



Village of Lawton
VILLAGE COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
125 S. MAIN, LAWTON MI 49065 269.624.6407
Tuesday September 10, 2024
MINUTES

- I. **Call to Order:** President Appleby called the September 10, 2024, meeting of the Lawton Village Council to order at 7:00 p.m.
- II. **Roll Call:** *Present:* Appleby, E. Dudek, Peterson, Turner, Smith, Tanis, G. Dudek *Absent:* None. *Others Present:* Village Manager Hackenberg, Clerk Rathbun, Police Chief Cordes, and four guests.
- III. **Pledge of Allegiance:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
- IV. **Consent Agenda:** The Consent Agenda included the approval of the September 10 Council Agenda, the August 13, 2024 Council Meeting Minutes, and approval of the August 2024 disbursements in the amount of \$312,081.33. Peterson made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda with the addition of New Business Item E. A discussion of Burn Pile at Lawton Evangelical Church on 09/28/2024. Motion supported by trustee Turner. A unanimous roll call vote approved the motion.
- V. **Communications, Correspondence, and Presentations:**
- VI. **Citizen Comments:**
 - A. John LeFrancois, a resident from Morrill, wanted to make the Police Chief and the council aware of numerous speeding issues within the Village. He stated one issue has been on the People of Lawton with numerous complaints of a grey F150 going fast. He stated it has almost hit a school bus. He stated that there have also been two different incidents of mopeds or minibikes going through the Village. They are loud and are going through late into the evening. Another resident, who did not provide a name, agreed with Mr. LeFrancois on this. He stated he brought some information from a neighbor to provide the chief. Another issue brought up was motorcycles coming off of railroad and racing each other through the Village. LeFrancois stated it seems we have a growing problem. Police Chief Cordes stated that he is aware of a few of these issues and they are investigating, but he welcomes residents calling the police department, as many times the incidents reported on the People of Lawton Page go unreported for the department to look into, which makes it more difficult for them to monitor. The police have a non-emergency phone line and can be reached at 269-624-2382. There is also a voicemail box set up if anyone has information, and there is not an officer available to speak with at the time of the call.

VII. Public Hearings/Appointments/Proclamations: None.

VIII. Old Business:

- A. Village Manager Hackenberg reported that they have spoken to Village attorneys on what exactly is wanted. We are working with Bloom and Sluggett, who was recommended by our regular attorney to work with on ordinances. Hackenberg reported that in the discussion with the attorney, they stated we are one step ahead on a rental inspection ordinance, since we have already adopted the IMPC maintenance code. Hackenberg reported that land contracts could be included on this ordinance, and we would have a couple of options. Council agreed that they would like to see this happen, and a second meeting would be a good place to bring this for review with a public hearing. Hackenberg stated the Village would reach out to the attorney at Bloom and Sluggett to have this drafted for an upcoming meeting.

VII: New Business:

- A. President Appleby brought a Quote from Kent County Curbing to create a water deterrent in the amount of \$5881.20 to the floor. Village Manager Hackenberg stated this will actually cover more than just Concord Hills. It will also cover a portion of Fourth Street as well. This asphalt project will help with the flooding in several areas of the Village that have been an issue this year. Hackenberg stated with us getting bigger rains than we have in the past, there isn't a system currently in place that can handle it. There are several locations in the Village that are natural low spots, in some areas, even curbing, guttering, and storm sewer hasn't been enough to keep up with these rains. He stated while we cannot fix the entire issue, this will at least help us try to keep up with the flooding, and issues that have been happening with the heavier rains. Tanis brought up issues with the snow plowing, Hackenberg stated we will place markers at the asphalt curbing to try to keep it from degrading with the snowplows. E. Dudek made a motion to accept the quote from Kent County Curbing to place Water Deterrent for the amount of \$5881.20, seconded by Tanis. A unanimous roll call vote approved the motion.
- B. Appleby brought Resolution 09-2024: A Resolution naming Trustee and Alternate Trustee for West Michigan Health Insurance Pool to the floor. Clerk Rathbun stated that per renewal documents that have been received, Priority Health will no longer consider Bronson a Tier One provider. Since Bronson is one of the only provider's around Lawton, this would place a burden on our employees. The current renewal was also slated to go up 30%, so it would be a dramatic increase. After some research, The Village would like to switch over to Michigan Pool with a Blue Cross Blue Shield PPO insurance option for employees. While it will still be an increase overall, this was the cheapest option quoted, and will provide employees better coverage than they currently receive. The one drawback being that the Village will have a one-time deductible reset in January because Michigan Pool requires everyone to go through the open enrollment period together. This resolution in particular would make Clerk Rathbun, and Village Manager Hackenberg the signatories for everything that is needed for Michigan Pool to go into effect. Trustee Peterson made a motion to adopt Resolution 09-2024, naming Clerk Rathbun, and Village Manager Hackenberg

