

February 3, 2025

A regular meeting of the Wood River City Council was called to order by Mayor Tom Stalcup at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, February 3, 2025, in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 111 N. Wood River Avenue, with the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance. The Clerk called the roll and reported that the following members were:

PRESENT: David Ayres
Bill Dettmers
Jeremy Plank
Scott Tweedy
Tom Stalcup

and that a quorum was present and in attendance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Councilman Plank moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of January 21, 2025, as printed, seconded by Councilman Tweedy, and approved by the following vote:

AYES: Ayres, Dettmers, Plank, Tweedy, Stalcup (5)
NAYS: None (0)

APPROVAL OF BILLS:

Councilman Ayres moved to approve the bills submitted for payment for the period January 16, 2025, to January 29, 2025, as printed, seconded by Councilman Dettmers, and approved by the following vote:

AYES: Ayres, Dettmers, Plank, Tweedy, Stalcup (5)
NAYS: None (0)

PRESENTATIONS:

Mayor Stalcup and Police Chief Brad Wells presented the Officer of the Year Award to Geoffrey Fester and Telecommunicator of the Year Award to Brendan Lenhardt for 2024.

CITIZEN/CITY OFFICIAL COMMENTS:

June Gibbs stated that she is once again going to speak about 876 State Street as she did not attend the last City Council Meeting as things were developing quickly about this property. Ms. Gibbs gave a quick recap to help connect the dots for those who are not familiar with the property. The City put the property located at 876 State Street out for bid in December 2023, and the property was awarded for the \$1.00 deal to WGO Investments LLC also known as Tim O'Donnell in which he submitted a bid to convert a church into a four-bedroom three-and-a-half-bath house. Mr. O'Donnell was given three years to complete the project but instead gave the property to Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC instead of returning the property to the seller, which was the City and was required to return the property to the City by a legally binding contract. Jonas Cathey, the owner of Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC is also secretary of the Wood River Economic Development Group and effective January 17, 2025, Tim O'Donnell is no longer the president, but a board member. Steve Yates, brother-in-law to City Manager Steve Palen, is now president. Ms. Gibbs then stated that the Wood River Business Alliance is a "dba" of Wood River Economic Development in which the City is in a contract for \$75,000.00 over three years. Ms. Gibbs stated to not forget that Councilman Plank and Councilman Tweedy sit on the Advisory Board for the Wood River Business Alliance and have remained silent to date. After her citizen comment at the January 6, 2025, City Council Meeting, City Manager Steve Palen claimed that he had the authority to allow the transfer of the property from WGO Investments LLC, also known as Tim O'Donnell, to Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC on what appears to be a simple nod as there is no supporting documentation in writing. Ms. Gibbs then referred to the Real Estate Purchase Agreement, item number 12 which states, "Buyer may not assign this contract without written consent of Seller", the City. She asked where the written consent is as she did not receive any such document in her public record request. The people now need to know that Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC sold the property located at 876 State Street for \$20,000.00 to Sara Nguyen. Ms. Gibbs explained that after the last meeting that she spoke at, she believes it to be the very next day, Chief Wells started contacting Ms. Nguyen regarding issues with the property. Oddly, he used his position as Police Chief and not his position as Building and Zoning Administrator when talking to Ms. Nguyen by phone. Ms. Gibbs questioned this as it was not a police matter. She then questioned why the City did not conduct business in writing and asked what City conducts business in this way. The property located at 876 State Street should have been clawed back when Mr. O'Donnell wanted

February 3, 2025

out of the legally binding contract, and it was not. Then, if the City wanted the property to go to Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC, it was required by the Real Estate Purchase Agreement to be in writing, which it was not. She then asked if the City has put themselves in potential litigation since as of this date, Sara Nguyen has not signed the City's \$1.00 deal. Ms. Gibbs also asked if the City made phone calls to Jonas Cathey or Tim O'Donnell trying to intimidate them into returning the property for a buck or is it that the City was trying to cover their behinds and hope that Ms. Nguyen agrees to take a \$20,000.00 loss. The timing for it to be just one day after Ms. Gibbs spoke seems more than a coincidence. Ms. Gibbs cannot believe how low the City has gone. She asked whose interests are being protected and stated that obviously it is not the people's interests, and it is not limited to the City's friends but also employees. People need to be made aware of this as this situation can happen to any citizen in the community. Ms. Gibbs is asking tonight for the termination of City Manager Steve Palen's contract and to conduct an investigation into Chief Wells as to whether using his position as Police Chief while working the capacity of Building and Zoning Administrator is allowed and why he did not perform these duties in writing.

