

CITY OF BURTON
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 1, 2010, 6:00 P.M., COUNCIL CHAMBERS
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The Meeting was called to order by Councilwoman Paula Zelenko at 6:05 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Haskins, Wells and Zelenko.

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

OTHERS PRESENT: G. Kray, DPW Director and G. Webster, City Clerk.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING: Discussion and possible recommendations concerning the following:

- 1. Water Meter Fee**
- 2. Backyard chickens**

PRESENTATION:

Mrs. Zelenko indicated discussion would be on the policy of the water meter fees. The Committee will also discuss backyard chickens.

Backyard chickens

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

John Stapish, PO Box 190134, said he feels this is a farm community and chickens should be allowed.

Vickie Morgan, 4195 Springfield, thanked the Committee for considering backyard chickens. She just wants them for the eggs. She spoke to a lot of neighbors and they do not have any problems.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION:

Mr. Wells said people are going to great lengths to disguise their chickens because we don't have an ordinance. He read a little bit about it on-line and doesn't see that it is a problem.

Mrs. Zelenko stated she did some research and talked to a few people. She has information on some ordinances and the raising of backyard chickens. She referenced a document "Chickens From Montgomery", a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio. They have chickens and someone from their city leadership wanted to outlaw them. There was an uprising of chicken lovers and one person, Valerie Taylor, gave her references and put this document together to answer questions about raising backyard chickens, the legality of changing the ordinance, public health risks, water quality run-off, green house gas emissions, predators, if they are messy and noisy, etc. Early lawmakers prohibited chickens because by the 50s and 60s, new subdivisions came in and people wanted to be more modern and sophisticated.

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Mrs. Zelenko said she gave the Committee ordinances from East Lansing, Ann Arbor, Traverse City, Ypsilanti, and Ingham County, Michigan. They all allow chickens. Some have different restrictions with regard to acreage and they vary with restrictions.

Mrs. Zelenko suggested putting this on the agenda for the next council meeting and Mr. Austin to draft an ordinance. The Committee needs to decide how strict we want to be, if we want to restrict the square footage, number of hens and prohibit roosters. There is also a document from Flint Urban Agricultural Report sponsored by the Land Bank and Ruth Mott. The City of Flint is considering bringing chickens back. Mrs. Zelenko addressed further an ordinance from Traverse City, Michigan.

Mr. Wells said he has concerns of enforcing the ordinance.

Mrs. Zelenko said enforcement would probably be the same as with a dog. She spoke to a gentleman from Animal Control and he said in his 20 years he hasn't had a complaint of anyone having backyard chickens.

Mr. Wells concurred with Mrs. Zelenko to send this to Mr. Austin.

Mrs. Zelenko said she would bring this up during Committee Report at tonight's Council Meeting and maybe they can have this on the next Council Meeting for approval. Another Committee Meeting is scheduled on the 15th. Along with the other agenda items, this wouldn't take very long.

Mr. Wells said he is all for it and doesn't see anything wrong with backyard chickens.

Mr. Haskins said he has some concerns with residents that don't want anything to do with chickens and will suddenly be living next to them. He read a couple of the ordinances from other communities and there are some good restrictions. Getting a permit and having it on file would be a good tracking record for enforcement. I don't think it is a bad idea having chickens in the community. He noticed that once you get too heavy on the chickens and it is not taken care of properly, the waste from the chicken creates an ammonia odor. If you had 6 chickens, how severe could that get?

Mrs. Zelenko said from what she has read, the amount of waste equates to that of a dog; about four chickens equal one dog.

Mr. Haskin said he would like to read on it some more and before it goes to the attorney, he would like to make sure we had all our input on it.

Mrs. Zelenko said she wanted a lot of opportunity for input. We can bring it up again during the next Legislative Committee meeting. If someone wanted to raise chicks they will go on sale at the tractor supply place probably the first of March.

Mr. Wells said he would like to hear input from other people at the Council Meeting tonight. We will get some complaints but I think they are going to be few and far between. We'll come back in our next legislative meeting and have some good information by that time.

Water Meter Fee

Mr. Wells said water rates have gone up, specifically sewer rates to people with wells. Some people want to put a meter on their well to make sure they are paying for what they are being charged. A lot of seniors are saying there is no way they use this much water. He spoke to Mr. Wright and he said he would be glad to come and talk to us again. He made this offer throughout the County that they will install water meters on wells with a cost varying from \$300 to \$500, depending on if they have to get into a crawl space, if they have a basement, and if the well is in the front yard. His rule is that once they are on, they stay on and they will not take it back off. Mr. Wells stated further, he would like in Council discussion tonight, to see where everyone is at with it. I don't have a problem with it and I feel everyone has the right to know they are getting what they pay for and not paying for more than they are using. Mr. Wright said it could be put on their bills every quarter over a period of 5 years to pay the meter off.

Mr. Kray said we have been giving out the meters since last September. Currently eight are in service now. He spoke to a resident this morning that is single and doesn't spend a lot of time at home. I estimate they probably use 200 to 300 cubic feet a month. They chose not to get the meter because of the potential drawbacks. A leaking toilet will run up a very high bill and you would eat up any savings that you would have had over that month. The County is saying once you install it, they will not allow you to go back to fixed rates.

Mr. Haskins stated Mr. Wright said if you insist on pulling the meter off, they will go by their highest reading.

Mr. Kray said we recommend to residents that purchase a meter, they have them installed after the external taps come off of their water lines. We sell lawn meters to residents that are on City water so they don't have to pay the sewer charge. You only pay the sewer charge on what goes down the drain. So we do recommend people install them after the taps have been pulled off for the outside so any washing of the car, filling the pool, and watering of the lawn would not go through the meter.

Mr. Wells said he does not like the idea of threatening with "if we put these on and it is higher you are not going back".

Mr. Kray said we run our own system.

Mr. Wells asked if the eight people that are on meters saved money significantly.

Mr. Kray said he does not have feedback on those accounts.

Mr. Wells said he would like the stats on those to see if there are in fact significant savings.

Mrs. Zelenko said from the calls she received, residents have said if I get this meter and put it on and it is more expensive, I want the option to take it off. According to the County, we can't do that.

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Mr. Kray said according to the County we couldn't do that. The city would allow them. The question is if the County would continue to bill the city at the highest monthly rate.

Mr. Haskins said Mr. Wright guaranteed it would be at the higher rate.

Mr. Kray said if someone lives alone and installs the meter, then in a couple of years decides to sell the home to a family of six, the family is paying more per quarter then if it stayed on flat rate.

Mr. Wells said we have to be fair to our residents. He is concerned about the seniors on fixed incomes and the majority of well users are seniors.

Mr. Kray said if you get a leak that goes undetected, you could have a \$1,000 water and sewer bill for a quarter.

Mr. Haskins suggested providing a pamphlet of information as an educational tool for residents that want to go with a meter.

Discussion continued regarding educating the public. Mr. Kray said residents would need a plumber to put the meter on. It is on our letter that they install it if after the outside taps have been pulled off the line so they don't have to pay the sewer charge. Mr. Wells also suggested informing residents if they are going to fill their pool to call DPW. Mr. Kray said this applies to City water users more so because we hook to the hydrants to do that, and we do offer that service.

Procedures and payments over a 5 year period was discussed. The Committee wants this looked at further and discussed again on the 15th. Mrs. Zelenko said the Finance Committee should be involved as well.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

jra