

City Council Minutes January 6, 2025

The Fergus Falls City Council held a regular meeting on Monday January 6, 2025, at 5:30 pm in the City Council Chambers. Pastor Doug Dent gave the invocation, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Mayor Schierer called the meeting to order, and the following council members were in attendance: Kremeier, Mortenson, Rachels, Hicks, Fish, Job, Kvamme and Rufer.

Recognition of Outgoing Elected Officials

Mayor Schierer thanked Tom Rufer for his 8 years of service to the city, his positivity, commitment to his family and the community and for making decisions to improve Fergus Falls. He thanked staff for their service, the voters for their trust in him and wished incoming Mayor Anthony Hicks the best of luck noting there is no better job than being mayor of the city you love. Rufer commented on the growth and progress the city has seen and was proud to prioritize making the city a better place. He thanked Mayor Schierer for his leadership, the voters for their support, and asked the council to treat staff with respect. He encouraged the new council to collaborate, be positive and continue moving the community forward.

The meeting adjourned sine die

Swearing In Ceremony

City Attorney Rolf Nycklemoe swore in the newly elected officials: Mayor Anthony Hicks; City Council Ward One Jim Fish; City Council Ward Two Mark Leighton; City Council Ward Three Mike Mortenson; City Council Ward Four Laurel Kilde and they were immediately seated.

Mayor Hicks called the meeting to order, and the following council members were in attendance: Kremeier, Mortenson, Rachels, Kilde, Fish, Job, Kvamme and Leighton.

Open Forum

Laurie Mullen said the Country Inn and Suites is for sale and felt the council should re-evaluate the Bigwood Event Center.

Approval of the Agenda

A motion and second were made by Fish and Leighton to approve tonight's agenda with the removal of the legal publication from the consent agenda and the motion carried.

Consent Agenda

The following items were approved under **Resolution #1-2025** by Rachels: Motion approving the December 16, 2024, council minutes. Motion approving the following licenses: Mechanical Plumbers Inc, CR Plumbing, Elite Heating & Air, CoolSys Light Commercial Solutions, G & R Controls Inc; Excavator Comstock Construction, Leitch Excavating; Demo Hauler Leitch Excavating; Paving Comstock Construction; Minnesota Lawful Gambling Permit Someplace Safe raffle on February 15, 2025, at M-State; Sign Hanger J & H Signs & Design. **Resolution #2-2025** designating the 2025 depositories. **Resolution #3-2025** delegating the City Administrator, Finance Director, Assistant Finance Director, Payroll Officer and Human Resources Director the authority to make the 2025 electronic fund transfers on behalf of the City of Fergus Falls. **Resolution #4-2025** approving budget adjustments. The resolution was seconded by Kilde and was adopted.

Legal Publication

Mortenson asked to remove the designation of the Daily Journal to ensure they will still meet the qualifications of a legal publication as they transition to a weekly publication using a magazine format. A motion and second were made by Mortenson and Kremeier requesting the Daily Journal Publisher to address these concerns at the next Committee of the Whole meeting and the motion carried.

Resolution of Accounts

Fish offered a resolution authorizing the payments and claims in the amount of \$2,025,972.21, which was seconded by Kilde and was adopted.

Aquatics Center Update

City Engineer Brian Yavarow presented an update on the aquatic center. He reviewed the interior and exterior work completed to date and the work yet to be completed. With good weather, the facility is slated to be open around Memorial Day. The Parks Department is developing staffing and operational planning, and the aquatic facility will replace the city's lifeguards at Pebble Lake. The retention pond at the bottom of the hill will not be fenced off as it is designed as a shallow filtration pond, and fencing would create a safety hazard for the sledding hill during the winter.

2025 Acting Mayor

A motion and second were made by Mortenson and Kremeier nominating Laura Job as the 2025 Acting Mayor and the motion carried.

2025 Mayor's Council Appointments

A motion and second were made by Job and Fish to approve the proposed the 2025 council appointments as presented by Mayor Hicks:

Board of Equalization	Ward One Jim Fish	Ward Two Mark Leighton
	Ward Three Al Kremeier	Ward Four Laurel Kilde
Business Development for Fergus Falls	Scott Rachels	
Fire Department Relief Association	Laurel Kilde	
Fire Department Trust Fund	Scott Kvamme	
Golf Board	Mark Leighton	
Investment Committee	City Administrator, Finance Director, Assistant Finance Director, Certified Financial Planner, Scott Kvamme	
Legislative Committee	Mayor, City Administrator, Jim Fish, Scott Rachels	
Personnel Committee	Laurel Kilde, Al Kremeier	
Senior Citizens Board	Al Kremeier	
Tax Levy Committee	Mayor, Laura Job, Mike Mortenson	
Visit Fergus Falls	Laura Job	
West Central Initiative Econ Dev District	Mark Leighton	
Port Authority	Mark Leighton, Scott Kvamme, Laura Job, Jim Fish, Laurel Kilde, Mike Mortenson, Al Kremeier	

The motion carried.

