

# City of Mercer Tax Equalization and Regular Meetings

**April 22nd, 2024**

Interim Mayor Ken Thomsen called the meeting to order with council members Barb Stute, Gary Volochenko, Erika Lorenz, and Randy Zinke and Tonya Wellington, Auditor, all present.

Ken Thomsen led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **Tax Equalization Meeting**

Ken Thomsen read a letter provided by Ryan Oberg, McLean County Assessor. The object of the equalization meeting is to hear any concerns that property owners have concerning the evaluation on their property. Allan Laib and Shelia Hoffer are contesting the property taxes assessed to their property. Allan Laib feels the property taxes he is paying are too high for the services available in Mercer and would like to know why depreciation has not been applied to the value of his property.

Ken Thomsen stated that Allan Laib has approached the Board of Equalization, and his property needs to be reevaluated and depreciation should be considered.

Ryan Oberg and Liz Patterson from the McLean County Assessor's Office joined our meeting in progress. Ken Thomsen stated that Allan Laib and Sheila Hoffer are looking for an abatement on the house that they feel is overvalued. He feels there should be some depreciation on the house after 15 years.

Ryan Oberg stated that typically the workflow for handling property value protests at meetings is to not discuss every single property or complaint. The Assessor's Office visits with each property owner so it can give the issues the consideration they need. Regarding value and the depreciation, Mr. Oberg stated what he sees now is that the rate at which the market is advancing overtakes any depreciation. If the property is kept on a normal schedule, the only time depreciation will be seen is if it falls out of maintenance in a 10-to-15-year period. At that time a condition rating would be added. Mr. Oberg also stated that the last depreciation study that was completed five years ago found that, for the most part, there were no properties newer than 20 years old that had experienced any depreciation.

Allan Laib asked why his taxes have been going up every year. Mr. Oberg stated that for the second year in a row there has been a 5% increase residential structures across the entire county. The five years prior to that were stagnant. Allan Laib stated that his property is 15 years old, and taxes have been going up every year. Mr. Oberg said, if looking at the tax bill, then yes, the tax bill increases every year because the taxing district increases its budgets every year.

Ken Thomsen asked Mr. Oberg how many notifications of increases were sent out for the City of Mercer. Ryan stated none sent this year.

Mr. Oberg told Allan Laib if he would like to pursue an abatement, Allan can contact him at his office and Mr. Oberg would help him fill out the paperwork and answer questions he may have going forward.

Ken Thomsen asked for a motion to approve the proposed value as presented. Randy Zinke made a motion to approve the proposed values as presented, and Erika Lorenz seconded. Barb Stute, Gary Volochenko, Erika Lorenz, and Randy Zinke voted aye. Motion carried.

Erika Lorenz made a motion to end the equalization meeting and Barb Stute seconded. Motion carried.

### **Regular Meeting**

Ken Thomsen read the minutes from March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Erika Lorenz made a motion to approve the minutes with changes requested and Barb Stute seconded. Barb Stute, Gary Volochenko, Erika Lorenz, and Randy Zinke voted aye. Motion carried.

### **Financial Report**

Barb Stute made a motion to approve the Financial Report and Randy Zinke seconded. Barb Stute, Gary Volochenko, Erika Lorenz, and Randy Zinke voted aye. Motion carried.

### **Bills to be Paid.**

Randy Zinke made a motion to approve the bills for the month and Erika Lorenz seconded. Barb Stute, Erika Lorenz, and Randy Zinke voted aye. Gary Volochenko voted no. Motion carried.

### **Water Bills**

Ken Thomsen asked about past due accounts. Account #11 is over 60 days past due and needs to be sent a letter. Randy Zinke stated that he got a letter last month and did not pay up by the 15<sup>th</sup>. No other letters to be sent.

### **Park Minutes**

Erika Lorenz read the park minutes from the April 16<sup>th</sup> meeting. Tina Goven, Erika Lorenz, and Kelly Murray, attended in person and Victoria Goven attended by phone.

The electric bill for the month was \$50.29 and water bill of \$53.00. Kelly made motion to pay the bills as presented, Victoria seconded. Motion carried.

The project account has a balance of \$1,298.58 and the maintenance account has \$6,901.75.

The sausage cook off the proceeds were \$2,535.22. A donation was made to the Mercer Community Center for the use of the building.

New picnic tables have arrived, and Dan Gardner has agreed to help put them together. Erika Lorenz will work on getting the old picnic tables up for bid. Willa Murray has agreed to do the lawn mowing for another two years.

The committee has requested, and have been approved for, \$750.00 per quarter from Turtle Lake American Legion to build up our Park Project Fund. There will be no fall fundraiser.

The committee discussed putting a camera on the bathrooms facing the long way down the park. Kelly Murray will check on a wireless camera.

The committee also discussed installing a small piece of concrete that would connect one of the picnic shelters to the sidewalk so that picnic shelter is handicapped accessible. Also, one of the new picnic tables is handicapped accessible. Darren Murray will contact Scott Just to see if there are any other jobs in the area that we could piggyback on for that small piece of concrete.

### **Old Business**

Ken Thomsen discussed the reserve requirements. Ken Thomsen is waiting for an update from Bryan Day about our ARPA Fund. The ARPA fund expires at the end of 2026. The ARPA money needs to be spent or it will be returned to the federal government. It is not known if ARPA funds can be used for sewer or water projects. There is \$15,810.88 in the ARPA fund. Randy Zinke stated that a V-trough is needed by the Post Office. Randy Zinke will work on getting estimates. The reserve requirements for the end of 2024 are \$61,002.00 in the Sewer and Water Reserve Funds. The Water Reserve Fund currently has \$35,368.00 and the Sewer Reserve Fund has \$9,527.47 for a total of \$44,895.47. The city will need to have \$16,106.53 more in these two accounts by the end of the year to comply. No decision was made at this time.

### **New Business**

Turtle Lake American Legion Permit Renewal.

Erika Lorenz made a motion to approve renewal of the Turtle Lake American Legion gaming permit at Chester's and Gary Volochenko seconded. Barb Stute, Gary Volochenko, Erika Lorenz, and Randy Zinke voted aye. Motion carried.

Ken Thomsen discussed bringing in more gravel for the city streets this summer. Many streets in town need more gravel.

Randy Zinke stated that we need to send out letters about the hay fields that are in city limits. Letters will be sent to all residents by June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. If a resident is going to save their property for haying the City of Mercer needs to be notified no later than July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Anything after July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, will be cut and charged \$100.00 per hr. with the rough-cut mower to maintain the property. Randy Zinke made a motion to charge \$100.00 per hr. for the rough-cut mower and for the bill to be added to property taxes for assessment, Barb Stute seconded. Barb Stute, Gary Volochenko, Erika Lorenz, and Randy Zinke voted aye. Motion carried.

Ken Thomsen asked if anyone had anything else that needed to be discussed.

Erika Lorenz stated she downloaded an RFP for garbage services from the League of Cities. Erika Lorenz will work with Tonya Wellington getting information on the end of contract with Waste Management so we can be proactive and get it out for bid. Once the RFP is completed and approved, it can be sent to the League of Cities. The League of Cities can post it for interested companies to bid on.

Erika Lorenz discussed the City of Mercer website. She would like to send Tammy Schatz the updates for the website.

Gary Volochenko made a motion to adjourn, and Erika Lorenz seconded. Barb Stute, Gary Volochenko, Erika Lorenz, and Randy Zinke voted aye. Motion carried. Next City of Mercer council meeting is set for May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 7:00 PM.