

Minutes of the Public Works and Public Utilities Committee for Tuesday, July 6, 2010.

The meeting was called to order by Alderman Million at about 7:15 p.m. Present were Mayor Grenke, Aldermen Bormann, Orsini, Simmons, Parmeley, and Angell. Also attending were Lynn Behrns, Mike Forsee, Phil Hoffman, Mark Mustain, Larry Dudgeon, Merritt Beck, Darryl Spauldin, Don Bobbitt, Nancy Jeffries, Sandy Buck, Janet Holdeman, Iris Crystal, Connie Kelly, Cindy White, Jack Hargis, Don Bobbitt, James Smith and several others.

Control of Feral Cats

The Committee entered into an informal hearing and discussion concerning whether to amend the City Code to allow for spay, neuter, and release of feral cats (who would have no specific owner).

Buck presented data about the number of cats caught last year and their disposition. Only about 36 cat licenses have been issued so far, though last year the final total was in the 60s. Million asked if all the neutered cats were also vaccinated. Kelly (of 869 Doty) said “yes”, this was handled when trapped cats were taken to the vet. The shots should be good for three years.

Parmeley asked if there were any other colonies than the one near Adams and Tidball. Kelly was not certain but doubted it. She said that this presentation was prompted because she was told by Buck of several complaints from neighbors. Buck had told her that future complaints would cause the City to start putting out traps. Kelly told Orsini that the cats were only vaccinated for rabies and not for feline leukemia or other transmissible feline diseases. Testing for leukemia costs about \$24 and results in many false positives.

Parmeley questioned how changing the present ordinance helps us. Kelly said it would avoid time and labor of trapping, reduce property damage from single strays, and would not have the expense of euthanasia. Responsibility for a “colony” builds up citizen interest and oversight. It means that all the cats have rabies shots. The territoriality of the colony works to limit total cat population in the area. There should be fewer nuisance calls. The neutered cats would be less noisy and less likely to fight each other. Kelly and others had brochures to distribute and could provide more for distribution at City Hall

An advocate told Million that her group had a 20-minute video available. There is also a 5-minute short video summary they could provide to the aldermen. She described a large city where cat population declined from about 300 cats to almost zero in ten years by natural attrition. Advocates claimed that this is the cheapest and most humane solution.

Kelly said that her group does not return any diseased cats to the wild. They also try to find homes to adopt kittens younger than 8 weeks. She told Million that the present colony has grown from three to ten, but had been as large as twelve. Cindy White (of 816 Doty) said that the Adams Street colony existed even before some of the neighbors start caretaking efforts.

Angell read into the record a letter to the Board from former alderman Janet Holdeman. Holdeman wrote that the present ordinance was adopted after extensive study and reflection. She felt no changes were needed. Conditions on the edge of town are different from interior residential and commercial areas. She feels that changes could open the door for some people to manipulate their way around rules and create uncontrollable nuisances. Changes could undercut the specific limits to the maximum number of dogs and cats allowed per household. She did not believe that support for changes went beyond a small group of activists. Maybe such a project was better suited to large cities with many abandoned properties—like Detroit. Feral cats conflict with residents and properties in neighborhoods with denser populations. Ultimately, she thinks this is not a cat problem, but one of ignorant or irresponsible people. Spauldin spoke about how many people drop off

cats in rural areas. He differentiated between feral cats, barn cats, and house pets.

Jack Hargis (of 329 S. Hickman) said he had helped Kelly, but noted that his own neighbors had at least five cats that ran at large.

Holdeman followed up her letter, saying the situation does not support change. Cats cause real damage to yards and vehicles. If they have no owner, who is responsible? If you feed them, have you become responsible? She noted the present colony is on Andrew Stanton's pasture with his permission. They are not in a back yard. There have been issues of feeding cats in the street, of providing constructed shelters. Kelly said she has stopped both practices. Holdeman would like to see the cats moved away from stormsewer inlet grates.

Orsini questioned the "vacuum effect" when colonies die back, or if colonies are moved to rural sites. Volunteers may move or lose interest. They may not be as successful as Sandy in initial trapping strays. If the City allowed this, how is Buck able to enforce the present Code with justice and attention to the complaints of others?

An advocate said that there are probably many Centralian's feeding stray cats. This project would be a way for them to properly assume care.

Parmeley suggested using present colony as a test case for eighteen months. Kelly and Buck could keep statistics. Orsini said she thought a "pilot" program might be valuable. Million said he respected the work of past aldermen in fashioning the present ordinance. It might be disproportionate to amend the Code because of one complaint. He agreed that the pasture area was unique.

Jeffries (of 801 Tidball) said there had been "many" complaints. Some of neighbors just don't want to get involved. Kelly responded that some of her past practices had been discontinued. Jeffries said that staff had conferred with April Wilson, the City Prosecutor, who thought that the ordinance was clear. A cat was either owned or a stray. With owners there are limits. (The code does not require cats to be leached). An audience member asked what if ten people each "adopt" three feral cats?

Bobbitt recommend keeping the ordinance as is. He asked the committee to not just postponed making a decision. Spauldin had similar sentiments. Angell asked why Kelly had changed practices? Kelly said she had responded to complaints and neighbors' feelings. Parmeley asked Beck's opinion about dividing up "ownership" of the colony, but the discussion trailed elsewhere.