Bo Devereux introduced himself as a representative for WGO Investments LLC and Greentree Commercial Services. Mr. Devereux has been involved with real estate development for almost 40 years. Mr. Devereux believes it is important to speak about what is taking place in Downtown Wood River in terms of trying to rehabilitate and redevelop the downtown area. Mr. Devereux was asked three years ago to come take a look at the downtown area, and unfortunately he did not know much about the area, but he knew what had transpired. It was clear to him that the main road that used to go through downtown had been moved because there was not a traffic count going through that area, so Mr. Devereux took a look at what the City had downtown. He explained that there were obsolete buildings and a tire store that could never reopen in that location because there is not sufficient traffic count to induce a retailer to move that type of business to the downtown area. He further explained that he also looked at older buildings that were well connected that provided a new town feel where the downtown area could have retailers complementing each other, for example, someone could go to a restaurant and then stop by the resale shop, and he saw an opportunity to revive the downtown area. At that time, Mr. Devereux also met with representatives from the City of Wood River and found them to be very accommodating and encouraging to cooperate and to assist developers in trying to resurrect the downtown area. He believes that three years ago the downtown area was vacant other than the prospering shoe store, a resale shop, and there were some other brave retailers that were continuing to move everything forward. Mr. Devereux commended the City for advancing the redevelopment of the downtown area. He explained that this is not a process that is going to take three to six months. It could take five or even ten years, and while it does not look like things are coming together, they are coming together. Mr. Devereux has seen buildings rehabilitated, properties donated to the City for a future dog park and walking area, and he sees significant momentum in bringing it all together. Mr. Devereux then explained that the City cannot rehabilitate and redevelop an area without some kind of economic incentive. He further explained that the rehabilitation of these structures is typically more expensive than building a new structure and without incentives, he does not believe that the City will get further investment in the downtown area. He stated that it must be understood that investing in Downtown Wood River at this point in time is quite risky and the potential return for a developer will not take place for years, and he believes that everyone should take that into consideration and support the City's efforts in trying to make this happen. Mr. Devereux believes that the area is creating significant momentum, and he explained that economic incentives are available to anyone who desires to invest in the area, and he encourages everyone to consider investing in the downtown area. He concluded by stating that every single investment advances downtown and demonstrates the commitment to making the City of Wood River an even better city than it is today.

Councilman Dettmers asked if the City Attorney can confirm that the issue presented by Ms. Gibbs earlier in the meeting has been resolved or if it is still an open pending matter with the potential seller.

City Attorney Mike McGinley asked for clarification regarding Councilman Dettmers' question.

Councilman Dettmers asked if the City has acquired the property at 876 State Street.

City Attorney Mike McGinley stated that he does not believe so.

Councilman Dettmers stated that later in the meeting under Old Business, he will ask that the Council go into executive closed session to discuss matters pertaining to personnel and potential litigation.

Mayor Stalcup read Letters of Commendation from the Fire Department related to three recent incidents. The Letters of Commendation were addressed to Fire Chief Wade Stahlhut, Deputy Fire Chief Nate Kamp, Fire Captain Bill Hall, Fire Captain Kristopher Ayers, Engineer/Paramedic Nathan Childers, Engineer/Paramedic Jason Gerner, Engineer/Paramedic Tyler Staicoff, Probationary Firefighter Jarrod Horyn, Probationary Firefighter Will Korinek, Paid On-Call Firefighter Dustin Mullins, and Paid On-Call Firefighter Jamie Wells. Mayor Stalcup commended the entire Wood River Fire Department for all of their diligent work and thanked them for protecting the community.

City Manager Steve Palen explained that the handouts he gave to the Council prior to the meeting show the estimates that are up to date with Madison County on the assessed valuation of the City at \$176,685,915, which is the highest evaluation ever for the City of Wood River. Also, the City's estimated tax rate right now is 1.3925, which is the lowest rate since 1994 and will likely be lower once the City receives the final numbers from the County.

