

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE PRINCETON CITY COUNCIL HELD ON
JANUARY 25, 2023, 7:00 P.M.**

1. Call to Order - Roll Call

Mayor Thom Walker called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. Councilors present were Vicki Hallin, Jenny Reynolds, Jack Edmonds and Jeff Reynolds. Others present: City Administrator Michele McPherson, Community Developer Planner Stacy Marquardt, Clerk Shawna Jenkins, Police Chief Todd Frederick, Public Works Director Bob Gerold, Technology Services Manager Ed Yost, Attorney Damien Toven, Liquor Store Manager Dylan Donner and Public Utility Manager Keith Butcher. Absent was Wastewater Plant Manager Chris Klinghagen and Fire Chief Ron Lawrence.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Agenda Additions / Deletions

HALLIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED. EDMONDS SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

4. Consent Agenda

- 4.1. Police Sergeant Ryan VanDenHeuvel Step Increase effective 2-1-24.
- 4.2. Police Officer Nicole Josephes Step Increase effective 2-4-24.
- 4.3. Princeton Public Utilities January 24th, 2023, Agenda Packet
- 4.4. Approve Gambling Permit for Christ Our Light April 12th Raffle.
- 4.5. Public Works Capital Improvement Purchases
 - 4.5.1. Sewer Camera
 - 4.5.2. Snow Blower Parts for Repair
 - 4.5.3. Library Fire Alarm System
- 4.6. Police Purchase request for Radio Equipment and Radar Units for Squads
- 4.7. Accept Retirement of Fire Chief Ron Lawrence effective March 1, 2024
- 4.8. ~~Approve Code of Conduct City Boards and Commissions~~

J Gerold said she would like to remove 4.8 Code of Conduct and place that under New Business as 7.4A.

HALLIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE AMENDED CONSENT AGENDA. EDMONDS SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

5. Open Forum; *public comment on items not on the agenda. Each speaker is limited to three (3) minutes. The Council will not discuss legal matters.*

6. Old Business

7. New Business

- 7.1. PFRD Support Petition - Dustin Akers

Dustin Akers 4159 70th Ave, stated that on January 19th, 2024, he started a petition as a concerned citizen in support of the Princeton Fire & Rescue on their journey to obtain safer working conditions and better leadership. As of today, the petition has 863 signatures. The petition contained important details such as safety issues within the department, mismanagement of city funds, inadequate leadership from our city leaders, and slow response times from fire chief of fixing essential equipment that our firefighters desperately need in order for them to remain safe and keep our community safe.

Dusty the Dumpster has proven that our city is resilient, engaged, and supportive of Princeton, Princeton Public Safety, and ready for a new generation of leadership. This coalition of people represents a positive message of strength that I'm proud to be a part of within this community.

Fire Chief Ron Lawrence thank you for your 29 years of service in the fire department. I wish you the best in your future endeavors moving forward. In 2018, Lawrence became the first Fire Chief of Princeton Fire & Rescue to become a part-time city paid position. Before that, members of the department were able to elect their own fire chief every two years.

In the retirement letter that Lawrence sent over to the city, it stated that he was retiring from Princeton Fire and Rescue's Department. What does this mean for the fire department moving forward as he did not resign from the city position? Will he have a new role within the city and step down from the fire chief city paid position and if so, what are his roles?

Earlier this month, our community was informed of a workplace assessment that would cost taxpayers up to 17 thousand dollars. According to Assistant Chief Josh Vacarri, "14-17 thousand dollars would have been more than enough to cover the repairs that the fire department desperately needs and have been asking for the past year." In my opinion as a concerned citizen, the department and city council need an audit. Where is all the taxpayer's money going to? Something needs to be done about this sooner rather than later. On February 8th, 2024, a majority of Princeton firefighters will be turning in their pagers unless change happens now.

In conclusion, thank you for allowing this time to present my concerns behind the petition and I look forward to building a better future for this community. Moving forward, the community has a few questions that we would like answered promptly:

- 1) How will the new fire chief be selected?*
- 2) How long will the term be?*
- 3) What are the city's plans to prevent this from happening in the future?*

McPherson answered Mr. Akers questions.

