



**CITY OF RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN
COMMON COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS**

February 8, 2022

Mayor Dan Toland called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers at City Hall.

City Council Members Present: Todd Bjerstedt, Nick Carow, Sean Downing, Scott Morrissette, Alyssa Mueller, Diane Odeen (virtual), Ben Plunkett

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: City Administrator Scot Simpson; City Attorney Chris Gierhart (virtual); IT Specialist Jon Smits; Utility Director Kevin Westhuis; Police Officer Kevin Moore; Senior Accountant Sam Hosszu; City Clerk Amy White; Community Development Director Amy Peterson; Assistant City Administrator Jason Stroud; City Engineer Todd Nickleski; Assistant to the City Administrator Jennifer Smith; Finance Director Josh Solinger

Others Present: Taryne Ternes, others

The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Approval of Minutes – January 25, 2022, Minutes

MSC Morrissette/Bjerstedt move to approve minutes. Unanimous.

APPROVAL OF BILLS:

Bills: \$2,823,921.65

MSC Bjerstedt/Downing move to approve bills. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT, PETITIONS, REQUESTS AND COMMUNICATIONS:

None

Councilmember Request Related to Provision of Masks to Public

City Administrator Simpson said a couple of Councilors were interested in providing masks to the public. Pierce County Health has made masks available and also has provided some resources for ordering masks. At this time, staff is not pursuing mass purchasing of masks. Staff thinks masks are relatively available. Staff is looking to see if Council wants to do something different. The Mayor asked for comments.

Aldersperson Plunkett had several comments. He said the City is not talking about mandating masks. He spoke about Omicron rates decreasing, the number of deaths and infections, and the pandemic costs. Plunkett talked about personal protective equipment (PPE) specifically about NIOSH certified N95s and provided information and samples. He believes that by providing masks, it can help people to return to work and protect the community from future contagions and disruptions. Plunkett talked about supply chain disruptions and the importance of having items available domestically. He wanted to provide a sample N95s for interested citizens so they would be able to see what best fits them and then procure them in the market.

Aldersperson Downing asked about Pierce County Public Health providing masks to the City. Simpson said KN95 masks are being provided. Downing asked further questions about distribution, availability of masks, and Pierce County running out of masks. Simpson said the City has offered assistance as Pierce County thinks is best.

Downing is also concerned about the long-term effects of Covid and having a plan for people living in public housing. He read in the packet that people are supposed to make a request for masks but how would people know to do that?

Simpson believed the Housing Authority is not taking responsibility for individual residents - it is the role of public health or the individual to do so. Downing asked if the City could post something for those residents to request that the City brings masks. He works in healthcare and said Covid was the most contagious thing the country has ever faced. Downing talked further about dropping masks off at the Housing Authority.

Simpson said as per request by Councilors, he felt free masks could be provided to the Housing Authority - understanding that they haven't requested any or indicated a concern about masks. His recommendation is that the City continues to let Public Health direct the City's actions around activities including potential distribution or not distribution or what masks to distribute or how to distribute them. Staff appreciates the concern related to public health. Public Health has provided options to pursue if Council wishes, but he is not proposing any specific actions at this time.

Downing asked about putting a paper up in the Housing Authority building so City staff can drop off masks. Simpson is not proposing that. Downing felt it would help bring down the amount of people in the hospitals. He thought it was a mistake to ignore the health risk in the community. Noting it was a simple action and won't cost money. Downing felt the Council needed to be responsible for that. He would like to help those who are the most vulnerable.

Motion by Downing to communicate effectively with public housing so people know they have the ability to request a mask who might not be able to get one otherwise. Plunkett asked how many masks Downing was proposing. The motion needed to be seconded before discussion. **Plunkett seconded the motion.**

Mayor Toland asked if staff has spoken to the Housing Authority. Simpson believed he previously stated that staff has been in communication with Public Health and the Housing Authority. He understands provisions were made between Public Health and the Housing Authority to provide whatever might be needed at the Housing Authority. He clarified that is why staff is not proposing to take any direct role in distributing, setting rules, picking numbers, or establishing what masks to give. Staff brought the concern to Public Health and believe they are adequately equipped to deal with it.

Downing is fine with the masks provided but doesn't believe they are effectively communicating because he hasn't heard from any of his constituents.

Parliamentarian Odeen said the item was not on the agenda and didn't believe the Council could act. She wanted to make a motion to table. Mayor Toland disagreed feeling Council had leeway make a motion.

Simpson agreed there was some ability to do so. He said there is also a notice on the agenda saying action can be taken on any item. Simpson said it would be for the Mayor, Parliamentarian, or City Attorney to determine if the motion was acceptable. City Attorney Gierhardt agreed with Simpson.

The Mayor asked for comments. Downing responded to Plunkett's inquiry about the number of masks saying two was the number he wanted to provide.

Aldersperson Morrissette asked if Downing wants the City to provide boxes to the Housing Authority if they request it. Downing said the City should communicate it has masks if people want them. The Mayor clarified saying what the City would do is put up a sign saying to call the Housing Authority if you need masks.

Morrissette pointed out a lack of consistency saying there are other vulnerable populations in town - Comforts of Home, Wellhaven - and we are not doing that for them. The City's ability to mandate things with the Housing Authority isn't as strong as he previously thought. He wants everyone in town who wants a mask have

access, but he wants to be consistent. He is also concerned about the fit of the mask. The Health Department will help people get fitted. Let's be consistent.

