

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COMMISSION
CITY OF EAST GRAND RAPIDS

Regular Meeting Held January 22, 2024

Mayor Favale called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at the East Grand Rapids Community Center and led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Commissioners Burdick, Groff-Blaszak, Hunter, Schulz, Schwartz, Wessely and Mayor Favale.

Absent: None.

Also Present: City Manager Charles; Deputy City Manager LaFave; City Attorney Huff; Finance Director Seath; Parks & Recreation Director Melville; Zoning Administrator Gianotti; Public Safety Captain Ric Buikema; City Clerk Parmenter.

2024-10. The agenda was approved.

2024-11. Public comment:

David Stoffer, 1925 Lake Drive, just found out that his sauna was “banned” and stated the benefits of a sauna and that his neighbors often enjoy the sauna also.

John Smits, 2255 Boston, has a woodburning sauna in backyard and his neighbors love coming over to sauna also.

Sam Rossman, 2145 Anderson, is upset that one person was able to use the city code to make a neighbor’s life a headache.

Ken Gauld, 2243 Heather, is in support of not banning woodburning saunas.

Ryan Sawyer, 2200 Durant, look at different types of wood for particles floating in the air, moisture content, how much smoke is produced. What about when there is a burn ban in Michigan or when the smoke was coming down from the Canadian fires. How is a smoker different? Saunas can help reduce dementia.

Jake Bertanza, 2727 Albert, stated this was just a neighbor dispute.

Matt Benson, 1430 Rosalind, saunas can bring communities together.

Janell Sawyer, 2200 Durant, is pre-disposed to dementia and woodburning saunas are better than any medicine.

Randy Russo, 1930 Lake Drive, is impacted by the woodburning sauna. This ordinance was put in place to protect neighbors and citizens in Esat. The smoke infuses his home, and the pollutants remain in the air for days. The negative impacts outweigh the benefits and appreciates the solution.

Chis Bailey, 603 Locust, uses Dave's sauna and stated that it is a great thing. He lives next door to someone who burns wood, and he just closes his window.

Matt Christy, 1510 Eastlawn, questioned where you draw the line and if we are willing to ban all woodburning items.

Mayor Favale stated that it would be worth having a work session regarding this topic and gathering more input and information.

City Manager Charles stated that staff can gather more information, schedule a work session and notify the interested parties of the date and time. It will be added to a future agenda soon.

2024-12. Mayor and City Commission comments, including committee liaison reports.

Commissioner Schulz mentioned that the Community Foundation continues to work with the GVBA and stated that the Trail Blazer was back on for July 4, 2024.

Commissioner Burdick thanked public works for the snow removal and mentioned that the sledding hill in Manhattan Park has been great and the trails do not impact it.

Commissioner Groff-Blaszak also thanked public works and questioned how we engage residents.

Commissioner Schwartz also wondered how we get the word out better to residents and thanked everyone who came tonight and for reaching out directly to her. She also stated that she did not see the ordinance as a personal attack on one person.

Mayor Favale also stated that she did not see it as a neighbor dispute and thanked public works.

City Manager Charles said kudos to Doug and the public works for their snow removal efforts. He mentioned that MaryAnn Sabo and Aaron Roberts were in the audience. He stated that Manhattan Park plans will be coming to the City Commission soon.

2024-13. Consider final reading and vote for amendments to Section 8.61 of the City Code regarding General Fence Requirements and Restrictions.

Zoning Administrator Gianotti reviewed the changes to the ordinance and that it would be effective February 2, 2024.

2024-013-A. Schulz-Schwartz. To approve amendments to Section 8.61 of the City Code regarding General Fence Requirements and Restrictions related to Flag Lots.

Yeas: Burdick, Groff-Blaszak, Hunter, Schulz, Schwartz, Wessely and Favale – 7
Nays: None.

2024-14. Consider approval of a one-year contract with Great Lakes Fireworks in the amount of \$30,000 for the 2024 4th of July Firework show.

Parks and Recreation Director Melville reviewed the request and noted the sponsorship from Corewell Health for \$30,000 to cover the cost of the fireworks.

2024-014-A. Burdick-Schwartz to approve a one-year contract with Great Lakes Fireworks in the amount of \$30,000 for the 2024 4th of July Firework show.

Yeas: Burdick, Groff-Blaszak, Hunter, Schulz, Schwartz, Wessely and Favale – 7
Nays: None.

2024-15. Consider the approval of the new Parental Leave Policy and Benefit.

Finance Director Seath highlighted the request.

Commissioner Groff-Blaszak asked if we had considered a longer period of leave time.

Finance Director Seath stated that we went beyond the standard of 4-6 weeks and noted that per FMLA, they can take up to twelve weeks off.

City Manager Charles noted that this does not preclude someone from using their vacation, sick or personal time to obtain more paid time off.

Commissioner Groff-Blaszak asked if they could consider covering twelve weeks paid leave.

Commissioner Burdick stated that it is difficult when dads are given different amounts of time off and wondered if there was an appetite for giving equal amounts of time off for dads.

Commissioner Groff-Blaszak was in support of six weeks for dads.

City Manager Charles stated that they could approve the policy as written today and will bring it back for revisions in the near future.

2024-015-A. Wessely-Hunter. To approve the new Parental Leave Policy and Benefit as written.

Yeas: Burdick, Groff-Blaszak, Hunter, Schulz, Schwartz, Wessely and Favale – 7
Nays: None.

2024-16. Wessely-Schwartz. To approve the consent agenda as follows:

2024-016-A. Minutes of the regular meeting held January 8, 2024.

2024-016-B. Disbursement of funds: payroll disbursements of \$355,331.52; county and school disbursements of \$1,314,331.26, and total remaining disbursements of \$ 359,399.45.

Yeas: Arendshorst, Burdick, Hamrick, Schulz, Schwartz, Wessely and Favale – 7
Nays: None.

2024-17. Financial forecast.

City Manager Charles reviewed the information.

2024-18. Key Strategic Areas update FY 2023-24

City Manager Charles reviewed the information.

Deputy City Manager La Fave gave a brief update on the Cascade/Robinson Pathway project.

Commissioner Schulz said that the City needs to take lead in what the GVBA should do and that Gaslight needs leadership. He also stated that parking needs to be worked on.

Commissioner Hunter asked if the Downtown Consultant would be an outside consultant. City Manager Charles stated that it would be.

The meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m., subject to the call of the Mayor until February 5, 2024.

Lori A Parmenter, City Clerk