Chief Lawrence is retiring as Fire Chief and as a member from the Princeton Fire and Rescue Department. Whether he will still have the role as Emergency Manager has not yet been determined. The city council is determining what the job descriptions will be, as it was originally a joint position. It is possible that the council may choose to place him in the part-time role of emergency manager.

In terms of taxpayer funds, state law requires that cities be audited annually. If anyone is interested in that, information is available to anyone who would like review those documents.

McPherson said that a new Fire Chief will be hired in the same manner as any employee is hired. A Job description will be approved, the ad will be approved to be advertised and applicants accepted to be interviewed. The council appoints a committee to interview the applicants and provide recommendations to the city council. Who will be on that committee has not yet been determined.

In regard to what are the city's plans to prevent this from happening in the future, recommendations from the workplace assessment will be put in place.

Audience Comments

Elizabeth Fearon 208 9th Ave S said she feels that the Fire Department should be able to vote who will be the fire chief.

Jessica Wies 1111 Triangle Court said she has a brother and sister on the department. She questioned why Administrator McPherson is not the one to perform the workplace assessment.

McPherson responded it is essential to have a neutral third party to hear each person's concerns and assure that their comments are confidential. This company is very well versed in these types of assessments.

Weis said she wants a date when the gear is going to be fixed. McPherson responded that the Mayor visited with those present at the Fire Department and made a list of gear that needs to be fixed or replaced.

B Gerold stated that he went over to the Public Safety building and went into the storage room. He said he found a lot of equipment in the storage room that could be used to fix or replace damaged gear. He added that when he was on the fire department, it was his responsibility to inspect his gear and if something failed, he went to his Captain. Captains as well as the Chief and Assistant Chief have keys to that storage room.

J Gerold said that city hall staff nor councilors were not aware of these gear issues until the letter from OSHA was received. She asked if at any point did the Assistant Chief, Captains, or the Chief bring them into the storage room to get their gear replaced. Assistant Chief Vaccari responded that much of the gear in storage is damaged or out of date.

Walker stated he was at the last two Fire Executive meetings. While there was some discussion on a couple of truck issues, at no time was there any discussion on issues with personal protective gear. He only found out about the gear concerns on social media, and then the letter from OSHA. In the list of items he received, there was a total of 21 items. Turnout gear that had some wear, facemasks and helmet parts. As he understands, those parts are all in the storage room. The Captains, Assistant Chief and Chief all have keys to that room. Yes, not all may be new, but there would likely be something in much better condition to be used until new parts could be ordered and received or repaired.

Susan Julson Wyanett Township asked if the Chief is not available, can the council put someone else in place as Chief. Attorney Toven replied that they cannot as the Chief is employed until he retires March 1st, and it is a hired position.

Dan Ryden, 5469 18th St stated the gear in the storage room is all damaged or expired. It took three months to get his mask replaced.

Dusin Akers asked why Councilor Gerold recently stepped down from the Fire Advisory Board. Walker responded that he asked her to. If there are personality clashes, someone else may be a better fit. It was done to see if the Board may function better.

Akers asked who will choose which duties the new Chief will have. McPherson replied that the Council reviews and approves all job descriptions.

Edmonds does not know why they have an issue with a neutral third party doing the workplace assessment. Toven reiterated that this law firm is tremendously experienced in these types of issues and have done this for a long list of people. They talk with everyone confidentially, put all that information together and report back to both the Fire Department and the City Council so the issues can be addressed.

Akers stated that the Fire Department members should be given the choice to elect their Fire Chief. Walker responded that back in 2018, the Fire Advisory Board came to the council with the recommendation to hire a part time chief.

Dan Hiller, 2863 50th Ave stated that there was supposed to be an ad hoc committee formed to review the Chief's performance. McPherson said she was not aware of that until she was searching through the files in preparation for the workplace assessment. It is something that the previous administration did not follow through with.

Dave Bauer, 6th Ave. said the community should not have to raise funds to fix these issues. He does not trust anyone here.