Downing talked about making an amendment to the motion. Morrisette thought that Council could direct staff without a motion. He asked for confirmation from Parliamentarian Odeen. She said it's not a parliamentary question, but Council has the authority to direct staff.

Plunkett felt there were valid points, but he had concerns about the masks Public Health was distributing. He spoke further providing details about the types of masks and certifications. He wants to give five different types of masks to interested people. We need to stop neglecting personal protective equipment. He spoke further.

The Mayor asked for a vote on the motion. Downing wanted to expand the language for the motion. Morrisette wanted clarification on what is being voted on. Downing said maybe we should just look at giving direction. The Mayor noted the locations that residents could pick masks up.

Simpson said with no further direction, staff has made themselves available to Public Health to distribute masks to the community, and the City has advertised the distribution of masks and we will continue to do that. What staff is respectfully suggesting is that unless Council has specific direction that is vital to the successful distribution of masks above what Public Health is recommending, staff thinks they have it covered. He spoke further about adequate supply, wide distribution, and additional things coming in the future from the federal government. Staff has relied on Public Health to this point, and we feel that they can be relied on going forward.

Downing is looking at the communication aspect. Simpson believes the City is heading the direction that most of Council wants but doesn't think we are headed in the direction of five masks.

The Mayor said there still is a motion on the table. He asked Downing if he wanted to rescind the motion. Downing wanted to rescind the motion and just give direction. Mayor Toland asked what direction he wanted to give staff besides what they are doing. Downing wanted a sign to be put up. The Mayor asked about calling the Housing Authority and asking to to put a sign up. He asked Assistant City Administrator Stroud if that was possible. Stroud said yes.

Plunkett felt this was next to useless. He asked what has changed since last August when Director AZ Snyder came to the Council meeting and said N95s were unavailable, unnecessary, uncomfortable, and did not work without professional fit tests. Now AZ is telling a different story. Plunkett said, do I believe her now or then? Or do I recognize quite potentially that the people in Public Health have neglected personal protective equipment and that has cost lives and money.

Aldersperson Carow called to question. The Mayor said there was no question to call and asked Plunkett if he was going to make a motion or request.

Plunkett said his request for staff was to procure enough for 1,000 individuals to get five masks each from the City's ARPA funds that we distribute to residents and the masks are available in the domestic market.

The Mayor asked Simpson if he wanted to speak. Simpson strongly disagreed with Plunkett's characterization of Public Health's role historically and going forward saying they have been nothing but a partner. He responded to Plunkett saying, what hasn't changed since August? We are flooded with new information. He doesn't question AZ's advice and doesn't have a concern about bad advice.

Plunkett noted the 900,000 deaths. Simpson addressed Plunkett saying it's completely irrational to blame Pierce County for 900,000 deaths. It sends the wrong message to the community about the role Public Health has played. He has been cautious about pushing back on the Council. Respectfully, he doesn't think that's a very good approach to take as a leader of the community. Public Health has provided consistent advice. Three Councilors asked him about distributing masks. Staff asked for advice from Public Health, and they provided options that adequately provide the spirit of what Council is asking for understanding that individual

Councilmembers might like to dictate concern things. He thinks it is a mistake to start allocating ARPA funds without understanding the reporting requirements. If Council wants the City to distribute 1,000 masks, it has the prerogative to do so. He would caution dictating the funding source as staff is perfectly capable to come up with funding. Plunkett said he stood corrected on that point.

Simpson continued saying staff is happy to implement direction from Council. Council can ignore or modify staff's advice. He would suggest the folks that are best equipped to help the community with masks are doing so and that people that are seeking these masks are able to find them. There may be other things we can do. We will gladly take advice. We will also take advice that the Council would make sure we are communicating clearly.

The Mayor said the direction was made to make sure the communications are there. Mr. Plunkett wants to make a recommendation about five masks each and spending money. The Mayor asked if there were other Councilmembers interested in that? There was not. The Mayor moved onto the Consent Agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Change of Agent for Holiday Stationstore #8→→*pulled by Morrisette*

Resolution No. 6650 - Approving Appointment of City Engineer

MCS Bjerstedt/Carow move to approve Consent Agenda. Unanimous.

Change of Agent for Holiday Stationstore #8

Morrisette asked Agent Taryne Ternes to come forward and reaffirm her answers. Morrisette asked if she understood the role of an agent; if she understood that if there is an alcohol related violation and even if she is not present, she is responsible; and asked if she has completed the responsible servers program. Agent Taryne Ternes answered yes to all.

MSC Morrisette/Bjerstedt move to approve Change of Agent for Holiday Stationstore #8. Unanimous.

REPORTS:

Administrator's Report

Simpson provided updates including the passing of former Councilor David Reese, absentee voting/election, library programs, City employment opportunities, and masks for residents.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mayor's Appointments

Historic Preservation Commission

Reappointment of Mark Anderson through January 2025

Police & Fire Commission

Reappointment of Dick Reinhart through April 2027

MSC Downing/Morrisette move to approve the Mayor's Appointments. Unanimous.

MSC Bjerstedt/Morrisette move to adjourn at 7:14 p.m. Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristi McKahan, Deputy Clerk