

March 3, 2021

WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL MEETING

The Winchester City Council held their monthly meeting March 3, 2021 at City Hall.

Mayor McIntire called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. with the following council in attendance: Ron Bell, Lawrence Coultas, Terry Gregory, Bill Jacquot, Sandy Long, Jeff Pittman, City Clerk Brenda Robinson and Deputy City Clerk, Amanda Howerton.

Also in attendance were Wanda Cody, City Treasurer; Caleb Handy, Police Chief; John Simmons, Supt. Of Public Works; John Paul Coonrod, City Attorney; Greg Hillis, Benton & Associates; Tony Cox; Steve & Barb Hoots; Chris Renner; Teri Little; Greg Blevins; Cindy Colbert; and Rochelle Eiselt.

Mayor McIntire said to look at the bills. Lawrence Coultas asked if all the bills had been recorded because he could not believe we were \$100,000 less than last month. Coultas said it looked like things had not been posted. After looking over the financial he thought things were ok. The gas bill has not been paid and will be paid next month.

MOTION: Lawrence Coultas moved, and Jeff Pittman seconded to pay the March 2021 bills as presented. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

MOTION: Bill Jacquot moved, and Sandy Long seconded to approve and dispense with the reading of the minutes of the regular February 3 meeting. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

Mayor McIntire asked for any corrections about the February 11 meeting. Ron Bell said he was surprised John Simmons did not know anything about it. McIntire said he had talked to him about it that morning. Bell said John did not know about it. McIntire said they talked about the utilities and Simmons agreed. Bill Jacquot said he remembered there was a question between the mayor and Simmons about the utilities. John P Coonrod said there was not a zoning issue only a plat issue.

MOTION: Bill Jacquot moved, and Jeff Pittman seconded to approve and dispense with the reading of the minutes of the special meeting February 11. Roll call resulted in 4 yeas and 2 abstentions. Ron Bell & Lawrence Coultas abstained. Motion carried.

McIntire asked if anyone had any corrections or comments of the minutes from special meeting February 22 to discuss the natural gas crisis with Panhandle Eastern Pipeline's unreasonable rates. It was a very informative meeting.

MOTION: Bill Jacquot moved, and Lawrence Coultas seconded to approve dispense with the reading of the minutes of the special meeting February 22. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

This past Monday, March 1, we have another council meeting that pertains mostly to the natural gas prices as well. We had a question-and-answer period for approximately the first 30 minutes

then went into executive session to discuss how to handle billing our customers in a manner people can hopefully afford.

MOTION: Bill Jacquot moved, and Lawrence Coultas seconded to approve and dispense with the reading of the minutes of the special meeting March 1. Roll call resulted in 4 yeas and 2 abstentions. Ron Bell and Terry Gregory abstained. Motion carried.

Greg Hillis, Benton & Associates presented a bill from Trotter General Contracting, Inc. for work completed on the pool Phase II. He was not on the agenda last month for this pay request. Last month the project was 80% complete. He suggested a payment for pay request #7 in the amount of \$6,926.22.

MOTION: Bill Jacquot moved, and Terry Gregory seconded to approve the application for payment #7 to Trotter General Contracting, Inc. in the amount of \$6,926.22 for Phase II of the pool project. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

Hillis presented pay request #8 for \$23,828.40 to Trotter General Contracting, Inc. They are 89% complete. The concrete and sidewalks are complete as well as overhead door. Doyle Plumbing is 67% complete with fixtures. They are still holding the retainage of \$35,000 for the damage to the circle drive.

MOTION: Terry Gregory moved, and Bill Jacquot seconded to pay Trotter General Contracting, Inc. pay request #8 in the amount of \$23,828.40 for Phase II of the pool project. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

Hillis gave an update on the pool liner. It was secured outside of the project contract. With the weather breaking we are supposed to be first on their list. He will find out Friday when they might be able to install it.

Hillis gave an update on the library grant. The library board met the previous night, and the design is 60% complete, the schedule is to submit the final drawings to the historic preservation about the end of March, then we will wait for their approval or anything they need to change for the historic preservation design of the building addition.