Walker stated that that Lawrence would have nothing to do with the fire department once he retires March 1st, which includes no oversight. Even if he were to move into the emergency management position, he would not be involved with the Fire Department in any way.

Edmonds added that the community has commented on their lack of trust. That gave us no other choice than to hire a neutral third party to do the assessment.

Toven said in regard to Lawrence's raise, he was one of 15 employees that received a step increase on that agenda. Cities have a wage scale with a set number of steps, and employees are eligible for a step increase yearly until the max step is reached.

Samantha Fergus, 807 11th Ave. asked if she could start a petition to start an ad-hoc committee. Walker again encouraged everyone in the fire department to participate in the workplace assessment. Members can choose not to participate, but if the assessment determines this additional committee is needed, that will be put in place.

Matt Johnson, Baldwin Township asked why a workplace assessment was being done, when the department has told the council what they want.

Dan Hiller questioned if the command vehicle that the Chief currently drives will stay with the Fire Department.

Chad Heitschmidt stated that he was the member voted by the fire department to be on the ad-hoc committee. The request for it to be a part-time position did not come from the fire department, as they did not want this. In the past, if someone wasn't working out as a Chief, they could vote for someone else after the 2-year term.

Dan Hiller questioned if Lawrence had the credentials to be an emergency manager.

David Meyer, 4540 260th Isanti said he does not live here, but started the Dusty the Crusty Dumpster group. The firefighters just want a chief that is going to stand behind them. The group is working to raise funds to help the department. If the firefighters walk, he wondered what the residents will do.

Ken Murray, Wyanett Board member asked how much Wyanett owes for fire service. McPherson said she does not have those numbers with her. In the past, the townships just saw a 3% increase each year, without using the actual costs to run the department. In addition, the formulas used are very complicated and was not well documented. Murray believes Wyanett was overcharged by approximately \$35,000.

Walker said with the way it was done in the past and not much documented, he does believe there was an error in the billing. McPherson added that she will work on those numbers this weekend. There is a Fire Board meeting on February 7th and the packet will include that information.

Walker added that all comments were important, and they have been heard. They want this issue to be fixed as well and they are anxious to get the workplace assessment results. There will be a new Fire Chief. He hopes everyone will stay and answer fire calls.

Ken Murray stated that the Council is capable of fixing the issues, and there is no need to spend money on an outside firm to do the assessment.

A resident asked why Chief Lawrence was not at the meeting tonight. Toven responded that he was excused from the meeting as this is not something any employee should have to go through.

7.2. Res. 24-06 - Approve Donation from the Eddy Family Foundation to the Fire Department

McPherson advised that the Fire Department received a \$4000 donation from the Eddy Family Foundation. They generously donate to both the Fire and Police Department every year. The department is very thankful for their generosity.

J GEROLD MOVED TO APPROVE REOLUTION 24-06. HALLIN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

7.3. Ord. 847 - 2024 Fee Schedule Amendment (Building Permit Fees) - FIRST READING

Marquardt reported that with the change to MNSPECT for our building permits, we do need to amend our building permit fees. MNSPECT will begin handling the permits for Princeton on February 5th.

HALLIN MOVED TO INTRODUCE ORDINANCE 847. EDMONDS SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

7.4. Ord. 848 - Title 2 Amendment - Board & Commission Code of Conduct - FIRST READING

7.4 A – Code of Conduct for Boards and Commissions – Moved from Consent Agenda.

J Gerold said she feels there are a few details and missing information in the code of conduct, so she would like both of these items to be tabled.

J GEROLD MOVED TO TABLE THE CODE OF CONDUCT AND ORDINANCE 848. HALLIN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

7.5. Bill List

HALLIN MOVED TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 23 AND 25, 2024 CHECK REGISTERS CONTAINING CHECKS 87718 TO 87781 IN THE AMOUNT OF \$1,110,272.45, AND THE PAYROLL ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS AS NOTED ON THE PAY PERIOD 2 TRANSMITTAL REGISTER IN THE AMOUNT OF \$110,586.88 AND PAY PERIOD 2 CHECK REGISTER IN THE AMOUNT OF \$258,375.66. J GEROLD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

7.6. City Administrator Bi-Weekly Report

McPherson reported on her observations and information since the last update on January 9, 2024:

Baldwin Township

Attorneys Bourgeois and Toven, Mayor Walker, Community Development Planner Marquardt and McPherson attended the Baldwin Township pre-hearing phone conference on January 19. Administrative Law Judge Jessica Palmer-Denig presided over the meeting. Representing the Township were attorneys Couri and Ruppe. No Township supervisors were in attendance.