Update on Mall Purchase Agreement Extension

City Administrator Andrew Bremseth said the city has secured a 120-day extension (until April 15, 2025) with mall owner Marty Graff. The seller requested a 30-day cancellation clause from either

party. Mayor Hicks suggested the development of a mall purchase agreement task force to work with Otter Tail County and learn of the implications of their CDA organization, identify potential future uses for the property, explore separating the utilities and seek grants to close the funding gap. The task force membership would consist of himself, Bremseth and council members Mortenson and Kilde. Otter Tail County will be asked to participate in these conversations. Kremeier requested all council members tour the mall with its owner and the affected business owners. A motion and second were made by Rachels and Kremeier to approve the appointments to the Westridge Mall Purchase Agreement Task Force and the motion carried.

City Council Goals and Priorities

Prior to tonight's meeting Mayor Hicks asked each council member to prepare 3-5 priorities or goals they would like to accomplish over the next 2-4 years.

Mark Leighton

- Cut city spending and fund the budget on needs, not wants
- Reduce costly regulations and fees
- Economic development and focus on existing businesses
- Core services police, fire, water, sewer, storm and streets
- Bring full transparency to the public
- Change a Committee of the Whole meeting to the evening to be followed by a town hall meeting
- Change the layout of council packets

Scott Kvamme

- Redevelopment of the RTC; an asset with economic development potential and a way to address housing needs
- Improve communication including focused listening sessions, open forums, town halls
- Technology upgrades in the council chambers
- Expand pickleball options

Laura Job

- Growth and prosperity of the community
- Focus on economic development.
- Identify ways to adapt and grow, collaborate, and empower the existing business community
- Attract new industry with shovel ready sites and use strategic planning and investment to be a welcoming destination for expansion or relocation
- Focus on internal efficiency to operate effectively
- Continue to seek cost saving measures to reduce the tax burden and keep high quality services

Jim Fish

- DeLagoon improvements
- Swimming pool/aquatic center
- Ensure the sale of the golf course makes sense

Laurel Kilde

- Council and staff to work cohesively and have productive discussion
- Maintain infrastructure and aggressively fix additional streets and fund with tax base growth rather than franchise fees

Business growth and attraction through economic development. Also need to tie into and support issues such as childcare

Be a business-friendly community for new and existing businesses

Use all our economic development tools by thinking outside the box and networking in the region

Seek out potential outside funding or grants to not burden the tax payers

Update zoning ordinances to be relevant and realistic

Recruitment, morale and fully staffed police and fire services

Scott Rachels

Proceed with an aggressive 5-year plan for street improvements without implementing a franchise fee
Economic development. We cannot turn down business opportunities and developers will not come to Fergus Falls with past council decisions. We need to ask developers “what can I do for you?”

Mike Mortenson

Focus on business by changing the economic climate. Look for retail, industry growth and tax expansion

We cannot rely on our current economic development strategy and need to bring economic development back in house.

Expand economic development efforts to a larger region and consider giving businesses money to come to Fergus Falls

Ensure employees are treated with dignity and respect

Be the city people talk about

Al Kremeier

Focus on our assets (lakes, prairies, ecosystems) to draw people to Fergus Falls

Economic growth. Jump on opportunities for those wishing to start a business

Roads and infrastructure, but not with a franchise fee. Make careful decisions on the order roads are repaired

Develop guidelines for giving TIF. Not interested in providing TIF for housing but would support it for business growth.

There is not enough tax base to cover the average citizen. Many people cannot afford the tax burden created by city decisions

Anthony Hicks

Earn the trust of the public inside and outside the council chambers

Transparency in communications

We are in a period of strong differences of opinion. We need to respectfully listen to all voices. We need to work together as no member of the council has individual decision making and singular paths cause confusion.

Need to formalize a plan/prioritization of what we can realistically accomplish to find compromise and balance

Ask department heads to provide quarterly updates on what their departments and staff are doing

The new council needs to leave the past in the past and move forward together to make Fergus Falls an even better place to live, work and play

Work with other government units to seek potential funding sources

Expressed his honor to serve as mayor

Kremeier asked to add a conversation at the sale of the Country Inn and Suites to the January 15 Committee of the Whole meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:03 pm

Lynne Olson