Parmeley moved that the City have an official test project, not to exceed 18 months. Orsini seconded the motion. Parmeley and Orsini voted in favor; Angell, Bormann, Million, and Simmons voted against; and the motion failed.

Million asked about limited enforcement of the current Code. He suggested for the time being that Buck work with the project advocates. Kelly said she and others could adapt (as they have already done). They would try to address all neighborhood complaints. Another advocate said she was happy to be publicizing the problem and hoped to achieve more spay and neutering.

Committee discussion of Wilson's opinion. Dudgeon said this was not to be taken as a special directive, just a method of approach. Wilson only decides on cases presented to her, so Buck has flexibility up to that point. Committee satisfied with that approach.

Electric Department

Committee reviewed the activity report and future work schedule for the Electric Department. The aldermen discussed problem with electric meters damaged during the June power outage. Mustain said he ordered about 100 replacement transpondits and is reprogramming them for installation (about a two day process). Since these meters totally lost their readings, the billing clerks are estimating usage from past averages, where available. These come from periods that should yield bills that are lower than would otherwise accrue to customers. For customers with the fried meters, the estimates will apply to all June and the first week or so of July. Million asked if staff had received complaints about high electric bills. Behrns said a few, but reminded aldermen and customers that this is the hottest weather in a long time. Last summer was mild and this spring was mild. June had long stretch of high temperatures that are more normal. This is compounded by people having grown accustomed to feeling comfortable without high power use.

Mustain said the new substation is going fine, but rain has somewhat slowed work. He said that if the new substation had in service it would have been easy to switch the whole city to it, and the outage would have been much shorter—perhaps only an hour.

Behrns noted that City tried to contact the two vendors who always submitted bids to buy scrap metal, but one vender was out of touch. Because of the large weight of scrap, we will put an ad in next week's paper.

Mayor Grenke thanked the electric crew for their outage response on a late Friday afternoon.

Street and Sanitation Department

Committee reviewed the activity report and future work schedule for the Street and Sanitation Department.

Hoffman reported on what repair work was needed for Brick Street. He did not think this should be a total rebuild, just replacement of base in patches and on a shorter strip. However, the cost would be higher than a simple overlay, perhaps as high as \$7,000. Behrns was not sure that funding could support this expense. Hoffman noted that bid quantities were just estimates. He said it was likely that we can just do temporary patches and schedule a full repair for next year. Committee was okay with that approach.

Committee discussed plastic recycling. Hoffman presented an analysis of costs. Any payment to Ryan, the vender, was balanced by cost cuts from needing less labor (sorting and bailing), avoided tipping fees, and saving in hauling back aggregate and rock. Returning to Civic Recycling would mean cutting collection of several varieties of plastic. Our product is dirtier and somewhat more problematic to vender. Committee also discussed whether to pay per load or per month. They decided that it might be cheaper with the latter. Ryan is not in short supply for materials and has new employee expenses, which is driving his request for payment. Bormann moved to let Ryan invoice the City \$250 per month to take plastics, starting with July. Simmons seconded the motion. All aldermen voted in favor and the motion passed.

The Electric Department has removed ballasts from 105 N. Allen. The next step in demolition is for Hoffman's crew to remove asbestos floor tile.

Water and Sewer Department

Committee reviewed the activity report and future work schedule for the Water and Sewer Department.

Forsee told Mayor Grenke that his department hasn't been using the sewer camera regularly in the last month. They have had other pressing projects. They have been able from the camera and surface studies to find several significant points of infiltration—mostly on customer's service lines.

Forsee presented a corrected bid tabulation for a replacement pickup truck. (The original Chevrolet had bid

a club cab and Ford had doubled the cost of equipment bins.) Forrest bid \$35,825, and Machens Ford bid \$34,158. Committee discussed this at length and noted that the bids were higher than budgeted. A one-ton pickup is necessary because of it does much towing work. Several aldermen were skeptical of the diesel engine. They requested staff present prices with for a gas engine option and horse-power comparisons for next week. Their feeling was a longer use life would be overcome by higher maintenance costs (a need for engine repair because of not enough highway miles and much idling.). Forsee said that despite heavy use, the present truck only put on 12-13,000 miles per year.

Staff is working with Cargill (new owners of the former Farmland Coop elevators) to find their best option for sewage disposal. This would be a long distance for a small force main and tough to get an easement. More likely, Cargill would use a tanker truck to carry a limited amount of wastewater to the northwest treatment plant. They would be a regular City account and would supply sample testing of water from their on-site boiler. (The plant also has a pond for domestic sewage).

Other

Behrns reported that MPUA and the four-city group are tweaking the contract for MPUA to secure the ARRs for the Prairie State power plant project. Another, later contract will address on-going FTR management.

Committee members told Behrns that they desired individual microphones for the proposed city council chamber's PA system. Bid specifications and requests should be out soon.

Angell requested adding an agenda item for the General Government/Public Safety Committee. He wished to discuss pedestrians walking in streets and impeding traffic, even when sidewalks were present.

Mayor Grenke said he felt good that police had stopped his son and issued a warned about the way passengers were riding in back of a pickup.

Million reported on his good experience with firefighters during an EMS situation. He also appreciated the police officer who attended to upset children and was able to effectively comfort them while the EMS responders did their work.

There were no further items to be presented, and the meeting adjourned at about 9:25 p.m.