

**Minneola Council Workshop
Minutes
January 14, 2020 at 6:30 PM
Minneola City Hall**

The City of Minneola Council Workshop was called to order by Mayor Pat Kelley. Also present were Vice Mayor Pam Serviss, Councilor Lisa Jones, Councilor Joe Saunders, Scott Gerken (City Attorney), Mark Johnson (City Manager), and Barbara Hollerand (City Clerk). Councilor Kelly Price was absent.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Kelley called the workshop to order at 6:36 p.m.

DISCUSSION ITEM

Item 1: Annual Fire Protection Special Assessment

Sandi Walker, consultant with Government Services Group, Inc., distributed a fire assessment program update handout. She provided background on the 2009 study and the City's implementation of the program in 2012. She spoke regarding case law requirements and historical demand methodology. She reminded council that the E.M.S. portion of the fire department budget cannot be funded by the special assessment. She stated that although vacant land has not been assessed in prior years, council could consider including those parcels this year. She stated that for schools, churches, and government structures, the current policy has exempted the tax-exempt space only, such as exempting a church sanctuary but not church office space. She said call data from 2017 and 2018 was analyzed, and 257 fire-related calls were identified.

Sandi Walker stated that \$350 per unit was the maximum assessment rate (100 percent) calculation for residential units. She said that properties on the tax roll as of June 1, 2020 would be subject to this year's assessment.

Sandi Walker reviewed the rate scenarios from the handout. She confirmed that rate percentages must be uniformly applied to each land use category such as residential, commercial, and vacant land. She spoke regarding the current residential rate of \$59, and she noted that \$61 is the revenue-neutral residential rate.

Council discussed information published on the T.R.I.M. notice.

Mark Johnson spoke regarding strategies for using the fire protection special assessment when the economy is flat or slowing down. He recommended assessing vacant land.

Council discussed increasing the assessment to 100 percent and assessing \$350 per residential unit.

46 **Laura Smith**, city resident, advocated for the full \$350 per residential unit.

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48 **Daniel Smith**, city resident, spoke regarding raising the assessment.

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50 **Mark Johnson** stated that the assessment was originally adopted as a hedge against falling
51 property values. He said if it is raised to 100 percent, it would only fund 67 percent of the
52 fire department's budget. He stated that the City will lose ad valorem taxes as property
53 values rise over time.

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55 **Councilor Jones** stated a concern that a downturn in the economy will impact fire services.
56 She recommended raising the rate to 100 percent or not assessing it at all.

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58 **Councilor Saunders** spoke regarding the economic circumstances at the time the
59 assessment was set. He said the council needs to make a policy decision as to whether it
60 wants to fund the fire department with the assessment.

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62 **Sandi Walker** spoke regarding other cities' policies. She said most cities use it to diversity
63 their revenue sources. She said Broward County has set the assessment at 100 percent, but
64 the approach by most cities is not "all or nothing."

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66 **Sandi Walker** spoke regarding implementing a hardship exemption and the qualification
67 process.

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69 **Mayor Kelley** asked for an analysis of 50 percent rates and \$199 residential rates. He asked
70 for hardship criteria.

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72 **Council** discussed the impacts of raising the assessment on the African Inland Mission.

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74 **Mayor Kelley** stated support for assessing vacant properties. He spoke regarding lowering
75 the millage rate in concert with raising the fire assessment.

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77 **Mark Johnson** spoke regarding compounding and long-term impacts of adopting a higher
78 special assessment.

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80 **Mayor Kelley** spoke regarding the timing of changes to the assessment.

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82 **Chief Jan Otero** spoke regarding the potential for the categories to shift over time and the
83 resulting impact on assessment revenues.

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85 Municipal Service Taxing Units were discussed.

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87 **Vice Mayor Serviss** asked to excuse Councilor Price.

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89 **Consensus** was to excuse Councilor Price.

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91 **Council** discussed meeting again in April to consider additional information.

Sandi Walker stated that preliminary tax values would be available at the end of June. She said the tax roll is sent to the County at the end of July and incorporated into the T.R.I.M. notices. She proposed that the council adopt the initial resolution in May.

Mayor Kelley indicated support for setting the millage rate at 5.99 mills and proposing a higher assessment, with room to adjust downward.

Vice Mayor Serviss spoke regarding educating the public.

Sandi Walker stated that high rates may increase the likelihood that the City could be sued. She recommended not exceeding 90 percent of the maximum rate. She said \$206 is the County's rate.

Council consensus was to schedule the next discussion for April.

Mark Johnson committed to championing whatever policy direction that council chose.

Mayor Kelley supported keeping the City's rate lower than the county rate.

Sandi Walker recommended a new study every 3-5 years.

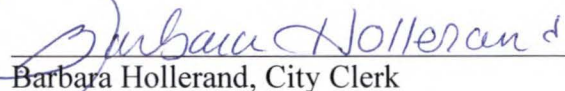
(Meeting adjourned at 8:13 P.M.)

ATTEST:





Pat Kelley, Mayor



Barbara Hollerand, City Clerk