

CITY OF NORTON SHORES
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
June 25, 2019

A regular work session of the Norton Shores City Council was held on Tuesday, June 25, 2019 at 5:30 p.m. at Norton Shores City Hall, 4814 Henry Street.

Present: Mayor Nelund, Council Members Beecham, Flanders, Hylland, Jurkas, Morgenstern, Moulatsiotis, and Olson; also, Mark Meyers, Bob Gagnon, Marc VanderStelt, Mike Huston, Jerry Bartoszek, Anthony Chandler and Shelly Stibitz

Absent: Council Member Sladick

1. Proposed Building Fee Adjustments

Fire Chief Bob Gagnon explained the need for adjustments to the Building Department Fee Schedule. The request was brought before the Council in October 2018 for review and is being presented now with responses to resulting questions. Actual cost was questioned and Building staff calculated the cost to process and conduct an inspection at \$98.45 per hour. Additionally, to Council's inquiry about comparing neighboring municipalities, the importance of determining competitive rates and ability to cover the actual cost was cited. The current fees were set in 2008. One major concern is that the Building Department cannot cover current costs and is understaffed with only the Building Official available to conduct inspections. They are having difficulty recruiting a part-time inspector which is holding up services and creating a backlog of property maintenance issues, expired permits and open permits. Chief Gagnon would like to add a full-time inspector instead of replacing the open part-time position which will both improve the pool of applicants and, once in place, allow for consistency with inspections processing paperwork. Along with fee adjustments the schedule was reformatted for ease of understanding by customers. Building Official Todd Kempf brought to Chief Gagnon's attention that issuing property maintenance citations under the property maintenance code would provide the City a means to recoup expenses and will be utilized in the future. Mr. Kempf said that the code has changed to the point that many more inspections are mandated which costs more time and money. City Administrator Mark Meyers reminded Council that the recession caused many cuts to staffing and the City is still rebuilding the division toward pre-recession levels.

Council Member Hylland stated that the graph provided shows that the fund is insufficient because expenses doubled in four years' time and the focus should be on reducing expenses instead of raising fees. Mr. Meyers shared some of the history surrounding pre-recession funding and personnel changes and feels the rise can be attributed to replacing positions. Finance Director Mike Huston added that, as employees retire and collect pension and benefits new employees are hired and receive pay and benefits, resulting in higher expenses. Council Member Hylland summarized his concerns about the proposed

changes as 1) fees going from one of the most economical to the most expensive, 2) rapid increase in expenses when the number of inspectors and inspections are down, and 3) enforcing property maintenance at the expense of new construction customers, all of which he fears will make the City less desirable for people to build in and live in. Council Member Olson said that he would expect, if the cost to inspect is as high as stated, that customers are being charged re-inspection fees as they occur. Mr. Kempf said that construction is rarely approved with one inspection and a reasonable amount of re-inspections do not incur additional fees to remain business-friendly. Council Member Olson commented that he could not support the proposed 33% increase and fees going from near the lowest of those compared to the highest.

Council Member Jurkas asked that going forward the fees are reviewed regularly so the increase isn't as large. Council Member Morgenstern agreed and, also, asked if the proposed fees, estimated to generate \$120,000, could be decreased to the \$70,000 needed to hire a full-time inspector with a plan to make small increases over the next couple years. Council Member Moulatsiotis disagrees stating that the Department would still operate at a loss. Council Member Jurkas added that the estimated \$45,000 savings in legal fees with the new property maintenance procedure will offset the loss. Council Member Hylland asked if shifting the property maintenance enforcement from the Building Fund to the General Fund would fix the deficit in the Building Fund. Mr. Meyers said it would need to be quantified but, also, Mr. Kempf is currently doing the work and he is paid from the Building Fund and that it could be an option.

Council Member Moulatsiotis commended the Building Department for their work in bringing the proposed fees for consideration and agrees with all the recommendations.

Council Member Beecham doesn't want to see people paying excessive inspection fees and Mr. Kempf responded that the base fee includes one inspection. She doesn't think the proposed fees are excessive but feels the lack of increases over ten years may lead people to feel that it is.

The proposed Building Fee adjustments will be brought forward for formal action at the next regular meeting.

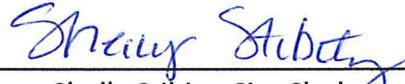
General Comments

Mr. Meyers shared that he was invited to present to the Fruitport Township Board at their meeting recently about establishing a Harvey Street corridor PlacePlan. Their Board seemed interested in the concept and cost sharing among Fruitport, Norton Shores, the Chamber and some businesses within the corridor is anticipated.

Organizers of Stand Up for the Cure, a well-known local fundraiser historically held at Harbour Towne Beach, approached the City requesting use of Ross Park on July 13. Their former location has no beach area due to high water levels. Organizers will submit a public assembly permit but may not have time to get a liquor license for the event at this late

date. An 18-team baseball tournament is scheduled at Ross Park on the same day which may create some parking challenges. Review of the application will determine if public safety at the event, including in the water, is needed. Mayor Nelund added that the group may be interested in making Norton Shores the event's permanent location.

Meeting adjourned at 6:37 p.m.



Shelly Stibitz, City Clerk