

Zoom meeting

**Observer:** Betty Hayford

**Aldermen present:** All

**Media present:** not known

**Meeting started:** 5:05 pm

**Meeting ended:** 10:30 pm

**Announcements.** The Mayor opened the meeting with an update on the Covid19 situation and a report of a zoom meeting with Anthony Fauci and other Mayors throughout the US. Evanston and Illinois are moving into the next phase with opportunity to go out more, using great care. The infection rate in Evanston is lower than neighboring communities. Contact tracing is operational in Evanston. The lesson of the 1918 pandemic is that you can not become complacent and have to take precautions even after infection slows. He recognized the passing of Hecky Powell to Covid 19, and praised his contributions to Evanston. Other Aldermen offered condolences.

City Manager Erika Storlie informed the Council of the death of former City Manager Joel Asprooth, who had recently sent her a gracious note. She introduced a presentation from Betty Boggs, Director of Connections for the Homeless, who reported on City efforts to provide shelter for the homeless. Connections is working closely with the City and both have provided significant funding. Connections has hired 27 new staff and is providing housing in hotels, meals and support services. She said the goal is to provide case management to allow clients to move out of hotels and into independent housing.

Storlie asked Lawrence Hemingway to report on summer programs and beaches. The plan is to open beaches on July 1, with continued social distancing. Summer camps will start on July 6, with reduced fees and enrollment. There will be some free programs for kids. Senior programs will probably not re-open in the summer. Plans are being made to expand the Farmers Market.

Clerk Reid reported citizen comments had been received on the Dutch Elm program, urging support. He announced an informational meeting on May 27 at 6:00 pm explaining procedures for running in local elections next spring. The State legislature passed legislation expanding access to mail in ballots and establishing November 3 as a state holiday so schools will be closed and schools will be available for polling places.

**Public comment.** 11 comments. 4 supported elm tree program; 2 supported opening restaurants and 1 opposed; 2 asked council to reduce expenses; 1 supported housing and 1 supported fire fighters.

**Special orders of business. (SP1). 2020 budget update.** Erika Storlie introduced additional staff work on budget, aided by Hitash Desai and Kate Lewis-Larkin. Projected revenue decrease is still \$10 million and could be higher. Expenses have been cut through layoffs, furloughs and other reductions. It is hoped that FEMA and other agencies will reimburse some Covid expenses. The current anticipated deficit is \$2 million.

**(SP2) Civic Center Planning.** Storlie explained staff is looking into a downtown location for city staff, with particular attention to the Library third floor. They are looking for space for about 200 staff. Wilson expressed interest in this option and looked forward to getting more details. Fiske also encouraged

development of a downtown option since the space in the Civic Center is too large and poorly designed for office use, as well as in need of extensive maintenance. Board interest was expressed in the library space and the potential city staff would serve as a stimulus for the business district. Storlie cautioned that discussions with the library board are at a preliminary stage and continued investigation is needed. The effective move to working on line suggests that flexible arrangements are possible.

**(SP3) City Manager Recruitment Update.** Hagerty outlined the suspension of the City Manager search process because of the Covid situation. He described the excellent work carried out by Interim City Manager Storlie, her success in overseeing the city response to the pandemic and addressing budget and other issues, her long experience in multiple positions in the city. He pointed out that the pandemic has interrupted the recruitment process and complicated the search. He urged Council to consider making her appointment permanent. An extensive discussion followed. Several aldermen supported the appointment, noting the fact the Erika has extensive experience in Evanston and understanding of Evanston as well as many aspects of city government. Others praised her calm and thorough response to the pandemic. Suffredin, and then Fleming, urged caution and reminded colleagues that they have committed to an open process that engaged citizen input. They urged the continuation of the search as planned.

It became clear that there was no clear path forward. Counsel Kelly Gandurski explained what city ordinance and council rules allowed. It was agreed to put the issue for Introduction at the next council meeting. In the meantime, aldermen will consult their constituents on characteristics desired for city manager and how the process might proceed in light of the new circumstances since February.

**(SP4) Resolution to Re-Open Restaurants on May 29.** Staff presented guidelines for opening restaurants for outdoor dining. There are extensive requirements, and few restaurants actually have outdoor patios or other space. Most sidewalks are not spacious enough to allow sidewalk tables. It may be possible to block streets or utilize parking spaces but details need to be worked out. The ordinance passed 9-0.

**Consent agenda.** The consent agenda from Administration and Public Works was presented and passed 9-0.

Items taken off the consent agenda were considered. First, Approval of the BMO Harris Amazon Credit Card activity. It was moved and seconded to approve. The motion passed 8-0, Suffredin abstaining.

(A5) Approval of contract for 2020 Parking lot Improvements. Fleming asked why it was necessary to do this work at this time. Dave Stoneback said the work was overdue and postponement could result in damage to vehicles and additional costs. The motion passed 5-4, with Suffredin, Fleming, Fiske and Braithwaite voting no.

(A6) Approval to purchase fungicide for staff to treat elm trees. This sparked discussion about the previous vote to divide outside vendor treatment over two years and an attempt to revisit the previous vote. It was noted several times that this purchase did not have anything to do with that vote. The previous vote involved an outside vendor and this vote was for fungicide for city staff to use in their separate portion of the program. Eventually the vote was taken and the motion passed 9-0.

Alderman Rainey made a referral to Administration and Public Works to inject all elm trees this year.

(A7) Approval of funding to demolish a vacant unsafe building at 2012 Maple Avenue. This involved use of an Illinois grant program to demolish buildings. This building has been vacant for many years. Questions were raised about the ownership and tax status of the building and the process of recommending demolition grants, including who will benefit by the action. Eventually the motion was tabled to provide more information to Council about the property.

(A11) Adoption of ordinance to Amend the Amusement Tax to include online streaming services and increase the tax on venues with capacity over 1500 audience members. Braithwaite asked for more information. Staff reported that only Welsh-Ryan Arena had a larger capacity but questions were asked about Space Open concerts. Aldermen asked for more information about the impact. The motion passed, for Introduction, 7-2, Fleming and Braithwaite voting no. Staff will provide more information for the next vote.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 pm.