

# City of Bayfield Common Council

## Minutes of March 19, 2024

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### **Call to Order – Roll Call – Pledge of Allegiance:**

Mayor Ringberg called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. at the Bayfield City Hall followed by roll call.

**Present:** Bland, Carrier, Cornelius, Dougherty, and Mayor Ringberg

**Staff:** Clerk/ZA Hoopman, Treasurer Johnston, PWD Kovachevich, Roy Bainbridge, Jacob Dickey, Chief Novack, PWD/GBWWTPO Pearson, Operator Burg, Librarian Weber, and Office Admin. Weeks

**Others:** Mary Dougherty

### **Review/Approve Agenda:**

The Mayor asked for Employee Resignation Letters to be added to the agenda description.

Dougherty/Cornelius moved to approve the agenda with this understanding. It was felt this would not give proper public notification and was not done. Motion withdrawn. Dougherty/Cornelius moved to approve the agenda as presented. Carried.

### **Public Comment and Suggestions from Persons Present on Agenda Items:**

Mary Dougherty was present wearing three hats and made the following comments:

1. First has to do with the culture and influences occurring and how they influence those who live and work in the community. She noted the comments by Councilor Bland regarding the Harbor Commission and noted how they do not contribute to the overall wellbeing of the community.
2. She has worked for a variety of board and has learned that micro-managing workforce has negative consequences and can lead to a loss of employees and their institution knowledge.
3. She noted the Bayfield County Report that mentions Bayfield County's aging population and lack of workforce. She is concerned we are heading toward a cliff of not having any volunteers. She further mentioned the losing Pearson is a big loss to the community.

### **Agenda:**

The Mayor began by providing a summary of the resignations received and potential future ones. He also informed the Council about the PD's hiring and retention issues. The Mayor asked the Council for advice on the changes needed to retain our current employees and attract new ones. He further informed them they could go into closed session if they wanted to talk about any of these employees specifically, but general discussion about policy needed to remain in open session. He finished by saying the goal today is to concentrate on how we make sure our staff feel respected and included as members of the team. The Mayor then outlined the ground rules for discussion and noted all are responsible for their words and actions.

Staff was asked if they had any comments:

- Treasurer Johnston noted she no longer feels safe in this working environment, and we do not feel supported by the community and our community leaders. She said she had felt discriminated against, noted the toxic environment we work in and reminded the Council it is staff that run and manage the City. We are the ones doing the work. We do not feel like we are being listened to. She finished by asking the Council what they want their legacy to be.
- PWD Kovachevich told the council the activity that has occurred over the past four years helped cultivate his decision to leave. After working for 33 years, he felt disrespected and not heard. He said comments he made fell on deaf ears. Additionally, he has heard a variety of disrespectful comments directed at City Employees, and committees making decisions for personal gain, etc. Please sit down and take time to realize what is going on.

- Clerk/ZA Hoopman read a heartfelt statement noting her frustrations. She mentioned several areas of concern regarding operations; codes and policies not being followed, negative and toxic environment, impacts of such on recruitment and retention, issues with allowing me to do administrator work duties without the title or pay, communication issues, not trusting legal advice, scripting motions prior to meetings, and having no recourse as an employee even when I she asked. She asked the Council what she can and should expect going forward. Why is this happening? Why am I not valued as an employee?
- GBWWTPC Operator/PWD Pearson – When we do not feel respected by our elected officials, we do not feel valued. During the two weeks he was training in as the PWD he witnessed two City Employees and himself being chastised during a meeting by elected or appointed officials. He also noted when the Council was recently discussing employee wages, he felt there was a tone that we were being overpaid for the work we do, and we were not invited to participate. There are very few people doing a great deal of work. We bring work home and we are talked about in public. These are all factors which led do his resignation and his decision not to remain in government and the politics thereof.
- City W/S Operator Dickey said Employees need to feel valued and work in an environment that is free from discrimination and toxicity. He asked the Council to take to heart what they are hearing today and make changes that focus on the path forward.
- Chief Novak spoke up regarding PD issues and noted they sometimes are an outlier to the day-to-day activities at City Hall but found the staff to be very helpful. He further addressed the staffing issues they are experiencing and noted this is not a localized problem but a larger national one.

### **Specific Personnel Problems:**

Councilors received copies of five resignations letters (past and present). The Mayor noted the negative environment was part of their decision to leave.

Councilors also received a copy of the report from Kellie Pederson, UW Extension titled Implications on an Aging population on Human Resources and Capacity. This report outlines the aging population in Bayfield County and the looming impacts on recruitment and retention for both paid positions and those historically filled by volunteers.

Discussion ensued.

The Mayor was asked how many times staff have come to him for help and assistance?

The Mayor responded by noting he had not done enough for employees, but outlined the many ways he tried to make positive changes: creating guidelines for Council Members, the Spano Retreat, creating a code of ethics, etc.

Questions were asked about what occurred at the Plan Meeting that led to two City employees' resignations. No information was provided.

In another round of spirited discussion, members were called out on conflicts of interest that were noted previously and in the recent past, but there was no acknowledgement or action taken.

Cornelius/Carrier made a motion to create a policy where there is zero tolerance for toxic behavior from said board (Council, Committee/Commissions/Boards). Discussion. Cornelius volunteered to spearhead looking into and drafting policy. Passed by roll call vote as follows: Bland, Carrier, Cornelius, and Dougherty – yes.

**Closed Session:**

Dougherty/Cornelius made a motion to convene into closed session pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes Section 19.85(1)(b, c, and f) to discuss specific personnel problems. Passed by roll call vote as follows: Bland-no, Carrier-no, Cornelius-yes, and Dougherty-yes. Due to a tie, the Mayor voted. He voted yes. Motion to convene into closed session carried. (6:06 p.m.)

Present: Mayor Ringberg, and Councilors Bland, Carrier, Cornelius, and Dougherty  
All others, including staff, were asked to leave.

**Reconvene into Open Session:**

Cornelius/Dougherty moved to reconvene into open session for purposes of adjournment. Passed by roll call vote – all ayes. (7:20 p.m.)

**Next Mtgs:**

- Tuesday, April 16, 5:30 p.m. -Reorganizational Meeting
- Tuesday, May 14, 4-6 p.m. Open Book
- Tuesday, May 14, 6 p.m. Regular Meeting
- Wednesday, June 19, 5:30 p.m.

**Adjournment:** Bland/Dougherty moved to adjourn. Carried. (7:21 p.m. )

Minutes by Clerk/ZA Billie Hoopman and Mayor Ringberg