trustees for the West Michigan Health Insurance Pool. A roll call vote was taken with all in favor, and none opposed. Motion carried.

- C.** Appleby brought Resolution 10-2024: A Resolution to Authorize MDOT Contract 24-5276 with the Village of Lawton and authorize signatories for the contract to the floor. Village Manager Hackenberg stated that this would cover the MDOT contract for the White Oak Project, and allow him to be the signatory for all documents in regards to this contract. E. Dudek made a motion to adopt Resolution 10-2024 in order to Authorize MDOT Contract 24-5276 for the White Oak Project, and make Village Manager Hackenberg the authorized signatory. Turner seconded the motion, followed by a roll call vote with all in favor and none opposed. Motion carried.
- D.** Appleby brought Police Department Updates to the floor for discussion. Hackenberg stated he and Cordes have been doing some research, and the Village of Lawton is at the lowest paid positions for police in Van Buren County. Hackenberg stated in order to keep part-timers on, which is helping keep overtime down, we have recently done a large raise for that position. Hackenberg stated that he wanted to bring this to the floor to consider a millage. He stated with the budget already being tight, unless we cut things from the current budget, in order to afford increases to the officers, it will have to come to a millage increase for public safety. Council person Smith asked if there is any way we can do a survey to see what the public would like to do. Cordes stated that there are only two agencies in Van Buren County besides us that do not have a mill. Village Manager Hackenberg stated that council can do up to a 4 mill increase without a vote for next year, but it would require a public hearing. Hackenberg stated 2 mills for the Village would average approximately \$100 per year for our tax payers. E. Dudek and Smith both stated that this will need to be broken down to the public if we go that route, because mills are not understandable for many people. Smith stated without explaining the tax increase to people, she does not believe it will be well received. Council agreed whether we look at things to cut from the budget, or they do a millage increase, we do need to find a way to fund our police department. Cordes stated what we have is not feasible. There are multiple full-time officers seeking other positions at this point, because of how low our police pay is, and that would hurt our police department severely. Smith asked if we have the ability to bump the pay in order to deter officers who are currently employed from leaving. Council discussed not hiring a fourth officer in order to bump up rates for current full-time officers, and keep them here until we can look at a millage. Appleby suggested we work toward higher wages looking into budget and input from the Police committee how to put together what is going on for the public to see the need for the Police Department. Smith agreed a meeting to present the need to the community for the mill would be very helpful. Appleby stated growing the tax base overall would be helpful in the long run, and it is the goal of council. Council agreed something needs to be done to maintain our police department, and made the unanimous decision that the Police Committee needs to meet to come up with a solution.
- E.** Appleby brought the second meeting to the floor for discussion for September. Several council members will be out of town. Appleby stated the biggest pressing issue for the second meeting is for the police committee to meet and bring results back. The police committee members who were present agreed that they could meet prior to the October meeting and bring findings to the rest of council at that point. Council will not meet a second time in the month of September.

- F. Village Manager Hackenberg stated that the Evangelical Church on Nursery Street has a large burn pile they are requesting permission to burn. They have requested to burn that on September 28 in the evening. The fire department has already stated they have trucks willing to be on standby. E. Dudek made a motion to provide Village Manager Hackenberg permission to authorize a controlled burn behind the Evangelical Church, at his discretion with weather conditions. Smith seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken with all in favor, and none opposed. The ayes have it, and the motion is adopted.

