

**TOQUERVILLE CITY COUNCIL**  
**Special Business Meeting Minutes**  
**August 12, 2020 at 6:01 pm**



Present: Mayor Lynn Chamberlain; Councilmembers: Gary Chaves, Justin Sip, Keen Ellsworth, Ty Bringhurst, Chuck Williams; Staff: Planning Commission Chair Manning Butterworth, Treasurer Dana McKim, Public Works Director Lance Gubler, Recorder Ruth Evans; Public: Pam Ruesch, Del Ruesch, Larry Bennett, DC Young, Claudia Young, Chris Butterworth, David Browning, Tonya Browning, Louise Bott, Corey Bott, Reese Straw, Karen Straw, Dwayne Jessop, Jennifer Miller, Lee Miller, Connie Storey, Bob Wolf, Nancy Wolf, Darrin LeFevre, Tammy Henderson, Justin Henderson, Allen Mills, Gary Lunt, Curtis Biggs, Lee Bertram, Marklyn Bertram, Scott English, Caren Hare, Mark Hare, Angel Hutchings, Ryker Steglich, Chayse Steglich, Martin Johnson, Joe Humpherys, Vickie Ott, Richard Ott, Tana Hall, Carrie Bohne, Candice Sudweeks, Peter Sudweeks, Pratt Call, Cherlyn Call, Mark Gamett, Nancy Gamett, Kay Chamberlain, Dawn Everett, Josh Melessa, Clark Harrison, Roy McNeal, Louesa McNeal, Sandra Feagin, Kevin Bullard, Patsi Hendrickson, Paul Heideman, Wendi Merritt, James Stone, Janice Hunter.

**A. CALL TO ORDER:**

Mayor Chamberlain called the meeting to order at 4:32 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilman Williams. The invocation was offered by Councilman Ellsworth.

**B. PUBLIC HEARING:**

1. Public input is sought on a proposed property tax rate increase.

Mayor Chamberlain asked the public to limit their comments to three minutes as well as one comment per person so that everyone who wants to may speak.

Treasurer Dana McKim presented information regarding the property tax increase and that there is a shortfall in the budget that needs to be addressed. There is a need for more staff in the office as the City grows. Property taxes have not been raised in 13 years. Revenue can come from commercial businesses or property taxes, and the City does not currently have any businesses. The current tax rate, the proposed tax rate, and other city's tax rates in Washington County were discussed.

Mayor Chamberlain read two letters from citizens regarding the increase. Resident Mary Thayer wrote she is in favor of an increase to hire and retain staff and to give them health benefits. Resident Brigham Darger wrote the increase would be better incrementally instead of all at once. Mayor Chamberlain commented that the need for the increase is to hire additional staff and to offer health benefits to existing employees.

Resident Jennifer Miller was in favor of hiring a city manager, but not in favor of increasing taxes all at once. Small increases over the next several years would be more beneficial. The taxable value of residences has gone up 25% over the last four years, resulting in yearly increases in property taxes.

Resident Lee Miller commented that this increase is a massive and unexpected increase. Smaller incremental increases would be better.

Resident Gary Lunt distributed a paper showing figures he put together regarding the budget. Last year's budget compared to the proposed budget show an increase in certain categories. There are concerns about the current state of the economy. There are empty bed and breakfasts in town and people are suffering through this hard financial time. Now is not the time to increase property taxes.



Resident Paul Heideman appreciates the City Council and the work they do for the City. State and government employees get more in wages than average civilians, especially when nearby cities compete with each other. We should not let Toquerville fall in that trap. The money out of resident's pockets has gone up due to the mill rate going up, so the property taxes actually have been raised over the past years. The City collects royalty taxes from the freeway signs and has raised utility taxes. Water rates have also gone up. The government is spending others money. The duties of a city manager need to be clearly communicated to the residents.

Resident Lee Singleton commented that the City Council was elected to keep the resident's best interests in mind, so why wasn't a letter sent out prior to the County notification? It would have saved a lot of frustration to hear from the City leaders before the County.

Resident Mark Harrison wondered if the additional property tax revenue from all the new houses would help offset additional expenses. Mayor Chamberlain commented that new growth is still two to three years away.

Resident Mark Hare appreciates those who work in public service. The City is a corporation that gets its direction from the State. Currently, there are no commercial businesses in Toquerville. Put businesses in along SR-17 and collect business revenue from the residents who want to do business. There will be 10,000 people here in the next 5-6 years which will change everything. Slow down the growth until the country stabilizes and wait for that revenue to come in. Ask for donations for the parks and other projects the City would like to do. Those that want to donate will do so.

Resident Bob Wolf wondered why the City is running a deficit. The City needs to balance the budget and to budget forward and keep the City out of a deficit.

Resident Sandra Feagin commented that she is opposed to raising the property tax and now is not a good time for a raise. Residents should be able to vote and see how funds are being moved around. Issues should be addressed for current residents before creating more growth and new issues. The staff and Council are appreciated for what they do, but maybe funds could be moved around instead of increasing property taxes.

Councilman Bringhurst clarified that the health benefits would be for staff only and not the Council. The idea is to invest in competent staff and give them incentives to stay here in Toquerville, thereby benefiting the residents.

Resident Wendi Merritt commented that this tax increase was proposed months ago. The information is out there to residents who want to know. It is embarrassing to find out the staff does not have health benefits. Instead of raising taxes all at once, it would be better to do a step increase. The property values from the Assessor's office are overinflated because they were assessed back in January. The current economy is not supporting those values. The City Council meeting tomorrow night is just as important to attend because water rates will be discussed.

