten (10) comments were received electronically –

The electronically-received comments were tabulated and distributed to the City Council – some commentors were in favor of the expansion initiative, and others were not -

Comments from attendees at the Public Input Session included:

Trent Pink –

Stated that he is not in favor of the proposed expansion due to a number of reasons, including:

- The campground tends to attract a less than desirable clientele and creates unwanted but necessary clean-up activities, including drug-related paraphernalia, on a far too frequent basis;

- Indicated that there appear to be a number of “squatters” who do not pay for nor maintain or manage their campsite on a regular basis or as expected;
- Noted that a payment box had been located on the site in the past but that it had been stolen;
- Noted that campsites often get vandalized; and
- Policing of the area take more time and effort than it should.

The Administrator indicated that these behaviors have been a known and ongoing issue for a number of years -

Melody Staffaroni –

- Stressed that a full-time live-in attendant may be required to ensure orderly operation -

Additional miscellaneous comments were heard related to and regarding the same –

It was noted that overnight rates may need to be adjusted in order to make the facility not be an economic liability –

It was also noted that it may turn out that the City may elect to not keep the facility open or operational -

B. Presentation from David Berg, P.E, of Dave Berg Consulting, LLC, on Proposed Utility Rates for 2025 – 2029.

The City is the administrator of the delivery of utility services to its residents. Specifically, the City provides for and administrates water, sanitary sewer, refuse collection and disposal, and electric utility services.

The rates for these municipal services are regularly monitored, and recommended to be reviewed on a 5-year basis.

The City approved Dave Berg Consulting, LLC to conduct an updated rate study in October 2024, which was intended to provide recommendations for action and rate structures proposed and designed to be effective until the end of 2029.

Dave Berg Consulting, LLC, presented these findings for approval on March 4, 2025.

Subsequently, individual utility rates adjustments have been proposed, and were presented at this meeting for consideration. These recommendations are as follows:

YEAR	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Electric	0%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Water	0%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Sewer	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%
Refuse	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%

These adjustments are designed to keep each fund “flush” for the next 5 years.

Recommendation is that the city approve the proposed utility rates developed by Dave Berg Consulting, LLC, for the years of 2025-2029.

Motion by Towner to accept and approve the rates proposed by Dave Berg Consulting, LLC for City provided utilities, for the years 2025 – 2029, and to review these rates on an annual basis.

Supported by Teska-Erickson.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

It was noted that the proposed rates are comparatively very low and quite reasonable—

It was reaffirmed that the single largest variable of utility costs to the City is the wholesale power purchase agreement with Minnesota Power (which expires in 2029) –

Noted that the projected high level of reserves designed to be created by 2029 will likely be favorable to the City as a “cushion” in case there is a substantial increase in whole sale power purchase costs in 2030 and forward – and “soften the blow” to resident consumers –

Question was raised regarding a proposed “buy-out” of Minnesota Power – this will not affect or influence these rates -

It was noted that likely the most significant potential impact will be where the electric market will be come 2030 – including the proposed scale-back or shutdown of coal-fired electrical generation plants, and the real possibility of needing more transmission capacity to adequately serve the needs of additional planned large data centers –

It was noted relating to water that with regard to a projected declining or negative change in net position (fund balance), it has

a significant (non-cash) depreciation expense, and when you back-out this depreciation, it is projected to positively cash-flow –

In comparison, refuse has no depreciation, since the City does not possess any assets there -

Total cash position on all utility funds aggregated are projected to increase by approximately \$500,000 by the end of the analysis period (2029) – or about 20% -

Question was raised on whether the city should “self-finance” rather than incur interest charges should short-term or interim financing be required when infrastructure construction projects are ongoing (preliminarily projected at approximately \$50,000 per year) –

Question also raised as to how much operating reserves should the City attempt to maintain (3-6 months?) – it was responded that the operating reserves should be there to “hedge” against catastrophic events –

Motion carried unanimously.

The effective date of these rates adjustments was proposed to become effective May 1, 2025.

Motion by Towner to make the accepted and approved utility rates adjustments effective as of May 1, 2025.

Supported by Teska-Erickson.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

Motion carried unanimously.

