

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE  
WORK SESSION CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
OF BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2016; 5:45 P.M.**

The Council convened in Work Session in the Council Chambers, City Hall Building, at 5:47 p.m., Monday, November 14, 2016.

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The Meeting was called to order by Mayor Renner who directed the City Clerk to call the roll and the following members answered present:

**2. ROLL CALL**

Aldermen: Kevin Lower, David Sage, Mboka Mwilambwe, Amelia Buragas, Joni Painter, Karen Schmidt (arrived: 6:22 PM), Scott Black, Diana Hauman, Jim Fruin, and Mayor Tari Renner.

Staff Present: David Hales, City Manager; Steve Rasmussen, Assistant City Manager; and Jeff Jurgens, Corporate Counsel; Cherry Lawson, City Clerk; Nicole Albertson, Human Resources Director; Jim Karch, Public Service Director; Melissa Hon, Assistant to the City Manager; Bob Yehl, Water Director; Brian Mohr, Fire Chief; Brendan Heffner, Chief of Police; Patti-Lynn Silva, Finance Director; and other City staff were present.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Matt Wing

**4. Presentation and discussion regarding the route changes with Connect Transit public transportation. (Presentation by Andrew Johnson, General Manager, Connect Transit 10 minutes. Council discussion 20 minutes.)**

Ms. Buchanan thanked the Council for their support of capital funding and the first-time contribution operations allows for upgrade to some of the services. She stated that the Transit Board realized several years ago that the bus routes were inefficient and needing improvement. The Board directed staff to research, review and recommend improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the bus system. The Board approved hiring a nationally-recognized consultant to work with the community, the Board and the staff to provide a comprehensive operational analysis of the entire route system and to recommend some changes. The Nelson\Nygaard firm was selected, and they showed us with a carefully developed route restructure plan, ridership does increase over time. Following 18 months of community input and multiple design revisions, a new route design was recommended to the Board of Directors and was unanimously approved by

the Board. A change of this magnitude was significant and created new opportunities for some riders and confusion, fear and concern among others. The new bus route design is an ongoing education process for riders.

Mr. McCurdy stated that discussion regarding route restructure began long before the Bloomington Board of Trustees voted to unanimously accept the route restructure and proposal in May of this year. The principles that Nelson\Nygaard applied are the same applied in communities across the nation with great success. It was anticipated that not everybody would be happy with the significant changes to the system. We were watching flat-to-declining ridership numbers. The primary factor in transit ridership across the nation is gasoline process. He stated that he was hopeful that the route restructuring, which Nelson\Nygaard predicts will result in a double-digit percentage ridership increase in two years, will help counter those numbers. If we start making adjustments based on complaints, we will return to a route system that is not based on research, not based on numbers, not based on customer data, but instead it will be based on customer complaints and who has the loudest voice, and that would result in routes that would be a disservice to the community.

Mr. Johnson stated that staff and Board are completely committed to ensuring that we have a fully-functioning public transit system. He introduced Chief Operating Officer, Isaac Thorne, to go through what is working with the new system, what is not working and what is being done about it.

Mr. Thorne stated that we do have a very popular route that is not serving Bloomington-Normal, which is the Green Route between uptown station and downtown Bloomington. There are some issues in the evenings keeping that bus on time and those are being worked on. Another issue with the purple route is dwell time and we looking at moving the purple route to downtown Bloomington to the transfer station. Another issue is the changes in the routes. New features have been added that were not there in the old routes and that is interlining of routes. Another issue is peak and off-peak hours.

Alderman Lower stated that he was very in touch with his constituency and thinks there is value in the Council and Connect Transit listening to folks. Alderman Sage encouraged Connect Transit to do some focusing on some performance metrics. Mr. Jackson stated that every month a list of metrics was published in their Board packet.

Alderman Black stated that a lot of feedback has come to Council regarding Connect Transit. He asked if someone calls into the office or somehow voices a complaint, what the process is. Mr. Jackson introduced Melissa Christman, External Relations, who provided additional information on the process.

Ms. Christman stated that any time someone calls to talk to one of the dispatch operators or customer services reps, or if there is an email received through our website or via social media that is related to customer service of some sort, there is a software program where the whole conversation is logged in. There are five operations supervisors on staff who are able to go in and look at those complaints. Every one of them is logged and every one of those is followed up within five days.

Alderman Black asked for clarification on the procedural mechanism to change a route. Mr. Jackson stated that it is a Board of Trustees decision and if the Council is hearing feedback that would be transmitted to the Board of Trustees, especially those who are appointed by the Council. At that point, it would be discussed in a Board meeting.

Alderman Black stated at the last meeting in April, there was a lot of conversation about first mile-last mile options. Uber was on the table at one point and then it was off the table and wanted to know where that conversation is right now. Mr. Jackson stated that the conversation is somewhat paused because we are looking to see what the effectiveness of our Tripper routes are, and we are still pursuing some other mobility potentials. Also right now we are sitting tight based on the state situation because adding extra money into the system is something that we are reluctant to do right now.

Alderman Mwilambwe thanked Mr. Jackson for coming before the Council to present an update as well as acknowledged issues that are being worked on.