VIII: Board, Committee, and Staff Reports:

- A. Village Manager Hackenberg reported the DPW has been patching potholes and fixing up the public parking lots. Hackenberg stated the public parking lots are getting bad, and we need to look into repairing or replacing them. They are getting extremely brittle. Hackenberg stated there were 3 internments at the cemetery. Hackenberg stated that the project is making progress, and traffic has been shifted. He stated they are finishing up running storm sewer down the side of the post office, and two more tie ins in the next few days. The contractor is pouring sidewalks north of the tracks, and a few concerned citizens have mentioned that it is too close to their homes, however, MDOT stated that these are still within their right of way. The sidewalks will go all the way to Dollar General. Hackenberg stated all of the sidewalks will be completed before they place the final layer of asphalt due to the striping being inset into the road. Hackenberg stated their new goal end date is September 20th, and he isn't sure where they will be on the 20th, but he has voiced concerns about the intersection being open for grape season to Welch's. Hackenberg stated that Reid's Corner is slated to begin on the 23rd of this month. Hackenberg stated that after the Main Street downtown portion is done, they should be able to complete the remaining portions with lane closures. Council stated there are concerns with the current business owners that the project has taken this long. Hackenberg agreed that there were some unfortunate setbacks, and he would like to see this done as soon as possible as well. Hackenberg stated he has started to drive around looking at things for Zoning Solutions and he has a partial list. Hackenberg stated he had a meeting with an executive at Welch's due to concerns brought to him about them wanting to build a new wastewater treatment plant or shut down. He stated in meeting with Welch's the concerns were unfounded, and they were able to go over many communication issues between the Village and Welch's in the past. Welch's is going to be in better communications with the Village going forward. Hackenberg has another meeting with Welch's tomorrow. Hackenberg stated he has signed up for a Citizen Planner Course this fall, and he is going to be taking the class every week from 6-9PM for six weeks on Thursday nights, which will make him eligible to take a Zoning Administration Class. Hackenberg stated that we received the CEM grant for \$100,000, so once that has been officially released, we can move forward with several building updates that have needed to be done for a long time. He will be out of town for two weeks in October.
- B. Clerk Rathbun reported that she did not have anything to add outside of the insurance.
- C. Chief Cordes reported that for the last month they took several calls including an increase in traffic stops, and increase in special events. Cordes stated that they are rotating the officers they have, and everything else has been pretty status quo. Cordes stated they are still trying to stay within the boundaries of the detour, and he has had some complaints about people going the wrong way on the detour, and people driving

on the new asphalt before it's cured. Cordes stated they have done several county assists over the past month. He stated they have signed up for several trainings, and those are going well. He stated we have hired Chris Orr from the Van Buren County Sheriff's Department as a part-timer, he is going to assist with electronic investigations, as this is his specialty with the state and the county along with weekend hours, and other areas our department needs help with. Cordes stated school is back in, and the police department has picked up an alternative crossing guard person to help when the current crossing guards call off this year. He stated this is extremely helpful, because it frees up the officers to help more with calls to the school for issues they receive. Cordes stated the home on the corner of Liberty has been tagged and mowed. It will be the first home that will go onto the tax roll after the new ordinance blight ordinance was passed this summer.

- D. Peterson Reported the Planning Commission did not meet. Peterson stated she is thinking it is time for the annual report of the planning commission to be completed. It is a requirement for the RRC. Peterson stated she would like to see this for the October Planning Commission Meeting.
- E. G. Dudek reported that the DDA did not meet.
- F. E. Dudek reported that the fireboard met, and had a routine month, which new QR equipment on the way.
- G. B. Rathbun reported that the library board met, and the library would like to do a meet the artist night with Jackie Hackenberg who painted the walls for us. The library would like this to take place after construction ends, sometime in the middle or end of October in the evening, and they would like to utilize the community room for this. They will do refreshments and are looking at 5-7PM for the timeline. Council stated they saw no issue with this and thought it would be great to show Jackie appreciation.

IX: Council Comments:

- A. Trustee N. Smith reported that the Vacant lot in Concord Hills has brush into the road and she would like Village staff to look into the owners. The property should be being maintained 6ft. back. Hackenberg stated we will look into it.

- X. Adjournment:** Turner moved, with support E. Dudek from to adjourn the Village Council Meeting at 8:28p.m. Next council meeting to take place on October 8, 2024 at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Brittany Rathbun
Village Clerk