This information will be placed on the City website as soon as practicable.

C. Consider Developing Sewer Lateral Ordinance.

The City has been considering developing and enacting a sewer lateral ordinance for some time now.

Such an ordinance would require that an inspection of the integrity of a private sewer lateral (the sewer line connecting a private structure to the City sewer main and collection system) be conducted upon each sale or transfer of property ownership.

Should any issues be identified, the condition will need to be rectified or any existing damage repaired before conveyance of the property would be acceptably allowed.

This type of program is becoming more and more accepted and implemented by municipalities around the state and nation.

It is anticipated that there will be several upsides to this type of program, including, but not limited to:

1. Helping address inflow and infiltration (I+I) impacts from private sewer laterals which have been compromised, thereby increasing the amount of material collected into the municipal wastewater system, exacerbating the I+I impacts;
2. Providing new property owners the confidence and verification of the performance and condition of the private sewer lateral(s); and
3. Providing the City with a live database to monitor this system and its effects.

Recommendation is to develop and adopt a City of Buhl sewer lateral ordinance.

Motion by Towner to authorize the Administrator to develop a Sewer Lateral Ordinance for the City of Buhl to govern the performance of private sewer laterals and their impact on the municipal wastewater collection system.

Supported by Teska-Erickson.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

It was noted that many municipalities already require something similar, and that this is increasing all the time –

It was also noted that other organizations (title companies, banks, etc.) also require these -

Question was raised by the City Attorney regarding property transfers versus property sales – and whether there would be any differences between the two – (it may be more difficult to track property transfers) – it was suggested that any transfer of property or transfer of title which needs to be recorded by the (St. Louis) County would require such an inspection -

Motion carried unanimously.

- D. Consider Accepting Perpetual Easement to Allow Ingress/Egress to 99 and 101 Jones Avenue Rear Yard(s).

On November 25, 2024, the City Council voted to grant an access easement for ingress/egress to the owners of properties located at 99 and 101 Jones Avenue in Buhl. This action will not include permanent parking provisions.

This was necessitated by the actions of Gabriel LaBarge, the owner of certain real properties located at 99 Jones Avenue, during the process of selling and conveying these properties to another private purchaser.

A permanent easement needs to be granted allowing traversing over City property to access this address, as the only way to access the rear yard and an associated detached garage on Mr. LaBarge's properties is by crossing City of Buhl property. No developed or established road or road right-of-way exists in this area, nor do any other specific permissions.

The City Attorney has drafted this easement, which shall be permanent and shall run with the land, and shall apply to the LaBarges, as well as their heirs and assigns. This easement was attached for City Council consideration.

There are similar access issues regarding the properties located at 101 Jones Avenue, owned and held by Ms. Julia Joyal; these are not specifically included in this action.

The City Engineer has previously reviewed and created property descriptions for inclusion into this easement.

Recommendation is approve this easement agreement.

Motion by Towner to approve the Easement Indenture between the City of Buhl and Gabriel and Sheila LaBarge for ingress, egress, and utility purposes to the property located at 99 Jones Avenue in Buhl, Minnesota, in the amount of \$ 1.00 and other good and valuable consideration.

Supported by Loeffler.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

A separate but virtually identical instrument will be created and considered for the property located at 101 Jones Avenue, which is owner by a different private party -

Motion carried unanimously.

E. Consider Filling Vacancy on the City of Buhl Recreation Board.

The City presently has a vacancy on its Recreation Board.

Notice of this vacancy was previously posted, and the public was notified and requested that anyone interested in serving in this capacity should contact City Hall for potential consideration.

This posting remains in effect until all vacancies are filled.

Sue LeTendre is a resident of Buhl and has expressed an interest in joining the Recreation Board.

She is interested in the available three-year (3-year) term vacancy.

She has helped out with various community activities in the past, including parades, the Beach Blast, movies, and dances. She enjoys helping out the community with these activities, and can help with donations and event set-up and tear-down.

She has completed an Expression Of Interest, and would like to join the board and be involved with more!

Recommendation is to appoint Sue LeTendre to the Recreation Board.

