

**MINUTES**  
**SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING – WORKING SESSION**

**APRIL 17, 2012**

Mayor Jeff Thompson called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. Council members present were Dennis Zimmerman, Gene Beavers (6:04 p.m.), Jean Soine, and Jeff Bertram. Others present were Renee Eckerly, City Administrator; Jennifer Welling, Administrative Assistant; Stephanie Hormann, Cable Coordinator; Bob Dickhaus, Stearns County Sheriff's Department; Doris Wendlandt, Ellarry Prentice, Press; Mark Eckerly, Robert McDaniel, John D. Desm, John C. Desm, Joe Schmitz, and Monica Moore.

**POLICE CHIEF POSITION**

Thompson announced the documents in the agenda packet. He stated that the main questions are:

1. Continue as we are?
2. Hire a Police Chief?
3. Do something more permanent with the County?

It was asked what Thompson's thoughts are. Thompson expressed that the City is large enough to have its own Police Department and Chief and he is not comfortable with having someone (an entire entity) from outside the community in charge of our City department. Furthermore, he is not in favor of giving up the control to the Sheriff's Department. The City's law enforcement should be from people of the community.

It was suggested to hear thoughts from each Council member.

Soine stated that she felt similar to Mayor Thompson and is concerned with the response time. The community can support a Chief as it has in the past. The community is growing and the City needs a hands-on person.

Beavers appreciated that the Council took time to think this through. A full-time local Police Chief is part of the City's pride and is instrumental in the City. It is important for our community to have a full-time, fully engaged Chief that knows the community and students.

Bertram suggested that the following question be raised: What do we want the Police Department to look like? The City needs to decrease their budget and when a person leaves it's an opportunity to look at options. He was in favor of employees living in the community as most employees don't. He expressed concern of the union impact, salary increases, and having to hire a police secretary if a new chief is hired. Does the Council want to hire externally or internally? Salaries, wage increases and taxes need to be addressed. Currently, the City is facing decreasing LGA money and therefore needs to decrease budgets; otherwise the expenses will be made up with increased taxes and/or cuts. The City could keep doing the paperwork and reports, but there would be no more patrol time if a Chief is hired.

Zimmerman found the Council member's thoughts interesting, but is most interested in police patrolling the community. He is on the Budget & Finance Committee and a part of the Union Negotiations Team and echoes Councilman Bertram's comments. This is an opportunity to look at options; save some money now and give the City some time and a Chief could be added later. If a chief is added now the salary would be on the high end and the City really needs to look at the numbers and the benefits; not pride. We absolutely need police, but do we need a Chief. This is an opportunity we hadn't planned on or looked for.

It was asked if the City is demanding/asking for 24/7 coverage.

The email from Chris Stanley was discussed.

Thompson asked if the County has a cost to continue doing the transcription and reports. Dickhaus stated the fee has not yet been determined.

It was stated that the solution maybe to continue having the County do the transcription and reports, continue with three full-time police officers and one part-time officer and not go back to what it was.

Dickhaus commented that the time spent in Paynesville has been very positive. He can attest to the time Kortlever must have spent with all the data entry and that clerical staff is very important. It was unfortunate that Kortlever was loaded down with records and reports.

Thompson stated that he is not dictating where a person should live.

It was commented that if the County continues doing the paper work it frees up the City Hall staff.

It was further stated that even when the County comes with a cost, it won't equal what the City paid Kortlever.

Schmitz interjected that Kortlever wanted to keep the officers on the road and therefore he took on the paper work.

Dickhaus mentioned that the data entry is time consuming. Kortlever took on the data entry roll because it was easier than training three people.

It was stated that the County wouldn't charge even half of the past Chief's wages. The Chief's wages were \$85,000.00 and a clerical staff person would be an additional \$30,000.00. The City is experiencing a decrease in LGA and so taxes would have to be increased.

It was interjected that there is not a need for a police clerical person. There was some discussion on wages, police budget, and the union impact on them. Hiring outside the City and promoting within was discussed.

Thompson stated that having a Police Chief gives the City a marketing tool especially with the Hwy. 23 Bypass opening. We must have faith in our community; now is not the time to give up and contract out for this position.

It was affirmed to keep the police and patrolling, but not spend the money. It was interjected that the Chief's wages are included in the budget.

Promoting from within was discussed and the implications of such with the unions.

It was questioned how the Council sees what is best for the City and its long term options. It was suggested to hold off on hiring a Chief now as it could be filled later; don't spend the money the City doesn't have.

It was stated that the ultimate goal is effective community policing. It was stated that if the Chief is replaced and the County continues to do the clerical the City gains more community policing.

It was suggested to look at the coverage and how well we can do it efficiently.

Thompson stated it all comes back to the unions and the Council couldn't control that. He stated he is not ready to give up any more control. The Council can't make any formal decisions tonight as it is a Working Session.

One Council member expressed that he would not support hiring within or a clerical person as could cost this City about \$130,000.00. It seems that a decision has been made and that he would not support the process.

Another Council member expressed his appreciation in all Council members voicing their thoughts and felt this meeting and discussion were warranted. He applauded those citizens who came and observed. He stated the more we are all informed the better off we all are.

Beavers asked to hear public comment from those in attendance. It was suggested that the persons in attendance talk to the Council members in person.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

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Renee Eckerly, City Administrator