Hillis updated the North West Sewer Site. The archaeological dig is complete with no significant findings. So that means you don't have to do a phase two of that. That piece of the puzzle is done and over with. You remember back when we were talking about planning grants. And construction grants, you guys did not go for the planning grant and went right for the construction grant. The planning grants were due November 30, a month ahead of the of the construction grants. Yours was due December 3. Last week, everybody was getting notified who received the planning grants. So, if they follow suit, hopefully within two to three weeks, you will hear something about the construction grants. **Please look at the city email. You will be notified by email from illinois.gov so keep your eyes open for that.** Winchester has a strong application for the construction grant. We submitted seven for the planning, one of them got kicked out for not having their data stuff correct. So that is very important for you, which you did have all your stuff correct. We were able to receive six of those planning grants out of the seven submitted. We are feeling very comfortable this is looking good for you. In your packet tonight, there was an invoice for 65% of the design of the project. And that 65% took you up to some

middle for a permit which you received the IEPA permit. We stopped there until you get your grant and then we will finish the bidding documents because we did not want to keep designing if you did not receive the grant to finish the project.

Hillis gave an update on the emergency connect with SMG water district. They were getting ready to start and then had the terrible cold weather. They hope to get started next week. they have everything except for two items, which we knew one of them is going to be a long lead item. And that was the valve. They are going to go ahead and get everything put in, except for the valve, then come back and install it as soon as it gets here. They're saying it's probably another two to three weeks out for the valve. They are waiting for the meter that goes in there. Hopefully that comes in next week. So next week, they should have everything to start finishing except for those two items. They will come back and install them. It has been a little slower than what we anticipated with the weather. We knew the check valve was a long lead item. The locking lids have arrived. There is an invoice we completed because those drawings were set up for the city to do the work and that was changed. After the proposals went out it was decided the city would not be able to do the work. The invoice is for professional personnel labor in the amount of \$2,100.20.

Brenda Robinson, City Clerk gave a price for a laptop complete with Microsoft office program and upgrade the other computers. Cost for this will be approximately \$1,745. Ron Bell asked if the laptop would be leaving the building. Robinson said she thought the clerk should be allowed to take it home to do the minutes & then return it unless you want them to sit in the office for several hours doing the minutes.

MOTION: Lawrence Coultas moved, and Jeff Pittman seconded to pay Vortman Computer Service & Sales \$1,745 for one (1) laptop with Microsoft program installed and updating other computers in City Hall. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

Caleb Handy, Police Chief handed out his monthly report as follows:

Animal complaint – 1; Arrest warrants – 2; Business alarms – 2; Child exchange – 1; DCFS – 1; Domestic disturbance – 2; EMS assists – 8; Fight – 1; Fire assist – 2; Funeral detail – 1; Identity theft – 1; Juvenile – 3; Property damage – 1; Property exchange – 1; Speak to officer – 8; Suspicious vehicle – 1; Traffic accidents – 3; Traffic stops – 6; Verbal warnings – 5; Written warnings – 0; Citations – 1; Vehicle assistance – 1; Well-being checks – 2.

Handy said the part-time Academy did not work out for Chase Burk, so we will be getting our money back. He is still eligible to work for us for 18 months from his hiring date without being certified. However, I would like to send him through the full time Swick Academy. That class starts in August and ends in December. He has a spot reserved for him. Obviously depending on what you guys think, the cost of that course is \$5,617.20 which includes housing and food. I have called the training board several times to find out what part of that is reimbursable and I have not gotten a call back. So unfortunately, I can't give a number on that. The classes will begin August 23 – December 3, in Bellville. If he goes, classes are Monday through Friday. Handy had reviewed footage from Chase's body camera and said he does a very good job. Other officers and deputies that have worked for him agrees. It would be a shame to lose him, especially nowadays. There's not a lot of people breaking down the door to be cops. After the

training he will still have to take the test. The difference being that he will be down there. COVID has played a big role in the way they do the part-time training academy. And it makes it tougher. Handy firmly believes Chase would be a great asset to the City, and it would be a shame to lose him. He is a local boy and I think he is more apt to stay on the police force and stay in the community. It is good we have him and know he is good to invest money in. Terry Gregory said her only concern is what if he does not pass the test. We may have to pay him a salary while he is in training. He is very committed to doing this. He made the comment he would pay the other portion that was not reimbursable. He said that he would take a pay cut if needed. He really wants to do this. And being down there will be a very big help for him.