Motion by Teska-Erickson to appoint Sue LeTendre to serve on the City of Buhl Recreation Board, with a term that expires December 31, 2027.

Supported by Loeffler.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

It was noted that Ms. LeTendre has been active and helpful and an asset to the Recreation Board in the past -

Motion carried unanimously.

- F. Consider Resolution 25-13 Authorizing the City to Receive and Accept Funds from Northeast Service Cooperative for a Wellness Grant in the Amount of \$550.00.

The City is a member of the Northeast Service Cooperative Health School Insurance Pool (NESC).

NESC extends a grant monies annually to its members, encouraging them to engage in health promotion activities.

In 2025 the granted amount is \$550.00.

Recommendation is to adopt City of Buhl Resolution 25-13.

Motion by Towner to adopt City of Buhl Resolution 25-13 and to expend said proceeds in conformance with NESC suggested activities.

Supported by Teska-Erickson.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

It was noted that the City has received this grant in the recent past, and has expended said grant funds on city-centric health- and wellness-related actions and activities -

Roll Call Vote: Kealy Absent, Loeffler Aye, Teska-Erickson Aye, Towner Aye; Matthews Aye.

Motion carried unanimously.

G. Consider Resolution 25-14 Adopting the City of Buhl Public Utilities' Rules Governing the Interconnection of Cogeneration and Small Power Production Facilities.

The City of Buhl, as the provider of electricity and electrical service within the City, is considered by the State of Minnesota as a municipal utility.

The State of Minnesota currently has interconnection process standards in effect to address the interconnection of distributed energy resources (DER) to the distribution grid. Under Minnesota Statute §216B.1611, cooperatives and municipals shall adopt an interconnection process that addresses the same issues as the interconnection process approved by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. The Minnesota Municipal Interconnection Process (Interconnection Process) applies to any DER no larger than 10-megawatts (MW) AC interconnecting to and operating in parallel with the electric distribution system of a municipal utility that has adopted it for use. This interconnection process document is designed to be customer-centric when explaining the steps and details to interconnect DER systems to the distribution grid.

A common application of these provisions is the interconnection of private solar cogeneration facilities which utilize certified inverter-based DERs of less than 40KW AC to the local distribution grid.

There has been one request for a private solar interconnected installation at present; more requests are anticipated to be forthcoming in the future.

Recommendation is to adopt City of Buhl Resolution 25-14.

Motion by Teska-Erickson to adopt City of Buhl Resolution 25-14 and to Authorize and adopt certain rules governing the interconnection of cogeneration and small power production facilities located in the City with the City of Buhl Public Utilities.

Supported by Towner.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

Question was raised as to whether this would also apply to wind power cogeneration – the Administrator replied that yes, any system “tied” to the local (electric) grid which would have the ability to return power to the grid would be governed by the same

–

Roll Call Vote: Kealy Absent, Loeffler Aye, Teska-Erickson Aye, Towner Aye; Matthews Aye.

Motion carried unanimously.

H. Consider Resolution 25-15 Authorizing the City to Enter Into a Cooperative Agreement with St. Louis County for the Purpose of the 2026 St. Louis County Maintenance Programs Solicitation.

The St. Louis County Public Works Department engages in several programs related to maintaining public roads and other rights-of-way in the County, and annually invites townships and cities to participate in in these programs.

On February 25, 2025, the St. Louis County Public Works Department announced the continuation of several of these programs for the 2026 calendar year.

These programs include the continuation of its maintenance striping program, as well as continuation of its crack sealing, chip sealing, and scrub sealing programs.

Participation in these programs will allow the City to access these services, if needed or desired, at a more competitive rate than the City would be able to on its own independently.

There is no cost associated with participating in these programs with the St. Louis County Public Works Department.

It is anticipated that the City may desire to access at least a portion of these programs in 2026.

Recommendation is to adopt City of Buhl Resolution 25-15.

Motion by Towner to adopt City of Buhl Resolution 25-15 and to Authorize the City to Enter Into a Cooperative Agreement with St. Louis County for the Purpose of the 2026 St. Louis County Maintenance Programs Solicitation.

