

VILLAGE OF SPARTA
Kent County, Michigan
Village Council Meeting
Monday, March 11, 2024 at 7:00 PM
75 N. Union St. (Sparta Civic Center)

Present: President Robert Whalen, Council Members Dave Cumings, Robert Carlstrom, Brenda Braybrook, Bill Taylor, and Tom Peoples.

Absent: Courtney Mais.

Also present: Village Manager Jim Lower, DPW Director Bill Hunter, and Village Clerk Katy Shelton.

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. **Roll Call:** Formal roll call was taken. Those in attendance/absent are noted above.
4. **Additions or Corrections to Consent and Business Agenda**
Consent Agenda:
 - a. Approve Regular Village Council Meeting Minutes of February 12, 2024
 - b. Approve Special Council Meeting Minutes of February 26, 2024
 - c. Approve Fire Board Minutes of February 22, 2024

No additions or corrections were noted.

5. **Approval of Consent and Business Agenda:** Motion by Carlstrom with a second by Cumings to approve. Motion passed unanimously.

6. Public Comment for Agenda Item

Please Note: This Public Comment portion of the meeting is reserved for comment on agenda items. Personal or abusive attacks on Council members, staff members, or other participants will not be tolerated and may result in the Village President taking action, up to and including, having the speaker removed from the meeting by law enforcement officers.

A. None.

7. Public Hearing

- a. **Res. 24-06 A resolution to approve the Baker Investments IFT Application.** Public hearing opened at 7:02pm. This pertains to the building on Division which burned down one to two years ago. The Village manager discussed this. He said that this property is located within the development district which was approved at last month's Council meeting, Council member Taylor asked the approximate number of Village approved abatements currently in existence. Village Manager Lower stated that he looked into this and believes it is about the fifth one. He said that the Village is no where near the limit as far as number of abatements which can be approved. He said that the Village has historically approved the maximum time limit of twelve years when granting a tax abatement. There were no public comments. Public hearing closed at 7:06pm.
- b. **MNRTF Grant Application.** Public hearing opened at 7:06pm. This relates to the park projects which were identified as priorities for 2025. This specific grant application applies to Rogue River park and the proposed park downstream near the Sparta Airport. There were no public comments. Public hearing closed at 7:15pm.
- c. **DNR Rec Passport Grant Application:** Public hearing opened at 7:15pm. This relates to the playground equipment which the Village would like to install at Nash Park. There were no public comments. Public hearing closed at 7:24pm.

8. Old Business

- a. None.

9. New Business

- a. **Res. 24-06 A resolution to approve the Baker Investments IFT Application:** Baker Investments is requesting an Industrial Facilities Tax Abatement for the \$2,620,000 new industrial construction they are in the process of completing. The application states that the IFT will help them create local jobs. The request would abate half of the tax burden on the new addition for a period of twelve years for all local taxing entities. This is a tool commonly used in the State of Michigan as an incentive for industrial development. The Village has

approved many such requests in the past. Motion by Braybrook with a second by Carlstrom to approve. Motion passed unanimously.

b. Res. 24-07 A Resolution endorsing the MNRTF Grant

Application: During the CIP budget process, the Village identified two park projects as priorities for 2025. They are both included in the new Park and Recreation Master Plan as well. The first is adding parking and accessibility to the Rogue River Park. The Village envisions a parking area with an ADA accessible kayak launch just off 13 Mile Rd. The Village would also like to add an identical facility on North Division near Sparta Airport in the future. That location would serve as an exit point for those floating/kayaking downstream. It could also be an entrance area for people wishing to go further downstream on the river towards the Rockford Dam. If approved for the grant, the Village would be responsible for a \$100,000 match in funding. Motion by Carlstrom with a second by Cumings to approve. Motion passed unanimously.

c. Res. 24-08 A Resolution endorsing the DNR Rec Passport Grant

Application: This is the second of the park projects identified as a priority by the Village Council at the recent CIP budget discussion. This grant would be used to construct parking facilities and an ADA accessible playground just north of the Childcare Center at Nash Park. It would be specifically tailored to kids in the 3-9 year old range, which is the age range of the kids at the adjacent Childcare Center. It was noted that the owner of the Childcare Center is on board with this project and will write a letter of support to the Grant organization. If approved for the grant, the Village would be responsible for a \$55,000 match in funding for the project. Motion by Braybrook with a second by People to approve. Motion passed unanimously.

d. Res. 24-09 A resolution requesting that MDOT add the Loomis St. bridge to the local bridge funding program for 2027:

DPW Director Bill Hunter discussed this. A recent inspection of the Loomis St. bridge revealed several critical issues concerning the structural integrity and safety of the bridge, necessitating immediate action in order to ensure public safety. It was noted that the condition of the bridge is not so bad as to require that it be shut down entirely – however it's bad enough that weight restrictions have had to be imposed. Total cost for the bridge replacement and approach work will be \$2,197,000. The local share of the Village portion of the

construction cost is 5% which comes to \$109,850. Motion by Carlstrom with a second by Braybrook to approve the resolution. Motion passed unanimously.