The hearing was scheduled for March 7, 2024 with a secondary date of March 8 in the event testimony and public comment runs long. The hearing will be held in person at the Baldwin Townhall and will start at 9:30 am, with the Township presenting its information and witnesses first. All preliminary evidence and witness list(s) must be submitted to the ALJ by February 29 (electronically) with hard copies provided at the meeting. Public comment will take place the evening of March 7, starting at approximately 5:30 pm. The City and Township are to cross-share information in addition

to providing it to the ALJ; the ALJ set the expectation that the counsels will be talking to each other up to the hearing date as needed.

Development

Staff met with Scott Moeller regarding the potential development of a parcel currently located in the Township that he will be closing on at the end of the month. Utilities will need to be extended. There was also discussion of the possibility of reviving the School District project.

Staff also met with the new owner of Trinity Crossing regarding possible financial assistance with interior upgrades and signage. The city still has some Small Cities Development funding that could be used for this purpose.

Finance

Accountant Hoheisel, Senior Accountant Hodge and McPherson met with Lynn Cornwell regarding investments. We have another meeting scheduled for early April after we complete our cash flow analysis.

Fire Executive Board

McPherson, Mayor Walker and Councilor Reynolds attended the January 15 Fire Executive Board meeting. The agenda was long, but topics of interest included the sale of Engine 1, development of a 5-year plan relating to personnel, identification and preparation of policies/procedures relating to safety, and preliminary fire billing.

Engine 1 was successfully sold and left the City on January 20, 2024. The sale price was \$16,000, \$1,000 over the purchase price.

Mille Lacs County

Public Works Director Gerold and McPherson met with David Enblom, County Engineer, Kyle Lau, County Public Works Director and Ryan Newland County Highway Maintenance Superintendent on to discuss the city taking on maintenance (plowing, sanding, sweeping) of County Roads located within the City's jurisdictional boundaries. The meeting went very well, and they will be meeting with the County Board regarding establishing an agreement between the two jurisdictions. We found other possible areas we could collaborate on relating to roads as well, and the details will need to be ironed out in the noted agreement. Unless the Council has objections, McPherson will be writing a letter to County Administrator Hayes indicating our willingness to move forward with a cooperative maintenance agreement; if all goes well, the agreement could be in place in time for fall sweeping season.

Upcoming Meetings and Reminders:

- February 7 – Fire Advisory Board meets at 7:00 pm, City Council Chambers
- February 12 – Fire Executive Board meets at 7:00 pm, Public Safety Building
- March 6 – Fire Advisory Board meets at 7:00 pm, City Council Chambers
- March 7 & 8 – Hearing for Baldwin Township Incorporation to be held at Baldwin Town Hall starting roughly between 9:30 and 10:00 am; March 8 is a secondary day in the event that there is significant testimony.
- March 12 – Annual Township Elections and Meetings
- March 12 – Distinguished Service Awards Dinner at 6:00pm (Social Hour) and 7:00pm (Dinner). Please let me know if you plan to attend so that we can RSVP on the Council's behalf. RSVPs are due March 1st. See attached invitation.

8. Committee Reports

Edmonds reported on the Public Utility meeting that was held yesterday. new Commissioner Paul Whitcomb was welcomed. A grant for \$600,000 was received from the state, and Princeton Public Utilities is transferring \$54,554 to the City. They would like to see that go towards infrastructure.

9. Adjournment

HALLIN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:43PM. J GEROLD SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully Submitted,

ATTEST:

Shawna Jenkins Tadych
City Clerk

Thom Walker,
Mayor