APPROVED: REQUEST TO SEEK BIDS FOR THE 2025-26 MFT STREET MAINTENANCE MATERIALS PROGRAM:

Councilman Tweedy moved to approve a request to seek bids for the 2025-26 MFT Street Maintenance Materials Program, as submitted by the Director of Public Services, seconded by Councilman Ayres, and approved by the following vote:

AYES: Ayres, Dettmers, Plank, Tweedy, Stalcup (5)

NAYS: None (0)

APPROVED: SET PUBLIC HEARING ON MS4 PERMIT:

Councilman Dettmers moved to approve setting a Public Hearing on the City's MS4 Permit (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems) for Monday, March 3, 2025, at 7:00pm before the regularly scheduled City Council Meeting, seconded by Councilman Plank, and approved by the following vote:

AYES: Ayres, Dettmers, Plank, Tweedy, Stalcup (5)

NAYS: None (0)

APPROVED: SET PUBLIC HEARING ON FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026 PROPOSED BUDGET:

Councilman Ayres moved to approve setting a Public Hearing on the Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 for Monday, March 17, 2025, at 7:00pm before the regularly scheduled City Council Meeting, seconded by Councilman Tweedy, and approved by the following vote:

AYES: Ayres, Dettmers, Plank, Tweedy, Stalcup (5)

NAYS: None (0)

APPROVED: CHANGE MEETING DATE DUE TO THE PRESIDENT'S DAY HOLIDAY:

Councilman Plank moved to approve changing the next regularly scheduled City Council Meeting to Tuesday, February 18, 2025, due to the President's Day Holiday, seconded by Councilman Dettmers, and approved by the following vote:

AYES: Ayres, Dettmers, Plank, Tweedy, Stalcup (5)

NAYS: None (0)

OLD BUSINESS:

Councilman Dettmers moved for approval of a recess to hold an executive closed session to discuss matters pertaining to Personnel (5 ILCS 120/2 (c) (1)) and Litigation (5 ILCS 120/2 (c) (11)), seconded by Councilman Ayres

Councilman Dettmers requested that the Council move across the hall to hold the executive closed session.

The motion was denied by the following vote:

AYES: Ayres, Dettmers (2)

NAYS: Plank, Tweedy, Stalcup (3)

February 3, 2025

Councilman Dettmers stated that since the motion was denied, he will discuss the matter in public under Old Business. He continued by stating that Ms. Gibbs is correct. Councilman Dettmers read the contract, and at the last meeting City Manager Steve Palen stated that he had the authority to act on behalf of the City to execute the contract without informing the City Council. WGO Investments LLC on the recommendation of City Manager Steve Palen then sold the property to Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC. Councilman Dettmers stated that he has seen the documents where Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC sold the property to the woman who has the property now. Councilman Dettmers is curious why this happened because if it had to be in writing and it was never brought to the Council then it seems to him that it is an illegal contract. He does not know how this happened or why it was allowed to happen, but it seems like the City might have a claim on the \$20,000.00 that was paid to Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC. Councilman Dettmers believes that the City needs to go after Rachel and Company Coffee House LLC for the \$20,000.00 because it looks like the property was transferred improperly without authority. He then stated that the property is still the property of the City of Wood River. Councilman Dettmers concluded by stating that this situation is a mess, a recurring problem, and he has warned the Council about these activities repeatedly. However, it keeps recurring and the Council keeps supporting the incompetence.

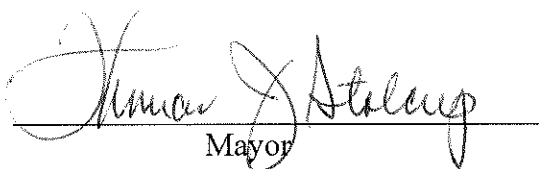
NEW BUSINESS:

Councilman Ayres stated that he would like the Director of Public Services to write a preliminary plan to be presented at the first City Council Meeting in March regarding the removal of all necessary trees and shrubs from Wood River Avenue to Second Street along Madison Avenue. This plan will start the enhancement and the visibility of the Downtown Business District. This preliminary plan should include a location for a future digital roadside sign and for the planting of new trees throughout the City that are planned for removal.

City Manager Steve Palen stated that he will instruct the Director of Public Services to write a preliminary plan. Discussion ensued regarding the location, and it was confirmed that it is from Wood River Avenue to Second Street along Madison Avenue.

Councilman Ayres explained that he has wanted the visibility to be improved along Madison Avenue for 20 years. Removing the trees along Madison Avenue would allow the thousands of vehicles passing to better observe Ferguson Avenue. Also, to his knowledge, the City has received three streetscape grants to improve sidewalks, improve lighting, and to build a proposed bike trail in the area. He continued by stating that the City has given grants for the façade program to improve the fronts of buildings along Ferguson Avenue, but no one sees them. Councilman Ayres concluded by stating he would like to clear the area and is hopeful that the businesses will install signs behind their buildings; furthermore, if the City can install a digital sign, businesses can be promoted in the Downtown Business District.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting adjourned at 7:36 p.m.



Mayor



City Clerk