A regular meeting of the Kalamazoo City Commission was held on Monday, November 20, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at City Hall.

Roll Call

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Mayor David Anderson
Vice Mayor Jeanne Hess
Don Cooney
Qianna Decker
Stephanie Hoffman
Chris Praedel
Alonzo Wilson

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

Also present were City Manager Jim Ritsema, City Attorney Aaron Leal, and City Clerk Scott Borling.

Invocation

The invocation, given by Bishop Daniel Cunningham from The Empowerment Center, was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Proclamation
2023-44-01

Commissioner Hess proclaimed November 2023 *Family Court Awareness Month*. Lisa, a representative from Protective Parents Michigan, received the proclamation.

2023-44-02

Commissioner Decker read a proclamation entitled *Stand Against Antisemitism, November 20, 2023*. The proclamation was received by a large group of people. Remarks were offered by Michelle Serlin, Rabbi Harvey Spivak, retired from the Congregation of Mosesbbi Mordechia Haller of the Chabad of Kalamazoo.

Adoption of the Agenda

By unanimous consent the City Commission adopted its meeting agenda as presented.

Public Comments

Next, when an opportunity was given for general public comments, the following people addressed the City Commission:

In-Person Comments

Norrine Wafford, City resident, offered remarks on the Ransom Street development and a dispute over the property line between her house and the development. Ms. Wafford asked for the name of the City employee who told the developer they could remove trees and fences from her property.

Mark Lee, a consultant with Better World Builders, spoke about the importance of energy efficiency and thanked the City Commission for considering and approving item G-15, a grant to Kalamazoo Alternative Housing, Inc. for energy efficiency retrofit improvements at the Douglas Apartments, 1211 Douglas Avenue.

Jody, a City resident, offered comments on the Cork Street Landfill and the need for better disposal options for trash and junk.

Shona Espinoza, City resident, offered comments on her housing situation.

Rabbi Mordechia Haller, City resident, spoke about vandalism at the Chabad of Kalamazoo and thanked the City and Kalamazoo Department of Public

Public Comments (cont'd)

Safety for their support and kindness. Rabbi Haller suggested a partnership with the City to offer a citywide Chanukah event on December 7th.

2023-44-03

Jeff Messer, City resident, thanked people who voted for the Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) proposal on November 7th and noted RCV charter amendments had passed in five Michigan cities. Mr. Messer expressed hope there would be a statewide RCV ballot question in 2026. A copy of Mr. Messer's written remarks was filed with the papers for this meeting.

Call-In Comments

A City resident reported a junk auto/abandoned car and requested clarity on how the City defined "junk auto."

Consent Agenda

Consent Agenda items were presented as follows with a recommendation to approve the items and authorize the City Manager to sign all related documents on behalf of the city:

2023-44-04

- approval of a contract supplemental and change order with AT&T for centrex service in the amount of $15,000.

2023-44-05

- approval of a professional services agreement with The Foster Group for utility rate financial services in the amount of $100,000.

2023-44-06

- approval of a contract supplemental with Corby Energy Services, Inc. for storm sewer rehabilitation by lining in the amount of $116,090.

2023-44-07

- approval of the cooperative purchase of playground equipment for Southside Park from GameTime / Sinclair Recreation through the mParks Statewide Program Funding Initiative Grant in the amount of $254,995.48.

2023-44-08

- approval of a contract with Hall Builders, LLC for Public Services' Bac T lab renovations in the amount of $209,498.

2023-44-09

- approval of a contract with Lakeland Asphalt for paving at Riverside Cemetery and Water Station 25 in the amount of $221,597.47.

2023-44-10

- approval of a professional services agreement with Peerless-Midwest Company for well rehabilitation and associated maintenance in the amount of $268,350.

2023-44-11

- approval of a three-year contract with PCI Municipal Services, LLC, to manage the City parking system in the amount of $297,000.

2023-44-12

- approval of a cooperative purchase with West Michigan International, LLC for two HV 613 chassis in the amount of $309,747.60.

2023-44-13
Resolution 23-

- adoption of a **RESOLUTION** authorizing a change in the Street Lighting Contract for Ransom Street, from Burdick Street to Westnedge Avenue.

2023-44-14
Resolution 23-
Resolution 23-

- adoption of two (2) PILOT **RESOLUTIONS** approving a Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) for the creation of 70 affordable housing units restricted to senior citizens (aged 55+) located at 108 E. Frank St., 128 E. Frank St., 121 E. North St., 131 E. North St., 729 N. Edwards St., 713 N. Edwards St., 709 N.

Consent Agenda (cont'd)

Edwards St., 135, E. North St., 730 N. Burdick St., 724 N. Burdick St., 129 E. North St., 702 N. Edwards St., 708 N. Edwards St., and 125 E. North St., pursuant to Section 35-4 of the Kalamazoo City Code.