MOTION: Lawrence Coultas moved, and Sandy Long seconded to send Chase Burk to Swick Academy and pay the cost of \$5,617.20. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

Handy said Patrick Johnson and Joshua Phares the new part-time officers have been sworn in to work for the City.

Wanda Cody, City Treasurer passed out her report. It was stated the third column should be 2/28/20 instead of 2/28/19. Cody said the girls were working on the pool fund and trying to get them straightened out. McIntire said in phase one of the pool grant we had a \$173,000 contract and \$167,500 worth of grant money. And phase two will have close to \$300,000 which pretty much eats up our bank loan. According to John Coonrod, the USDA informed him the other half of the grant which is \$167,500 will be released after they come and inspect the finished product. It may take another month or two before we get that money but that should take care of your negatives there too. Lawrence Coultas asked what expense came out of the Tort fund to show a negative. Cody said she didn't think anyone here knows. Coultas said as much as we levy for Tort, he can't see it being in the negative. Cody said the infrastructure for the month was \$5,561.94. Total in the infrastructure fund is \$75,996.62.

John Simmons, Supt. of Public Works passed out his monthly report as follows: Monthly odorant reading & sniff test; Monthly meter reading (handsets are no good, had to use pen & paper); No brush pick due to snow and ice; Gas testing and evaluations; Repairs on Elm Street lift station; Changed three broken water meters; Plowed snow several times and salted; Jim has been off several days due to medical reasons; Talking to H. D. Supply on new system for reading meters; Trying to get people to pay bills, have collected a lot; 11 locate tickets; 0 gas leak calls; 27 work orders; 3 funerals; February 13-20 gas prices went out of control, he was getting emails day & night on the gas prices; Having problems with softener plant, valves not working correctly.

Simmons said the handsets they have used for several years are no good. Sometimes after the guys do their reading, they lose everything and have to start over. He is looking into remote reading handsets.

Simmons said a gentleman on South Main contacted him about a large tree branch hanging over the side street. Simmons asked about having it removed and the gentleman agreed to pay half. He contacted two tree trimmers and only one got back. Danny Powell gave a bid of \$500 to remove the tree and \$700 to remove the tree & stump. The gentleman agreed to pay half of the removal. It is on the city boulevard. The City's cost would be \$350. Ron Bell said we need to save money

and shouldn't remove the stump. There needs to be a policy on removing stumps. This tree is on the boulevard and needs to be removed.

MOTION: Terry Gregory moved, and Jeff Pittman seconded pay for half removal of the tree and stump at 172 South Main. Our cost being \$350. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

Simmons said there was a large tree in the parking lot at the pool that needs to come down. He said several people have backed into it over the years. He will get bids on removing it for next meeting.

Simmons said Trevor Cawthon, our licensed water operator wants to get his sewer license. There's a Wastewater Short School in Edwardsville, May 17 - 21. The classes are \$575. We do not know if it going to be remote or if he's going to go down there. It looks like he is going to go down there. The problem is they're filling up fast. If he does not make this class, there is another one in August. The cost for a room is \$88 per night. Total cost for the class is \$575 and for a room is \$464, total \$1,039. The test is given at the end of the class and he thought Trevor would have no trouble passing it. This way we will have two with sewer license and later Jim Dobson would like to get his water license. So, we should be in good shape on both licenses. McIntire said that Jim Dobson is having some serious health conditions and does not know how serious right now. It would be a good idea to have two people with sewer and two with water license.

MOTION: Ron Bell moved, and Terry Gregory seconded to send Trevor Cawthon to Wastewater Short School in Edwardsville, May 17 -21. Cost of the class is \$575 plus \$464 for the room totaling \$1039 which does not include food. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

Leigh Winner, Animal Control Officer had her January monthly report. She received five (5) dog calls and three (3) cat call, taking one (1) cat to the vet. She issued three (3) fines totaling \$336.

