

MINUTES
Warrenton City Commission
Work Session – October 13, 2020

5:15 p.m.
Warrenton City Hall - Commission Chambers
225 S. Main
Warrenton, OR 97146

Mayor Balensifer called the work session to order at 5:15 p.m.

City Commissioners Present: Mayor Balensifer, Mark Baldwin, Tom Dyer, and Pam Ackley (via Zoom)

Excused: Rick Newton

Staff Present: City Manager Linda Engbretson, Finance Director April Clark, Accounting Technician Nik Haines, Public Works Director Collin Stelzig, Public Works Operations Manager Kyle Sharpsteen, Police Chief Mathew Workman, and City Recorder Dawne Shaw

Discussion on utility billing penalties and shutoffs – Ms. Engbretson reviewed the submitted agenda memo and a spreadsheet outlining utility billing penalties. She noted some people have made no payment at all since February or March. She stated some of the issues that are coming up because of nonpayment is if they are renters, it is becoming a burden on the landlord, and outlined a few examples. She noted what other cities are doing in regard to late fees and penalties, as well as rental accounts. Discussion followed on rental accounts. Ms. Engbretson stated what we really want to talk about tonight is where the commission is regarding setting a date to reinstate penalties. Brief discussion ensued on commercial accounts. Ms. Engbretson stated we want to start a payment plan, so people start paying. Commissioner Dyer suggested a monthly plan – if they stay on plan, no penalty; if they miss a payment, then charge them a penalty. Commissioner Baldwin suggested using the state Covid money for past due accounts; it was noted we cannot use Covid money to reimburse the city for lost revenue. Discussion continued.

Mayor Balensifer asked what staff is recommending; Ms. Engbretson stated staff would like to reinstate the normal process after the first of the year, with notification to past due customers. This will include payment arrangements. She noted agencies that can help people get caught up with utilities. Mayor Balensifer stated if people call us in good faith, we should not charge them a penalty; we should give them a payment plan. If folks do not call, they should be held to where they have until a certain point to get their ducks in a row. Ms. Engbretson and Ms. Clark stated they want to treat everyone the same (commercial and residential). Ms. Clark clarified that she would like the commission to pick a date to reinstate the normal process, and then we can communicate with people to make payment plans to bring their accounts current. Staff would like to start the first of the year. Commissioner Ackley agreed with Ms. Clark, we need to determine a date to implement the process. She also thinks that landlords should pay the utilities. There was agreement to reinstate the normal residential utility billing process on January 1; and

June 30 to have landlords be responsible for utilities if staff can work out the details. Ms. Clark suggested the landlord change be going forward with new tenants, not existing accounts – the commission agreed. After further discussion, the city will reinstate the normal process on February 1, to avoid causing stress over holidays. Consensus was to reinstate the normal residential billing process on February 1; to get a notice to large commercial accounts to bring accounts current or there will be penalties; and staff will explore a transition period for landlord/tenant billing options.

Discussion on Covid relief fund grant – Ms. Engbretson stated the city’s allocation was \$174,000; there is approximately \$150,000 left to spend. She stated we cannot use it for revenue loss, but we could give it to NOAH or Clatsop Community Action (CCA) to assist people with past utilities. Other suggestions were to assist with senior meal sites or business loans; staff does not recommend that city staff manage this. Ms. Engbretson noted staff’s suggestions – expand technology in the fire training room and the Community Center, which will help facilitate larger meetings with the Covid restrictions; installing touchless faucets; keyless entry doors; fire department service window to reduce walk-in traffic through the bay doors; more laptops for remote working; folding training tables to enable in-person training/webinars and meetings; and a large projection screen behind commission seats and a projector for better meeting viewing and communication. There was consensus on a projector for the chambers, and consensus on installing technology (audio/visual) in the Community Center, with improved internet service. There was also consensus on assistance through CCA for utilities and rent/mortgage. Ms. Clark noted the money must be spent by December 31.

There being no further business, Mayor Balensifer adjourned the work session at 5:59 p.m.

APPROVED:


Henry A. Balensifer III, Mayor

ATTEST:


Dawne Shaw, CMC, City Recorder