- e. **Res. 24-10 A resolution to purchase, acquire & construct capital improvement and to publish notice of intent to issue municipal securities:** This resolution will allow the Village to issue municipal securities later this year for the new Village Complex project. This resolution simply will allow the Village to provide the public notices of the plans and start the bond process formally. The Village Manager stressed that this will not involve a tax increase – it's just a notice of intent to bond which is required by state law. He also said that this project is millage neutral – there will be no increase in the Village millage rate in order to pay for it. Motion by Taylor with a second by Peoples to approve this resolution. Motion passed unanimously.
- f. **Res. 24-11 A resolution to adopt a fund balance policy for the Village of Sparta:** It was recently discovered that the Village does not have a formal written fund balance policy. This resolution formalizes what the internal policy has been up till now. This policy states that the Village will not go below \$1,000,000 in unassigned GF fund balance. Finance Director Carpenter is very much in support of this number. Motion by Braybrook with a second by Carlstrom to adopt a fund balance policy in the amount of \$1,000,000. Motion passed 5:1 with Cumings dissenting.
- g. **Snow Removal Proposal:** The current practice requires all property owners within the Village, whether occupied or vacant, to ensure the sidewalks abutting their parcels are cleared of snow and ice within 24 hours following a snowfall. The Village has approximately 117,887' of sidewalks with the DPW currently responsible for clearing about 36,716' after each snow event. The DPW recommends an expansion of that system so that the DPW become responsible for clearing all of the sidewalks within the Village's right of way. This will substantially enhance safety, eliminate compliance issues with property owners, and improve accessibility throughout the Village.

To support this expanded snow removal scope, DPW Director Hunter proposes acquiring a Wacker Neuson WL 28 compact wheel loader. He believes that it would be ideal for the Village requirements. He anticipates that equipment to cost approximately \$97,705. Those

monies are available in the motor pool fund. He stated that implementing this procedure will require an additional 10-15 hours of staff time per snow event. He emphasized, however, that the benefits of such an expanded snow removal program will far outweigh the costs by serving our community more effectively and inclusively.

Council members discussed how this proposal would certainly benefit the elderly and disabled residents in our community. It was also noted that this machine could be used year round as there are several attachments for it. The Village Manager reminded the Council that changes will need to be made in the code ordinances so as to reflect that property owners will no longer be responsible for removing the snow on their sidewalks.

Motion by Cumings with a second by Peoples to approve this proposal. Motion passed unanimously. The Council also thanked DPW Director Hunter and Village Manager Lower for all the time and effort that they have spent on this issue. Council President Whalen asked that a notice be published in Sparta Today alerting Village residents to this change.

10. **Village Manager & Department Reports:** The Village Manager stated that they did agree to purchase the Vactor truck, and that he would be flying out with Director Hunter and another person in order to look at it and hopefully bring it back to Sparta.

Council member Carlstrom asked about the WWTP report by WW Superintendent Rob Smith. It was stated in the report that the blower for digester #4 had seized up and that replacement cost with installation was \$16,596. He asked if we had documented preventative maintenance on the WWTP equipment. He also asked about the age of the blower. He said they are known for blowing up if the oil isn't changed as required.

11. **Communications**

- a. **Clean-Up Day Volunteer Sign-Up:** Spring Clean up will be April 25 1p-8p, April 26 1p-8p, and April 27 9a-3p.
- b. **Habitat for Humanity Lot Purchase:** Village Manager Lower has met with them several times. They would like to partner with the Village on a few affordable housing projects in the near future. They provide affordable – not free - housing to families in need. One parcel that was discussed was on State St abutting Rogers Park just south of the Hispanic church. Council member Carlstrom said he hesitated to let that property go, stating that once a house goes up, that that property could never be incorporated into Rogers Park in the future. He asked about maybe subdividing the lot. President Whalen asked about potentially building houses on Loomis if the land if available. The Village Manager will continue to discuss this with Habitat for Humanity.

The Council then discussed the need for more soccer fields. President Whalen stated that the community has outgrown the fields at the SRA. They discussed adding dedicated soccer fields at Nash Park.

12. Payment of Bills

February Payables

PAYABLES	
(101) General Fund	\$127,982.45
(202) Major Street Fund	\$18,843.43
(203) Local Street Fund	\$14,860.00
(581) Airport	\$45,325.63
(590) Sewer Department Fund	\$55,414.51
(591) Water Department Fund	\$49,195.11
(661) Equipment Rental Fund	\$3,969.31
Total	\$315,590.44

Informational:

(206) Fire Department	\$8,453.67
(208) SRA Park Fund	\$214.27
(248) Downtown Development Authority	\$4,972.13
Total	\$13,640.07

Motion by Taylor with a second by Braybrook to approve the payment of bills in the amount of \$315,590.44. Motion passed unanimously.

13. Public Comment

a. None.

14. Council Member Announcements

a. None.

15. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned by President Whalen at 8:46pm.

Submitted by Katy Shelton, Village Clerk