Supported by Loeffler.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

Clarification requested as to if this would apply to any roads in the city – yes, this is the understanding of the Administrator –

The City may elect to take advantage of all, some, or none of these programs entirely at its discretion -

Roll Call Vote: Kealy Absent, Loeffler Aye, Teska-Erickson Aye, Towner Aye; Matthews Aye.

Motion carried unanimously.

I. Consider Requesting Extension of Blandin Foundation Grant Agreement for Conducting Comprehensive Planning Initiatives.

The City has been considering an update to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The most recent update to the municipal comprehensive plan was in 2015.

The City applied for a Blandin Foundation Small Communities & Rural Placemaking Grant to update the community's comprehensive plan on May 10, 2024.

This action was favorably met and the Blandin Foundation awarded this grant to the City of Buhl on July 10, 2024.

This award, and its associated Grant Agreement, provides that the City is to submit a report about the outcomes of this grant by May 1, 2025.

Work activities associated with this Grant Agreement are anticipated to be completed in 2025, but not before May 1. Therefore, it is the desire of the City to request an extension of this reporting period until all work activities are completed.

Recommendation is to authorize the Administrator to request an extension of this Grant Agreement reporting requirement until the 4th quarter of 2025.

Motion by Towner to authorize the Administrator to request an extension of the reporting requirement of the Blandin Foundation Small Communities & Rural Placemaking Grant Agreement with the City of Buhl to update the community's comprehensive plan until the fourth (4th) quarter of 2025.

Supported by Teska-Erickson.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

Motion carried unanimously.

J. Consider Adopting Mayoral Proclamation Recognizing and Designating April 2025 as Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

The Sexual Assault Program of Northern St. Louis County (NSLC) requests discussing and adopting a Mayors' Proclamation recognizing April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Their 2025 program theme is "Together We Act, United We Change", highlighting the importance of working together to address and prevent sexual abuse, assault, and harassment.

In 2024, the Northern Saint Louis County programs reached a total of 391 victims (137 adults and 254 child/youth victims), and it is noted that 1 in 3 girls, and 1 in 5 boys, are sexually abused before the age of 18.

Their Advocacy Program also wishes to share information regarding the Teal Ribbon Campaign, honoring local survivors of sexual violence. This campaign highlights the issue by tying teal and blue ribbons around Iron Range cities; this is available for the community with the city's permission or at its request.

Information was included on these and other Sexual Assault Programs of NSLC awareness and education initiatives.

Recommendation is to adopt the Sexual Assault Program of NSLC Mayors' Proclamation recognizing April 2025 as Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Motion by Teska-Erickson to adopt the Sexual Assault Program of NSLC Mayors' Proclamation recognizing April 2025 as Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Supported by Loeffler.

Discussion. Approve/Reject/Table.

Motion carried unanimously.

K. Other Business.

Question raised by Mayor Matthews regarding a current IRRR grant in the amount of \$250,000 with a 1:1 matching requirement which sunsets on June 30, 2025 –

This grant is available for infrastructure initiatives, including water tower development activities, and the question was posed as to where the matching funds may be sourced from –

The Administrator replied that matching funds may be eligible from the existing (State of MN) MPFA grant funding for similar activities, and that

discussion have already taken place with the IRRR regarding potentially extending this grant term-

L. Councilors' Comments.

Councilor Towner –

Noted that the annual Independence Day celebration will be coming up at the end of June, and encouraged all who may desire to have a float in the parade to begin thinking about or working on it now!

It is anticipated that there will (again) be prizes for the best float(s) –

Sign up with the parade committee or at City Hall!

A flyer will be distributed when available -

M. Mayor's Comments.

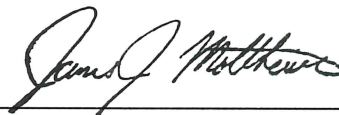
None.

8. ADJOURN:

Motion by Towner to adjourn.

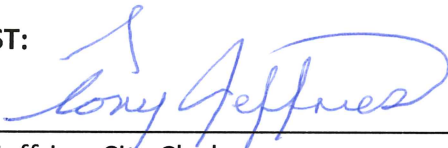
Supported by Teska-Erickson.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.



James Matthews, Mayor

ATTEST:



Tony Jeffries, City Clerk