

Aldermen pass motion to dredge to help Grafton Ferry

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Grafton Mayor Tom Thompson, City Treasurer Joyce Harmon and City Clerk Mary Lillesve as well as the six current Aldermen presided in front of a packed council room on Tuesday, April 28, for what would be the last Council meeting before the May 12 induction of the newly elected Treasurer and three new Aldermen.

The meeting was "business as usual," the minutes from March 24th's meeting were approved, in the public forum portion of the meeting City residents aired complaints about the City's Adopt-a-Lot committee, trailers and construction 'junk' on the City owned marina parking lot and speed limit enforcement.

The City's contracted engineer Charlie Juneau, of Juneau Associates, Inc., summarized the status of projects and included a list, prioritized by urgency of repair needed, of areas where current drainage infrastructure was recently overrun by storm water.

Things started heating up an hour and thirty minutes into the meeting when, under the topic of new business, the Council was asked to approve a proposal for dredging that would enable operation of the Grafton Ferry. Mayor Thompson said that Ron Buchannan, River Life & Co., told him that, though he asked for a "not-to-exceed" contract of \$30,000, his estimate was that the fee for the task would be between \$15,000 and \$25,000.

The Mayor mentioned receiving letters urging the City to continue supporting the ferry by paying for the dredging from the local BP gas station and Raging Rivers Water Park; in addition, Thompson spoke of a conversation he had with Ben Allen in which Mr. Allen spoke of his plan to 'bring in' an artificial ice skating rink, but he's concerned about the City's willingness to forgo support of local businesses and tourism.

When City Attorney, Jim Schrempf suggested getting the subject on the floor, Alderman Jerry Bauersachs stated his disappointment that "what we are dealing with here is crisis management", he felt that, what was being discussed in this meeting "should have been done in January and February so that we could all talk about it, gotten all our information together and so forth, but right now the decision will have to be made because they're going to start running the ferry on Friday."

Bauersachs said he wanted everyone to know that he was not opposed to the ferry; what he is opposed to is "The amount of money the City continues to spend on the ferry." He listed the City's expenses of over \$75,000 for the 2014 operating season; "Which brings our grand total for four years, and no return on this keep in mind, the City's paid \$456,721." He feels residents don't benefit from the ferry since it only runs Friday through Saturday.

Instead, the Alderman proposed dredging costs (approximately \$24,000/year) be shared evenly between the City, the Calhoun Ferry Company and the Grafton Chamber of Commerce with the City continuing to pay cost of the landing area across the river (\$6,000), advertising (\$11,000), electricity (\$600/month); in addition, the City would not require the Calhoun Ferry Company to contribute any sort of per car fee.

After Bauersachs stated his ideas for lowering the City's ferry operation expenses, It was Mayor Thompson's turn "Let's get to the facts, you keep bring up the property payments. We bought the property, it's true, it's like a mortgage, but that property will

be paid off. Did we have an initial heavy investment; yes. Like any business in town, you don't start out for free, you may have to build a building, or do infrastructure, it costs a lot of money to start up a business and that's how we view the ferry."

The Mayor's listed numbers that had to do with the benefit the City receives from 10,000 cars per season that drive off the ferry into Grafton. "You got 10,000 cars with an average of two people per car, and you can do the math on this. That goes back to 20,000 people and if they spend \$30 each in Grafton that's \$600,000; in addition you have close to 3,000 motorcycles."

Thompson stressed that sales tax is the way the City funds their budget, property tax only contributes \$45,000 to Grafton's budget. He said the ferry increases the number tourists thus expanding the sales tax base and that if the sales tax base decreases, property taxes will increase.

Jeannie Brendel, President of the Grafton Chamber of Commerce, was recognized by Thompson to make a statement. She said "The Chamber's a not-for-profit organization and we do fundraisers for marketing to promote the town and we get people to spend a lot of money here, so rather than asking the Chamber to donate six or eight thousand dollars, why don't you just take it out of the money we give to the City every year?"

Bauersachs took exception with Brendel classifying the Chamber as a not-for-profit stating "If I were to give you a donation of \$100, I could not claim that on my income tax." Investigation found the Grafton Chamber of Commerce, Inc. listed as a not-for-profit corporation on the Illinois Secretary of State's website.

Jeff Lorton was recognized to speak and noted how the City had pursued a ferry since 1997. Lorton noted that his business increases by 30 percent when the ferry is in operation. He suggested the City make the decision to fund the dredging necessary for operation of the ferry for the 2015 season. He suggested, tongue in cheek, that he'd be willing to donate \$4,000 of the required money. Jeff's final statement "Let's stop arguing and make this work", won him a rousing applause.

Mayor Thompson called for a motion to get the ferry running for the sake of our businesses – again to rousing applause from the audience.

After much debate, a motion to fund dredging necessary for the ferry to operate was brought up by Bobbie Amburg; Jerry Bauersachs requested an amendment stipulating the City only pay one third of the dredging costs. Protocol required the amendment to be voted on first and, aside from Flo Rowling lamenting aloud that she didn't know what to say – which prompted shouts of "NO" and "YES" from the audience, the amendment was defeated with only Bauersachs voting for it.

In the end, the motion to dredge passed unanimously.

After that, it was back to business as usual with the exception of a note read by outgoing Alderman Charles Linnemeyer. Linnemeyer and his wife Linda have chosen to live closer to their children and will be moving from Grafton. He said he enjoyed the six years that he served as an Alderman, he said that he'd miss the City and the responsibilities of being an Alderman. Speaking in his usual frank form, Alderman Linnemeyer said that one thing he did not like was when Council meeting got rowdy, stating "I don't like, honestly where everybody gets to stand up and talk and say their piece." He said that the City had a lot of work to do, he hears talk of promoting tourism and has recently heard about a take our city back movement. He said "I'm not sure what that means, I don't know what City you're talking about."

He finished with the hope that division that's been recently in the City will go away. Charlie received a standing ovation from all in the room.

The meeting ended at 9:30 p.m.