2023-44-15 - approval of amendments to the FY2023 Budget totaling $4,230,306 in additional revenue and $6,307,050 in additional expenses.

2023-44-16 - approval of the allocation of up to $30,000 from the City Commission Initiatives Fund to purchase a passenger van for the Kalamazoo Police Athletic League to transport youth to and from programming.

2023-44-17 - approval of an agreement with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation for a grant in the amount of $50,000 to support the development of a city-wide economic development strategy.

2023-44-18 - approval of a grant agreement with Kalamazoo Alternative Housing, Inc. for $198,000 to complete energy efficiency retrofit improvements at Douglass Apartments (1211 Douglas Avenue).

2023-44-19 - authorization for the City Attorney to settle a sewer backup claim with Mike and Sarah Garcez related to the property at 1521 Southern Avenue for the amount of $45,866.21.

2023-44-20 - approval of an easement for Consumers Energy at 535 West Patterson Street to improve the reliability of the circuit along Cooley and North Streets.

2023-44-21 - approval of the Mayor's appointment of Sharda Sims to the Civil Rights Board for a term expiring on March 31, 2025.

2023-44-22 - approval of the following appointments and reappointments to the Water System Advisory Council:

- the appointment of Terrell Cole for a term expiring on December 31, 2025.
- the reappointment of Sydney Ellis for a term expiring on December 31, 2026.
- the appointment of Michael Evans for a term expiring on December 31, 2025.
- the appointment of Lucus Pols for a term expiring on December 31, 2024.
- the reappointment of Nancy Stoddard for a term expiring on December 31, 2026.
- the reappointment of Tom Wheat for a term expiring on December 31, 2024.

Commissioner Wilson, seconded by Commissioner Hoffman, moved to approve the consent agenda requests and authorize the City Manager to sign all related documents on behalf of the City.

With a roll call vote this motion passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda (cont'd)

AYES: Commissioners Cooney, Decker, Hoffman, Praedel, Wilson, Vice Mayor Hess, Mayor Anderson

NAYS: None

2023-44-23
City Manager's Report/Utility Rate Presentation

Public Services Director James Baker delivered a presentation entitled *2024 Proposed Utility Rates: City Commission, Monday, November 20, 2023*. A copy of the slides from this presentation was filed with the papers for this meeting.

In response to questions and comments from City Commissioners, Director Baker provided the following information:

- the proposed buy-in fee (slide 22) was similar to the connection fees charged by other utility providers, which affordable housing projects had to pay.

- there was no limit on the number of households that could be helped through the Water Affordability Program; plenty of notice would be given before the City shut off a customer's utilities.

- in October of 2022 water rates were increased 20%, effective January 1, 2023. The proposed water rate increase would be around $2.34/month, making the average water bill $38/month.

- as a large utility the City has big responsibilities: replacing lead service lines, monitoring and treating PFAS, and administering the requirements of an Administrative Consent Order with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). In the past there was significant underinvestment in the utilities, which has resulted in the need for significant investment now. Some capital projects are already in process and cannot be stopped. A lot of City funding is used to leverage grants; if the City cuts its funding, it will lose the grants.

- the City offers a safe product. The water and wastewater systems are public systems, owned by the rate payers; there are no profit margins.

- the City has received $23 million in state and federal grants for 2023-2024 projects; this is a direct savings for rate payers. Kalamazoo has not seen this level of state and federal infrastructure investment since the New Deal programs of the 1930's; the City needs to take advantage of this golden window.

- currently, the Water Affordability Program is funded by a grant from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. It might be possible to use other funding to grow the resources available for this program.

- the current goal for lead service line replacements was 800/year. Staff would urge the City Commission to fund the service line replacements currently in process and scheduled for the City's core neighborhoods (Eastside, Edison, Northside).

Commissioner Hoffman indicated she would have an issue with the proposed rate increases.

2023-44-23
City Manager's Report/Utility Rate Presentation (cont'd)

Commissioner Decker estimated water rates had increased 28% since 2017, and she expressed concern that this was a lot to ask of City residents, especially those who were having a difficult time paying their bills already and those households that would not qualify for the Water Affordability Program. Commissioner Decker agreed the work needed to be done and stated she did not want to eliminate improvement projects, just slow them down to spread the cost over time. Commissioner Decker suggested stretching the lead service line replacement end-date from 2037 to 2041.