Simmons talked about the handhelds earlier a guy came down from Locis the other day. He was going to try to find a couple of old loaners to work to help us get by. He talked to Locis, the current handhelds were obsolete when we bought the last ones, they cannot get any parts, and no longer sell them. H D Supply, which is what Roodhouse has, is going with remote reads. They will furnish the handsets which will be compatible with Locis. They will come down, go through all this with us. They are coming down tomorrow, the day after the council meeting. We have been changing out all our water meters for the last several years to Badger meters and our gas meters to American meter. A lot of towns have remote reads but do not mess with gas. But we will have to do both. We will have to go back and put the little remote read on all the meters that we have installed. In the future, we will install new meters and everything, but you will be able to remote read the new ones after we get them set up. The ones that do not have remote, we will just continue to do them through the handheld. They will go through the system with the Office personnel. And hopefully come up with some quotes and prices next month. Next meter reading we will have to use pen and paper. Bill Jacquot asked if these new handhelds would be adaptable to a different program if we decided to get rid of Locis. He was told yes; they will work with any program. Simmons was asked to find out what other programs this company would recommend.

Simmons said they need to sell the truck bed, which was removed from the 2012 truck, when they put a flatbed on it. It is sitting at the shop and gets in our way and I am afraid it's going to get damaged, or Herschel will run into it. Simmons said someone wanted to buy it. Coonrod said he would have to double check the bid process. He said it would require a written ordinance. Put it on the agenda next month, so we can have it ready to pass. Simmons was asked what he thought the city would get for it. He thought at least \$1,200 and then talked to Paul Rueter and Rueter thought might get \$1,200 - \$2,500 for the bed. The Fire Department has a truck bed to get rid of also. It was decided to hold off until next month to vote on an ordinance to sell surplus equipment.

Mayor Rex McIntire said the first item on his part of the agenda was appointing Jeff Pittman as project manager but decide to wait until the end of the fiscal year.

Next on his agenda were the fire contracts for city and country residents. He was told the city residents did not pay for fire protection which are included in their taxes. It only pertains to country residents. We had two (2) out of town fires recently. The fire contract for out-of-town residents is \$40 annually. If you don't have a contract the bill it is about double the cost. If you have a contract most likely your insurance will pay for the fire call.

McIntire said we got our final gas usage and billing for February today. The city usage for the month of February for natural gas was 15,461 deca therms. It's up about 1000 from January. The total cost including the overage charges or the incremental was \$458,373.89. I want to point out, according to Lindsay Enloe, with USDI, Winchester had the lowest average rate of any town in this area. He said that is due to the fact that our citizens cut back during the real cold week February 13 of February 20. Our average thermal unit, like I said was \$29.65 per deca therm. He said some cities were going to have to pay over \$70 per deca therm and they are going be between a rock and a hard place, for sure. McIntire said at the special council meeting 3/1/21 the council had come up with a plan for payments. They could pay their excess bill over a three (3) year time period to make it affordable for everyone.

John Paul Coonrod, City Attorney said since our discussions at the March 1 special meeting, I put together an ordinance, which establishes an installment payment program for residents in response to unseasonably high prices for the wholesale purchase of natural gas. To get straight to the point, which is the policy section one. It says that there is hereby an establishment and installment payment program in response to unseasonably high wholesale natural gas prices experienced by the City Winchester and its natural gas customers during the month of February 2021. This ordinance is fairly streamlined, but it's just complex enough, we have to do some of the heavy lifting in the definitions section. Or we would have a two-page long run on paragraph that would be unintelligible. That is why we have definitions here. The first step is, we have to define what we mean by the January billing period before prices went up in the February the billing period when we experienced the price spike. Now, I'll go through the verbatim definition of these two billing periods in a second. But just to make it easy January billing period means exactly what your common sense tells you. It means the bill for the January gas; February billing period means the bill for the February gas, is defined by this ordinance. And the reason we have a kind of detailed definition is because our billing period is never exactly the same period of time nor the exact same days of the month, we read meters roughly on the 25th and issued bills