**5. Presentation on the Estimated Tax Levy for the Bloomington Public Library. (Presentation by Jeanne Hamilton, Library Director 10 minutes. Council discussion 15 minutes.)**

Ms. Hamilton stated that the Library requests that the Council adopt the estimated 2016 Library Property Tax Levy in the amount of \$4,683,111. Except for a \$33,233 increase in fiscal year 2015, the library tax has remained flat over the past seven years. In the past year, the Library also received a \$36,000 decrease in state funding. Today, they were informed that the Library will receive over \$10,000 less than the property tax levy dollar amount from this past year. The Library will not be able to meet community needs if we continue at a flat levy rate and are not able to capture the growth in the equalized assessed value.

Mayor Renner asked what this would mean to a typical household. Ms. Hamilton stated that was a three (\$.03) cent increase. The average home value is \$165,000 and this past year's bill was \$138.05 and the new bill would be \$138.08.

Alderman Buragas stated as she reviews the information, the tax rate is not changing. Looking at the information that we were given, the tax rate has actually decreased over time compared to 2014, 2013, and 2012. The Library, while maintaining its services and sometimes trying to expand those services, has kept its tax levy and its tax burden flat.

Alderman Painter stated her concern is that there are a lot of people that are contesting their property tax increases. If that goes through, where does this whole formula stand? Ms. Hamilton stated, that is one of the reasons why we have a \$10,000 decrease that was found out today because of contested tax bills and if somebody does not pay their tax bill.

Alderman Fruin thanked Ms. Hamilton, her staff and the Board for their work. His observation has been that over the years the Library has been very efficient and well run and has held the tax levy pretty flat for the most part. When we talk about tax levy and tax rates, what gets lost in all this is that people are really fed up with property taxes. Our property taxes are as high as anywhere around. People are not coming here because of the property taxes, and people are

leaving because of property taxes. We have to deal with the reality and make sure the media tells the story in the right way.

Alderman Black stated, it is very strange that we are in a position where we are approving a tax levy, although the board that recommends it is not an elected board. He stated he keeps hearing the words circulation is down and wanted to know if that is accurate. Ms. Hamilton stated it is slightly down, but since fiscal year 2006 we are up 45%. If you looked at a graph of it, we saw a big boom in the recession and we are tapering off from that. Part of the reason is we have limited space.

Alderman Black stated that he knows the library needs more space. We have talked about City Hall needing a renovation. This is a great opportunity to really get strategic and how can we combine some of these facilities and how can we partner with Normal. The number one question is looking towards the future, is this going to be another seven years before we come back and have this conversation again or where do we see the finances of the library are going.

Alderman Mwilambwe asked about the tech mobile that is mentioned in the memo as far as the projected cost and what kinds of programs will be done with that. Ms. Hamilton stated that they were thinking a van and equipping it with laptops and being able to go out to parks and do programs to support things that we have never really had success having those sorts of things on the bookmobile. A van would be about \$30,000 and the equipment that would go inside would be about \$50,000.

Alderman Lower asked if any contingency planning had been done in case that it was decided not to increase the levy and what that would look like. Ms. Hamilton stated that they would look at lowering some of the fixed asset planning for the future and also look at other areas of the budget and see where we can tighten our belt.

**6. Presentation on the Estimated Tax Levy for the City of Bloomington. (Presentation by David Hales, City Manager and Patti-Lynn Silva, Finance Director 10 minutes. Council discussion 15 minutes.)**

Mr. Hales stated that we want to keep in mind that tonight begins the tax levy approval process. In this proposal we have a little over a half million dollars of increase in the so-called levy, even though that will not amount to a tax rate increase. Each year as we have more and more investments made – commercially, industrially, home – our costs of providing services to those so-called new growth investments goes up. It is important as part of our long-term financial strategy that we capture that new growth property tax revenue to help ensure that we can provide those services.

Ms. Silva stated we have about \$5.6 billion dollars' worth of real property in our city. If you take a third of that, you are about \$1.8 billion, which is our EAV. That is what we apply our tax rate to. The tax rate itself is not increasing even if you put the library and the city together.

Chief Mohr stated that 35% of our call volume for EMS is in the downtown primary response district. Our utilization of the medic here at headquarters is so high and at some point in time when it is utilized so much, it is not there for service, so we are drawing ambulances in from

the outside response districts. By adding another ambulance here to headquarters, we could more evenly distribute those calls for service and decrease our utilization to make it more efficient for all of the community, not just the headquarters' primary response district.

Alderman Buragas stated in the EAV, that includes \$14 million dollars' worth of new commercial and residential value in the city. She asked if we could extract from that, that over the last year we have seen \$42 million dollars, when multiplied times three (x3), worth of new or increased property value for commercial and residential properties in our community. She stated a question came up about pensions with new employees and part of the issue we have right now is we have a backlog where over time the pension systems were underfunded and now we are trying to get caught up. She asked if that underfunding problem will get worse with new employees or are we sufficiently planning when hiring new employees that their pensions are fully funded moving forward.

Ms. Silva stated that we are sufficiently planning to adjust those pension needs.

Alderman Fruin stated he feels that time needs to be spent on expense management across the board.

## **7. ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Renner asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**Motion by Alderman Schmidt, seconded by Alderman Hauman, that the meeting be adjourned. Time: 6:55 p.m.**

**Motion carried, (Viva Voce).**

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON

ATTEST

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Tari Renner, Mayor

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Cherry L. Lawson, City Clerk