Resident Larry Bennett commented that people don't always read what they should but it would've been nice to know about this increase from the City. Toquerville residents care about this issue. There are design issues with the bypass road that need to be addressed. Residents on fixed incomes are concerned about the yearly raises. Every increase adds up. The work the Council is doing is appreciated.

Resident Mark Gamett appreciated the information in the letter that was posted online by the Mayor. Regarding the Capital Plan, won't growth pay for itself when the new homes come? That way there



wouldn't have to be tax increases. Mayor Chamberlain commented that growth is factored into future budgets and that the budget will be reviewed every year to reevaluate where the City is at.

Councilman Sip commented that the mill rate decreases every year to bring in the same amount of tax every year. The City needs to at least keep up with inflation and raise property taxes accordingly.

Resident Josh Melessa agreed with providing health benefits to employees. The salary for the city manager in a town of 2,500 or less should be below \$60,000. The City is still small and the city manager would want raises right away, so raises need to be factored in. The city manager's salary should depend on experience and is going to be the biggest cost to the City.

Resident Manning Butterworth agreed with offering benefits to employees. It would be helpful to garner support from the community by giving citizens access to the City's future plans so they have an idea of upcoming taxation.

Resident Peter Sudweeks is in favor of providing employee benefits and commented that in this COVID economy, rates are continually shifting up and down. The housing economy is still growing due to lower rates. A city manager could be phased in over time. Residents would feel better about this knowing what a city manager does and how it would benefit the City.

Councilman Bringhurst responded by saying the knowledge is currently held with the City Councilmen and it should be held with a city manager. Elected officials will come and go but a city manager would be a constant. It is a full time job dealing with all the city affairs and it should be done by one city manager rather than each Councilman individually. A city manager would also manage the staff and coordinate with the Mayor and City Council to streamline City business.

Resident DC Young commented that the City has come a long way from where it's been. The City has balanced the budget every year and has managed the money that has come in. The growth is spilling over into Toquerville. Sometimes the urgent things are not the important things. We need to be measured and only get the things we can afford. There are things the City wants but doesn't have yet. Citizens would love to see a 3 minute response time from the Fire Department rather than an 8 minute response time, but that takes money. This City Council will balance the budget. Mr. Young was in favor of paying his fair share in exchange for the value.

Resident Reese Straw commented the increase of so many dollars a month is manageable, however the property taxes are due in one lump sum. This is difficult to save so much money in a short amount of time. The other options such as collecting commercial tax revenue or providing fewer services should be considered. What is the reason to hire a city manager this year? Mayor Chamberlain commented that the bypass road project will start soon and hiring a city manager before that starts is critical.

Resident Darrin LaFever commented that in all his time serving as a Planning Commissioner, a Councilman, and as the Mayor they tried to get commercial businesses in town. The City installed millions of dollars of infrastructure out at Anderson Junction trying to get businesses to come. The residents need to pay their fair share. The City has always balanced the budget. This increase should have been done years ago. Mr. LaFever was in favor of providing benefits.

Resident Wendi Merritt commented that the city charter five member form of government does not allow the City to hire a city manager as the CEO. The charter would need to be changed. This is a potential issue and would need to be addressed by the City Attorney.



Resident Roy McNeil commented that this 97% increase is a shock. Little increments over time would be better for the residents. The reason most residents moved here is because it is a small town, and most are willing to pay their fair share to keep it small.

Resident Patsi Hendrickson commented that she has been in Toquerville longer than almost anyone. This City has seen a lot of growth over the years. Residents would like to see the City stay small. The City is going to need some things as it moves forward, but not with a huge increase all at once.

Councilman Chaves wanted the residents to know this discussion was not pre-planned and that their voices and opinions matter to the Council. The Council appreciates all of its residents and will take all of the comments shared this evening into consideration.

***Councilman Ty Bringhurst moved to close the Public Hearing portion of the meeting. Councilman Keen Ellsworth seconded the motion. Motion unanimously carried, 5-0. Ty Bringhurst – aye, Keen Ellsworth – aye, Justin Sip – aye, Gary Chaves – aye, Chuck Williams – aye.***

**C. BUSINESS:**

1. Discussion and possible approval on a proposed property tax rate increase.

The Council discussed the public’s comments and concerns about the tax increase, making smaller incremental tax raises, budget cuts, and how much to raise the rate this year. The Council determined that a raise was needed and discussed raising the rate of approximately 50% of the proposed tax rate. The Council also discussed going through the truth and taxation process every year to evaluate the current property tax rate.

***Councilman Gary Chaves moved to approve the proposed property tax rate increase with a total revenue of \$200,000 and a mill levy rate of .001320. Councilman Keen Ellsworth seconded the motion. Motion unanimously carried, 5-0. Ty Bringhurst – aye, Keen Ellsworth – aye, Justin Sip – aye, Gary Chaves – aye, Chuck Williams – aye.***

**D. ADJOURN:**

***Councilman Ty Bringhurst moved to adjourn the Special City Council Business Meeting. Councilman Keen Ellsworth seconded the motion. Motion unanimously carried, 5-0. Ty Bringhurst – aye, Keen Ellsworth – aye, Justin Sip – aye, Gary Chaves – aye, Chuck Williams – aye.***

The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

  
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Mayor – Lynn Chamberlain

9/10/2020  
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Date

  
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Attest: City Recorder – Ruth Evans