Commissioner Praedel thanked Director Baker for educating him on utility processes and the need for capital investment in the utilities. Commissioner Praedel stated the City needed to educate residents and help them understand the choices the City was facing in terms of the cost and results of inaction. Commissioner Praedel remarked on the need to show residents the City was being efficient with the funds it was currently spending, and he highlighted the pre-purchase of water main pipes, efforts to identify alternative fuel strategies, and initiatives to reduce sludge hauling and disposal costs as evidence of fiscal responsibility. Commissioner Praedel noted that eliminating capital projects would not address inflationary pressures on operating costs or eliminate cost increases due to stricter regulatory requirements. Commissioner Praedel observed that when utility infrastructure failed, the disadvantaged were the ones who suffered most.

Commissioner Cooney stated he believed Director Baker was doing his best, and he acknowledged water and wastewater services were a necessity. Vice Mayor Cooney stated both the need for capital investment and the need to help people pay their utility bills were realities for the City.

Vice Mayor Hess agreed with Vice Mayor Cooney that the City was facing a both/and situation regarding investment and affordability. Vice Mayor Hess stated the City needed to listen to people over-communicate with them.

In response to a question from Commissioner Decker, City Attorney Leal stated the Chief Financial Officer would need to address the question of whether the Water Affordability Program could be supplemented with $50,000 from the City Commission Initiative Fund.

City Manager Ritsema stated he would get an answer to Commissioner Decker's funding question by the next meeting.

In response to a question from Commissioner Praedel, City Manager Ritsema stated funding was included in the FY 2023 Budget for a lobbyist, who could advocate for state funding for capital projects. City Manager Ritsema indicated the goal was to have a lobbyist selected and in place by early 2024.

Commissioner Comments

Next, an opportunity was given for miscellaneous comments from City Commissioners.

Commissioner Wilson thanked voters for allowing him to serve on the City Commission and stated he was looking forward to learning.

Commissioner Cooney stated he was pleased with the antisemitism proclamation and noted people should be able to speak out against violence in the Gaza Strip without spreading hatred towards Jewish people. Commissioner Cooney stated it was better to light a candle than to speak against the darkness.

Commissioner Comments (cont'd)

Commissioner Decker congratulated Vice Mayor Hess, Commissioner Praedel, and Commissioner Wilson. Commissioner Decker highlighted Consent Agenda items G-4 (the purchase of playground equipment for Southside Park), G-13 (the allocation of funds for a passenger van for the Kalamazoo Police Athletic League), and G-15 (a grant to Kalamazoo Alternative Housing, Inc. for energy efficiency retrofit improvements at Douglass Apartments).

Commissioner Praedel congratulated Commissioner Wilson and thanked voters for allowing him to return to the City Commission. Commissioner Praedel stated the issues facing the City Commission, such as antisemitism, were amazing, and he stated the Commission could be an example of how people with different ideas can work together. Commissioner Praedel remarked on the release of the Draft FY2024 Budget on December 1st and the passage of the veterans' millage. Commissioner Praedel thanked the City Clerk's Office for their work to administer the November 7th election.

Vice Mayor Hess reviewed items the 54th City Commission had worked on and thanked voters for allowing her to return to the Commission. Vice Mayor Hess spoke about the importance of positive thinking. Vice Mayor Hess reported she had attended a bill signing event with Governor Whitmer that afternoon for state legislation to address gun violence, and she offered remarks on the work of Rick and Marth Omilian to address this issue.

Mayor Anderson thanked people for voting and candidates for putting themselves forward. Mayor Anderson reported voter turnout was between 17 and 20 percent, and he stated the votes Kalamazoo residents cast were votes for hope and commitment. Mayor Anderson stated he should have abstained from voting on Item G-15 and disclosed he was a volunteer member of the board for Kalamazoo Alternative Housing, Inc. Mayor Anderson commended the long work of Rick and Martha Omilian to address gun violence and stated it was difficult to celebrate the signing of anti-gun violence legislation. Mayor Anderson acknowledged the recent deaths of Barbara King, the first black registered nurse in Kalamazoo County, and Ruthie Walker, wife of community leader and early director of the Family Health Center Moses Walker. Mayor Anderson noted that Commissioner Wilson was the first Kalamazoo Promise graduate to serve on the City Commission. Mayor Anderson remarked that November 20th was the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Mayor Anderson stated he was glad to be serving on the City Commission again, and he thanked Commissioners and City staff for their work on behalf of Kalamazoo.

Closed Session

Vice Mayor Hess, seconded by Commissioner Decker, moved that the City Commission go into closed session to discuss pending litigation.

Prior to a vote on the motion, Mayor Anderson announced the City Commission would not return to open session following the closed session.

With a roll call vote this motion passed unanimously.

AYES:	Commissioners Cooney, Decker, Hoffman, Praedel, Wilson, Vice Mayor Hess, Mayor Anderson
NAYS:	None

Adjournment	The meeting adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

Scott A. Borling
City Clerk

Approved by the City Commission on: ____________________________

This page was left blank intentionally.