roughly around the first to the fourth of the month. The January period is defined as meaning the monthly billing period, which includes measured gas consumption by natural gas customers, occurring during the dates of January 1, through January 20, for which city utility bills will be issued to customers in early February 2021. It includes January 1, not through January 20, not only meaning the entire January billing period, but again, because the date that we read meters and the date that our statements in encompasses varies, we've stayed with just the first to the 20th. And it does extend for the rest of the billing period. Same with the February billing period, the February billing period, includes measured gas consumption by natural gas customers, occurring during the dates on February 1 through February 20, for which city utility bills will be issued to such customers in early March. Bill Jacquot asked what happened to January 29-31? Coonrod replied sometimes they read meters on the 25th, billing periods only in between meter readings. Right? None of our gas bills are the first through the 31st of any month. Because of that, the actual dates I put in here are the first through the 20th. During this billing period, the first through the 20th includes, but not limited to, the entire billing period. He included the first through the 20th for the purpose of identifying the month which the statements are pertaining to. The bill you get around the first of February, is for your usage in January. The base amount would be calculated for each individual natural gas customer within the City of Winchester. The total measured natural gas consumption by that customer during the February billing period, multiplied by the cost per gas unit as previously billed to that customer during the January billing period. Basically, what they're going to pay is the amount of gas they used in February, multiplied by the January rate, like we talked about. That's what they're going to be responsible for paying up front like any normal bill due on the 25th. The month that follows what our surplus billing is because of the price spike, accounts for the surplus amount. That's the amount on top of which people wouldn't normally be expected to pay. And that surplus amount is dealt with differently than the base amount, as detailed by the next two paragraphs. Paragraph B February 2021 Utility billing. The City utility bills issued for the February billing period shall report both the base amount and the surplus amount. Payment of the base amount shall be due in accordance with standard billing practices of the City on March 25, 2021. The surplus amount shall be due in accordance with the following installment payment program. So, the base amount, would be February usage multiplied by the January rate that's due just like every other bill. It is listed separately from the surplus. The surplus is dealt through the payment. The installment payment program, which in paragraph C is defined as a payment of the surplus amount may be made in full by any customer at any time. Commencing with City utility bills issued for the February billing period and continuing with City utility bills issued for each monthly billing period thereafter, until such time as the total surplus amount attributable to each individual natural gas customers is satisfied by said customer, a minimum monthly payment of 3% of such surplus amount shall be due. No late fee shall be assessed upon any surplus amount. They wouldn't want to take a hit on the back end if some guardian angel comes along in the guise of a federal program and just gives us a pile of money to pay this off, then those people would be out. Well, that's why in paragraph D. It says in the event that, as a result of civil litigation efforts, State or Federal Government intervention or other means the City of Winchester is the recipient of a future grant of funds intended for the amelioration of hardship attributable to recent unseasonably high natural gas prices, not to include those funds transferred as a part of a loan or similar debt transaction, like we're hoping to get through the Finance Authority, said City of Winchester shall abate and where appropriate

rebate the Surplus Amount owed or paid by individual natural gas customers to the extent of such grants and funds, pro rata. If the state government just gives us \$40,000 to make up for the extra money, to shell out for gas, that \$40,000 and no more than \$40,000 would be allocated to our customers in accordance with their usage. Again, pro rata can be done by abatement of the Surplus Amount that has not yet paid or by rebate, either in cash or in credit of what they've already paid. So that's paragraph D. Section 2 just says it's effective upon publication. And similar to the last ordinance, we passed, the City Clerk is directed to publish the pamphlet and standard because we are dealing with a short time period with regards to the Finance Authority loan opportunity.

Terry Gregory asked if someone's on the budget billing plan, would be required to pay the level payment and then 3% of the surplus, or should they treat February as a non-level payment month.

