

**LOWELL TOWN COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 10, 2023**

The regular meeting of the Lowell Town Council was called to order on Monday, April 10, 2023 at 7:00 P.M. by Vice- President Michael Gruszka. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited followed by a moment of silence. Clerk-Treasurer Judith Walters called the roll. Members present were Michael Gruszka, John Alessia, Shane Tucker, and John Yelkich. President Todd Angerman was absent. Also present were Town Manager Craig Hendrix, Police Chief James Woestman, GIS Director Greg White, and Town Attorney David Westland Also present was one member of the press, and nine interested citizens present, and three via Zoom.

TREASURER’S REPORT - March 2023

Councilman Yelkich made a motion to approve the March 2023 Treasurer’s Report, seconded by Councilman Alessia and carried with four ayes.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilman Tucker made a motion to approve the regular meeting and work session minutes from March 27th and special meeting of April 4th, seconded by Councilman Yelkich and carried with four ayes.

APPROVAL OF VOUCHERS

Vice-President Gruszka stated he had reviewed the following vouchers: White Vouchers #10338 - #10396, White- Police - #1049-#1055, Waste Water #4254- #4294, and Stormwater Utility #6045 - #6051. Councilman Alessia made a motion to approve the vouchers as listed, seconded by Councilman Yelkich and carried with four ayes.

ORDINANCES & RESOLUTIONS

2nd reading - Ordinance #2023-03 - Additional Appropriation - General, Freedom Park, Cum Fire Fund - Councilman Yelkich moved to adopt Ordinance #2023-03 by name and title only, seconded by Councilman Tucker and carried with four ayes on roll call vote.

1st reading - Ordinance #2023-04 - re-establishing Cumulative Capital Development Fund - to re-establish the rate to the maximum of five cent, since the assessed value grew so much in 2023 the advertised levy wasn’t high enough and the rate decreased to 0.0434. A Public Hearing will be held at the April 24th regular meeting. Councilman Alessia moved to hold Ordinance #2023-04 for a second reading, seconded by Councilman Yelkich and carried with four ayes.

1st reading - Ordinance #2023-05 - Additional Appropriation - General Fund - PO Grant - \$8476.90 - Councilman Tucker moved to hold over Ordinance #2023-05 for second reading, seconded by Councilman Yelkich and carried with four ayes on roll call vote.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

WWTP Project - Approve Pay Request #8 - Bowen Engineering - \$145,819.50 less retainage and approve Sewer Voucher #4293 - \$ 138,528.53 Councilman Alessia moved to approve Pay Request #8 and Sewer Voucher #4293 to Bowen Engineering, seconded by Councilman Yelkich and carried with four ayes on roll call vote.

Update Master Agreement for professional services with SEH - Councilman Tucker moved to enter into an updated agreement with SEH, subject to attorney review, seconded by Councilman Yelkich and carried with four ayes on roll call vote.

NEW BUSINESS

Tri-Creek School Referendum - Andy Anderson, Superintendent and Dana Bogathy, Business Operations, were present to communicate with the town council on information about the school referendum so their constituents have an informed decision. Superintendent Anderson stated Tri-Creek School will be forced to cut more than sixteen positions that include teachers and support personnel for the 2024-2025 school year of \$800,000 if the community does not pass the 2023 Operations Referendum on May 2nd as school funding has not increased. If this happens, student education, safety, and extracurricular programs will be negatively impacted. Ms. Bogathy spoke of losing staff to other Lake County public school districts and attracting and retaining quality educators and staff. Out of sixteen school districts in Lake County, Tri-Creek is ranked 13th in pay for a starting salary. They spoke of expanding the Red Devil Trade building programs and expanding the SRO officers in all schools. Ms. Bogathy stated the school district has lost up to 1.1 million due to property tax caps, and Mr. Anderson said that state legislature is talking about doing away with test book rental, but there is no line item to pay for text books and they will be lucky to break even. Ms. Bogathy said the way the public question is presented on the ballot is mandated by state law and is misleading to voters and states an average increase of 25.5%, but the reality is the majority of the community will experience only a 4% to 11% increase on the school portion of their 2023 payable 2024 tax bill. Mr. Anderson said the school portion of property taxes goes for debt service, mortgage, renovations, not on education, that portion is funded by sales tax, and only a operating referendum tax can be used on salary and benefits. Councilman Alessia stated he worked for Tri-Creek School from 1993-2010, and left to go to Lake Central School

primarily for money and that he has hired many teachers from the Tri-Creek School district. He stated the starting salary of \$44,000 in Tri-Creek to \$53,000 in Lake Central is a significant amount. Superintendent Anderson spoke of the many challenges for educators and asked that citizens invest in the people spending more waking hours with their children and the positive impact they have on students.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vice President Gruszka announced the next regular meeting will be held Monday, April 24, 2023 at 7:00 P.M.

MEDIA QUESTIONS/PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chuck Abraham, Lowell Tribune, asked agreed the master agreement with SEH. Mr. Hendrix commented that it had not been updated since 2014, and stated task orders with hourly rates for projects are approved from the master agreement.

Jared Lamar, 358 Grant Street, stated he has asked the town manager about a proposed solution for the flooding on his property and had been told it is not a high priority as his house is not in danger of flooding and only affects his property. Mr. Lamar said he is not asking the town to grade or slope his yard but asking for improvement to the culvert from his neighbors property. Mr. Lamar stated he pays a stormwater fee and provided pictures of the area. Councilman Alessia asked if he had reached out to a company and received an estimate, and Mr. Lamar stated he would and wanted to install a french drain system. He stated he understood the flooding problems started after the concrete business was built and thought the water was being diverted from a street over to his property.

Stacy Brown, 511 Timberlake, asked if the public hearing on the Freedom Trail Project had been scheduled. Mr. Hendrix stated they have not been informed from INDOT.


Brian McCarthy, Michael Drive, had questions about the school referendum and Vice-President Gruszka stated that Superintendent Anderson would be around after the meeting to answers any concerns.

Jeff Kopka, 520 Timberwood, stated that he has lived in Lowell since 1978 and that Lowell is not the same Lowell as he grew up in. He asked with all the expansion Cedar Lake is doing if the combined wastewater treatment plant will be prepared to handle all the increase, because he didn't see where we are making any improvements. Councilman Yelkich replied that the Joint Management Board with Lowell and Cedar Lake has been reviewing a 35-40 million dollar expansion at the wastewater treatment plant. Mr. Kopka spoke of the sale of the water utility and stated we were "laughing all the way to the bank", and Councilman Yelkich stated American Water vested in the system wholly and they are able to do more effectively on projects. Mr. Kopka asked about road repairs from water leaks and was informed that American Water will be restoring and will put back the way they were, but was waiting for the asphalt companies to open. Mr. Kopka asked about paving streets as he said many are in very poor condition, and was informed

the Town just awarded a \$900,000 road improvement project. He was told the town now receives 50/50 funding from INDOT when we used to receive a 75/25% match and stated they do they best they can with the money we receive.

ADJOURNMENT

No further business, Councilman Alessia made a motion to adjourn at 7:40 P.M., seconded by Councilman Tucker and carried with four ayes.



Michael Gruszka, Vice-President

Attest:



Judith Walters, Clerk-Treasurer