

VILLAGE OF SPARTA
Kent County, Michigan
Village Council Meeting
December 20, 2023 at 6:30 PM
156 E. Division (Sparta Village Hall)

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

Absent: Robert Carlstrom.

Also present: Village Manager Jim Lower 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 present/absent are noted above.
4. **Additions or Corrections to Consent and Business Agenda:**
 - a. None
5. **Approval of Consent and Business Agenda:** Motion by Mais 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. None
8. **Old Business**

- a. None.

9. New Business

- a. **Res. 23-30 A resolution authorizing the sale of the real property located at 223 E. Division Street:** This is property currently owned by the Village to be sold to Rex Baker for development. He is very close to moving forward with his project. The Village will make a profit of approximately 19K. Motion by Braybrook to approve this resolution with a second by Mais. Motion passed unanimously.

The Village Manager then discussed the “Downtown Redevelopment District” which includes this property and which was approved last year. He said that if we have a large district within which certain classifications of businesses and developments are allowed, that that would make Sparta more attractive to developers. He also said that it would be more cost efficient to approve one large district once as opposed to reclassifying property addresses one by one. He stressed, however, that all future developments must be approved individually as far as the project itself moving forward.

- b. **2024 Goal Setting/Planning Workshop:**

The following “Consensus Based Council Goals and Priorities” were delineated by Village Manager Lower and discussed by Council members:

1. Balyeat Field Repurposing and Improvements. Done.
2. Wastewater Treatment Plant. In progress.
3. Marijuana Ordinance Development and Implementation. Done.
4. Parking Issues Downtown. Although the Village needs more parking, this goal is fundamentally accomplished.
5. Planned Growth through Increased Housing and Density. In progress.
6. Communication to Residents: In progress. Per President Whalen, he'd like to see a newsletter sent out to residents with the tax bills. The newsletter would include what's new in the Village as well as future plans and projects.

The Village Manager then listed “Approved Manager Suggested Goals”:

1. Village Complex and/or New Village Hall. In progress.
2. Human Resources Policy, Procedure, and IT Upgrades. In progress.
3. Village Office Hours and Work Schedules. Done.

Other Village Manager goals were then discussed.

1. Nash Field – ball park. The new daycare will be going in alongside the fields. CASA is currently using it for soccer games. They pay to use the fields, and the raising of those fees was mentioned. CASA would like to permanently repurpose the fields more strictly for soccer by taking out the baseball fences and so forth at their expense. President Whalen mentioned that Little League also plays baseball there, so the field can't be exclusively for soccer. It was also mentioned that there is very little parking at that location.
2. Exterior cleaning of the Village Office. Per Dave Cumings, when he last checked into this, it's extremely expensive (in the neighborhood of 25K) to clean because it's sandstone. He said that he would be getting some current quotes to see what the cost would be.
3. 150 Martindale. The owner of this residence has recently died. The family asked if the Village would be interested in buying the property. It's assumed to be in severe disrepair, but there is a decent sized lot involved. Per President Whalen, the Village needs to get a quote for demolishing the buildings on the site. He said we need to contact Mike Lamb to get an accurate value for the property. It was the consensus of the Council that it is very interested in obtaining this property.
4. Rogue River Park. The Village Manager and the DPW recently did a walk through the property with Paul Ford from Spicer Engineering to see what could possibly be done at this location. It's envisioned that a parking lot and trails (as well as other things) could be located here depending on what EGLE specifies since some of the property might be wetlands. President Whalen said that Trailer Expert would grub the trails for the Village. The county is going to redo the ditches next to the road which should dry the property out quite a bit.

5. Planning Commission. It currently has nine members, but with the current lack of people willing to serve on committees and commissions, it might make more sense to downsize it. Several commission members have terms expiring shortly, so the easiest way to decrease the size of the Commission would be through attrition. It was noted that a number of municipalities have the Village Council act as their own Planning Commission. The consensus of the Council was that a seven member Planning Commission makes sense. The Village Manager will draft an ordinance allowing for that once it gets to that size.
6. Current ordinances and how they're being enforced. It was noted that there are a lot of "silly" and unnecessary ordinances on the Village books. For the sake of efficiency and better community relations, it makes sense to get rid of unnecessary and objectionable ordinances. It was proposed to have a public meeting asking for input from residents as to which ordinances they'd like to see removed. There should also be a dedicated link on the Village website where people can express their opinions. The long term goal would be to have "code enforcement" be moved over to the Police Department for supervision and training. It was also mentioned that, if possible, whoever fills this position also be able to oversee sewer enforcement as far as checking for additives and pollutant issues. In the short term, the Police Department will handle winter code enforcement, which basically involves the shoveling of driveways and sidewalks.

Each of the Council Members then identified which goals they felt most strongly about.

Bill Taylor: He feels that the Knauffs and Rex Baker have done some real good things in the downtown area. He would like to see more street improvements accomplished.

Courtney Mais: She would like to see a universal park plan for ALL of Sparta parks. She'd like to see all the parks made ADA accessible, though she realizes how expensive that is. She'd like to see a larger splash pad at Rogers Park and also explore more park grants/funding.

Dave Cumings: He said that he's very impressed with all of the projects going on and the speed at which things have been

accomplished. He mentioned Old Orchard, the new Child Care Center, Sewer improvements, and cleaning the front the of the Village Building as some of his priorities.

Tom Peoples: He'd like to review how the Village funds the Fire Department. He'd like to explore Michigan Class for investments. He said the Village needs to put in sidewalks by Maxines and Sundaes in the Park. He'd like to see the resurfacing of State Street with an island in between Balyeat and Rogers Park. President Whalen mentioned that that was proposed years ago but never implemented. The Village Manager doesn't think the County will ever agree to that due to snowplowing issues. The Village Manager stated that we normally do one sidewalk project a year. Funding for that comes out of the road improvement budget. He said that he will explore costs for installing a sidewalk in that location.

Brenda Braybrook: Wants to see Sparta become a city. She said that when she was first elected, she was diametrically opposed to such an idea. However, she now thinks that is what is needed due to the deterioration in the relationship between the Village and the Township.

Robert Whalen:

1. Street repairs: we need to get caught up on the repairs that have been approved but haven't been scheduled.
2. Park improvements: Nash Park is a large chunk of property that is underutilized. It's a nice pocket park that will benefit the new day care specifically and the Village in general.
3. The beautification of the East end of the Village. There is a building by the propane building and the gas station that needs to be brought up to code. The installation of a Village Nature Park by the Rogue River will be a tremendous asset for the Village. That will involve moving the "Nature Trail" sign and rocks further east.
4. Parks funding: the Village needs to look for more grants for this. The Village Manager is working with the DDA manager on this.
5. Balyeat Field: He wants to see a "focal point bridge" installed by the east side of the existing bridge foundation. He envisions something like what they have in Rockford where kids can come and take prom and family pictures. He said that we could possibly

put in a pavilion that might be funded by a local service organization or local business owners.

6. He wants the Village to go through all the ordinances and remove unnecessary ones. He also suggested that we might get a grant to help us update the ordinances or at least reimburse us.

 10. **Village Manager & Department Reports:** The Village Manager stated that he was looking forward to the code and ordinance project.

 11. **Communications:** It was mentioned that Chris Atwater with the Rodeo Grounds property received a 400K grant from the Right Place in order to hook up with the sewer system.

 12. **Public Comment:**
 - a. None.

 13. **Council Member Announcements:**
 - a. None.

 14. **Adjournment:** President Whalen adjourned the meeting at 8:21 pm.
- Submitted by Katy Shelton, Village Clerk.