Coonrod said those two things cooperate kind of independently, as far as the level payment plan, the base amount would go into the level payment plan, but their surplus is their surplus. No matter whether you're on a level payment plan or not, you're going to have a surplus amount that's a true attributable to you. And you would be responsible for paying 3% of that, unless we want to treat it differently. But we didn't discuss treating it differently at the last council meeting. It was passed at the last meeting if we got a loan for 1%, they would be responsible for paying 3% of the surplus amount. I know this doesn't work out perfectly, but you subtract the 1% from the 3%. That gives you 2%. And that, given the amount that we're looking at, would pay off over roughly three years, which would roughly dovetail with the loan. In English, everybody's going to get a bill based on the February rate. And it'll be probably five to six times higher than normal. You will be required to pay your same usage. In other words, however many therms you use, you'll be required to pay at this time the January rate, which was a little over \$4 per deca therm that will leave a balance. And we arrived at a 3% per month fee on that balance. Because that comes out if you'd have everything paid off in three years, if he stayed with that 3% a month, roughly three years. And that's how long the loans from the State are. By the time the loan is due, hopefully all the money will be inherited to make up for it. If we received any additional funds, or if they roll back the rates due to litigation, we will definitely credit your accounts or you'll get your money back. I've talked to several couples that said they were going to go ahead and pay it all. That's good if they can afford to do that. And that way, they don't have to fool with it. But for those that can't. We are going send a letter out with the bills. Lawrence has worked up a plan that's pretty explanatory. The Mayor wants to make everybody aware of what we're doing. But we're trying to make this affordable. If you have any questions, or if you know anybody that's having a problem with this. Just call it here. We'll do the best we can to explain it to them. There will be no interest, penalty, or late fee added to the bills.

MOTION: Ron Bell moved, and Jeff Pittman seconded to adopt Ordinance 912 – An Ordinance Establishing an Installment Payment Program for the Resident in Response to Unseasonably High Prices for the Wholesale Purchase of Natural Gas. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

Bill Jacquot reported the pool board met recently. He wanted to announce on Saturday morning, May 29, will be the grand re-opening for the swimming pool. He wanted to know if anyone had

any ideas for a grand reopening. Terri Little said the Civic Group would like to help. She was told to contact Jill Cox, Pool Board Chairman.

Sandy Long, I was approached by someone in my area about the traffic on Elm Street. It is such a narrow street, and they travel rather fast through there. I know for sure we have at least seven maybe eight small kids, preschool and under in that block from Cherry to Jefferson. She had been asked if the city could put up some speed limit signs like 20 miles an hour. Lawrence Coultas suggested speed bumps. Ron Bell said they could not plow the street when it snows with speed bumps. It was suggested have the police patrol it more. Terri Little said she had attended council meeting before asking for police patrol Coultas Rd. She said there are underage drivers out and lots of parties out there. Lawrence Coultas suggested contacting Police Chief Handy and having them patrol some of these problem streets more. Coultas said we do not want our citizens to be fined. He did not say anything to Caleb, but I look at the report in one month and there is just one citation given. But one citation is one month. And like I said, on my corner, most people come around here 45-50 miles an hour.

Long wanted to bring up the Alertify again. She suggested having a poll to see how many would be interested to sign up for it. It could cost as low as \$3 per month if enough people signed up. The city would have to have updated phone numbers. You could send out a lot of different events on it and well as the Civic group using it and could advertise city-wide garage sales. Long suggested have a grand opening for City Hall March 19. City Clerk Robinson said in her opinion if City Hall is not open to the public, they should not have an open house. Lawrence Coultas agreed. It will be held after City Hall has been open for a while. Also, the new windows have not been installed. It will take 4 – 6 weeks to get the windows.

Mayor McIntire said Darlene Smith, head librarian's mother-in-law Mary Smith passed away. Russel Neff passed away as well.

MOTION: Lawrence Coultas moved, and Jeff Pittman seconded to go into closed session to review closed session minutes. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried. Went into to closed session at 9 p.m.


MOTION: Jeff Pittman moved, and Terry Gregory seconded to come out of closed session. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried. Came out of closed session at 9:30 p.m.

MOTION: Lawrence Coultas moved, and Sandy Long seconded to unseal closed minutes as presented. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried.

MOTION: Terry Gregory moved, and Jeff Pittman seconded to adjourn the meeting. Roll call resulted in all yeas. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:33 pm



Rex McIntire, Mayor



Brenda Robinson, City Clerk

