

**MINNEOLA CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP  
Minutes  
June 18, 2019 at 6:30 PM  
Minneola City Hall**

The Minneola City Council Workshop was called to order by Mayor Pat Kelley. Also present were Vice Mayor Pam Serviss, Councilor Lisa Jones, Councilor Kelly Price, Councilor Joe Saunders, Grant Watson (City Attorney), Mark Johnson (City Manager), and Kristine Thompson (Administrative Assistant).

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Pat Kelley.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE**

A moment of silence was observed and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Vice Mayor Pam Serviss.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.

**DISCUSSION ITEM**

**Item 1: Fire Assessment Program**

**Mark Johnson** introduced Sandy Walker, of Government Services Group, to present updated fire assessment program information to the city council for review and consideration.

**Sandy Walker**, Government Services Group, Inc., indicated she has been working with the City since the inception of the Fire Assessment Program and explained the following:

A fire assessment is a charge imposed against real property to pay for fire services, including anything up to the level of first responder, but does not include EMS. Florida Home Rule case law states, in order for a special assessment to be valid, it has to benefit properties and it has to be fairly and reasonably apportioned among properties. Government Services Group follows those criteria by performing an analysis on what is fair and reasonable to apportion the cost for the Fire Department. The historical demand methodology was used for Minneola's study, which is court tested and approved, and is widely adopted through the State of Florida. About 95% of the programs in the State of Florida use this methodology. The reason it is called "historical demand" is because the fire department's service calls are the driving factor. There are four (4) key components of the study, which are: service delivery, the fire department's budget, call data, and parcel data. The study indicated about 67.26% of the fire department's budget can be legally funded through the fire assessment fee.

46 **Sandy Walker**, discussed the various parcel types and what percent of calls each type of parcel  
47 receives. She indicated, compared to the 2009 study, residential calls went down 6.82%,  
48 commercial calls went up 2.81%, industrial and warehouse calls went up 0.87%, and they now  
49 included vacant land calls which are 4.38% of the calls. She explained these percentages caused a  
50 slight shift in rates and discussed the various assessment rate options. She also discussed options  
51 of how to send public notice of an assessment increase, timeline requirements to adopt fire  
52 assessment rates, and tax exempt properties.

53  
54 **Mayor Kelley** discussed rate options and asked for clarification about the public notice  
55 requirements.

56  
57 **Sandy Walker** stated the City would need to notice the public with any of the options because the  
58 assessment fee would change for non-residential properties.

59  
60 **Mayor Kelley** asked is the percentages charged be mixed among the various uses.

61  
62 **Sandy Walker** answered the percentages cannot be mixed and the rates have to stay proportioned  
63 among uses.

64  
65 **Mayor Kelley** inquired if the fee for vacant land is the same for all lot sizes and asked if agriculture  
66 is exempt.

67  
68 **Sandy Walker** indicated the fee for vacant lots are the same regardless of size and stated there is  
69 a statute that prevents agricultural exempt parcels, which are vacant or have non-residential  
70 buildings which are \$10,000 or less in value, or have pole barns from being charged a fire  
71 assessment fee.

72  
73 **Mayor Kelley** stated he would prefer to keep the residential rate at \$59.00, or 17% of the  
74 maximum allowable assessment, and add the fee for vacant land.

75  
76 **Vice Mayor Serviss** agreed and stated the rate should be kept the same, at 17%.

77  
78 **Councilor Jones** stated she believed the assessment is in place for a reason, which is to make sure  
79 the fire department is funded should something happen with the economy. She also stated the fire  
80 department has improved and excelled over the recent years and believes the rate should be  
81 increased to an amount such as \$65.00.

82  
83 **Councilor Price** stated she prefers the 17% option and suggested taxes are increasing due to  
84 property values increasing.

85  
86 **Councilor Saunders** asked if the methodology factored unincorporated calls.

87  
88 **Sandy Walker** indicated the study only included the calls within the City's limits.

89 **Councilor Saunders** expressed agreement with Councilor Jones and added that the intent of the  
90 fire assessment was to fund as much of the fire department as possible rather than relying on the  
91 ad valorem taxes of the properties. He stated the fire department should be specifically funded and  
92 asked what the total cost of the fire department was after the EMS calls were not considered.  
93

94 **Sandy Walker** indicated the 5-year average cost was approximately \$2,000,000 including the  
95 capital improvements not covered by impact fees.  
96

97 **Councilor Saunders** suggested if the fee is never raised, then they will never achieve the goal  
98 they set out to do.  
99

100 **Mayor Kelley** explained the options, under consideration, cannot be decided at the workshop.  
101

102 **Councilor Saunders** asked if the fire assessment fee is raised, should the ad valorem taxes be  
103 lowered.  
104

105 **Mayor Kelley** discussed the option of lowering the ad valorem taxes if the assessment fee is  
106 increased.  
107

108 **Councilor Jones** asked to see the calculations if the assessment fee was raised to \$65 for  
109 residential lots.  
110

111 **Mayor Kelley** asked how much relief that would show on the general fund.  
112

113 **Councilor Saunders** explained the concept of the assessment fee is to make sure the fire  
114 department has a solid fund source that can't be manipulated by the economy. He added that he  
115 does not believe raising the assessment fee and lowering the ad valorem taxes would accomplish  
116 anything and believes the assessment fee needs to be incrementally increased. He stated there  
117 should be a plan to get to 100% funding.  
118

119 **Mark Johnson** stated it is possible to advertise an amount suitable to the council and the council  
120 could lower it if desired.  
121

122 **Councilor Jones** stated she did not believe doubling the assessment fee would bode well, but  
123 something needs to be done.  
124

125 **Mayor Kelley** asked what staff's opinion was and if Mark would meet with the individual council  
126 members to help everyone understand more about the assessment. He also asked when the first  
127 budget meeting was going to be held.  
128

129 **Mark Johnson** stated a budget meeting date has not been set but plans to schedule a date soon.



**Sandy Walker** stated council could create a hardship exemption option which could be applied for annually. She added that the exemption would be for homestead properties which meet a set income threshold and the City could buy down their assessment fees either wholly or the difference of the assessment increase.

**Councilor Saunders** inquired who would pay for the buy down.

**Sandy Walker** explained the City would pay it.

**Mayor Kelley** asked if a letter could be written articulating the reasons for an increase in the assessment fee.

**Councilor Jones** believes people will make their decisions and does not believe a letter will change a whole lot of minds.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

**Daniel Smith**, City resident and planning and zoning commissioner, stated he believes the 25% option makes sense. He also expressed agreement with Councilor Saunders and Councilor Jones, citing that there is a good reason to increase the assessment fee and the City should consider making it a long-term goal. He stated he disagreed with creating a hardship exemption because it could be misused by homeowners.

**MOTION by Councilor Jones, SECONDED by Councilor Price to adjourn.**

**AYE:** Serviss, Jones, Kelley, Price, Saunders

**NAY:** None

**MOTION PASSED: 5-0**

*(Meeting adjourned at 7:22 P.M.)*

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Pat Kelley, Mayor

**ATTEST:**

  
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April Sheppard, Acting City Clerk

