

CITY OF FALCON HEIGHTS
Regular Meeting of the City Council
City Hall
2077 West Larpenteur Avenue
AGENDA
February 27, 2019 at 7:00 P.M.

A. CALL TO ORDER:

B. ROLL CALL: LINDSTROM X LEEHY X HARRIS X
MIAZGA X GUSTAFSON X

STAFF PRESENT: THONGVANH X

C. PRESENTATION

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS:

F. CONSENT AGENDA:

1. General Disbursements through: 2/19/19 \$83,810.21
Payroll through: 2/15/19 \$19,439.07

Council Member Gustafson Moved, Approved 5-0

G: POLICY ITEMS:

Mayor Lindstrom

I want a motion to add an agenda to the Policy Agenda, and that is announcing the results of the closed meeting. The closed meeting is about the performance of the Fire Chief Rich Hinrichs and taking action that the Council seems appropriate.

Mayor Lindstrom 1st Motion
Council Member Gustafson 2nd Motion
Approved 5-0

1. Results of Closed Meeting on Fire Chief

Mayor Lindstrom

The Council had a chance to evaluate the performance of our Fire Chief. I will speak for myself, and I find the performance of our Fire Chief has been unsatisfactory to me. He consistently violated the policies of the City of Falcon Heights, specifically on the "Respectful Work Place Policy." There have been interactions with employees from various departments with disrespectful language and angry outbursts. This is very disturbing to me. Second, the Fire

Chief conveyed information to state agencies and other local governments that have been explicitly against city official policy. I find it to be unsatisfactory and recommend that this Council terminate the Fire Chief.

Roger Knutson, City Attorney, asked if the employee evaluation was shared by the Council. Mayor Lindstrom answered yes. Mr. Knutson then addressed that the next item is an appropriate action to make a motion. Mayor Lindstrom stated, "I would like a motion to terminate Rich Hinrichs as our Fire Chief and as a city employee." Mr. Knutson asked if termination will effective immediately, and Mayor Lindstrom answered yes.

Clement Kurhajetz Jr (1733 Hamline Ave)

I want to address on the outbursts and not following city procedures. In order to be a chief, you have to have outbursts. I hope Rich has a good attorney and hope he gives out information to other cities, State, Federal government or ISIS so it can ruin this community's look. I think Rich does a good job. I think the Council and Administration are wrong and should look inside the city itself besides the Fire Department. You should also look at the people other departments and in the office. I do not think you did your due diligence when you hired them.

Michael Kruse, Fire Captain (1235 Roselawn Ave)

I have been in the Fire Department for nine years. I do not think this is an open process and no one in the city knows that this is happening right now, except for the people in this room. It was not on the agenda, and the Council added it today. You are taking an action that no one in the public knows and does not have a chance to voice their opinions. I think that is a bad process.

This move will jeopardize the safety of this community and the City of Lauderdale. Rich is a keystone of this department. You will have a tough time getting a suitable replacement. What happens tomorrow and who is in charge tomorrow? When we get a call at 2:00 AM tonight? Does anyone have that answer?

I understand that this was brought on by an incident where I was present. There were no verbal threats made or physical threats. It was an animated discussion, and we had dozens of these kinds of conversations in the past. Rich was the Assistant Fire Chief under Clem and became the Fire Chief after he retired. I can say that he is the person who has the most technical knowledge about firefighting and can lead a department. There is no question in my mind about that.

Anton Fehrenbach, Assistant Fire Chief

I served in the Fire Department for almost 15 years and Assistant Fire Chief for over four years. I want to thank Rich for putting me in the position. I completely agree with Captain Kruse. What happens at 8pm tonight when the Chief is no longer involved? Who is taking over? Has that been thought of?

I personally cannot put in as much time that Rich put in. I thought I put in a lot of time, but he goes beyond. A couple angry outbursts that look negatively to the City Council are how we deal on the fire side. We deal with emergencies and life and death situations. We handle ourselves differently because this job is tough on us. Recently, Minnesota passed PTSD

legislation which help first responders dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder get coverage through workers' compensation. We handle things differently and we are a big family. Removing our Fire Chief is sad and wrong. Many cities have reached out to us and are not happy about it. They stated that it would be a great loss to the city. It is saddening to see this happening right now. This is not good for the City of Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Roseville, St. Paul, and Ramsey County.

Michael Mckay (1753 Holton)

Rich and I joined the Fire Department within a month of each other. As a taxpayer in Falcon Heights, I am concerned about the budget. A couple of years ago, the police department budget increased from \$650,000 to over a million in less than three years. I also heard rumors that will increase. I want to know the Council's plans for what is going to happen to the Fire Department. I hope that has been taken care of, and I would hope that you do not terminate someone, especially without notice.

Rich has put in many hours, and I do not think the compensation that he receives is not even comparable to anything that you are going to get in the future. Another thing that worries me is that there were no communications to any members of the Fire Department from the Council and Mayor. You are not following your due diligence. Again as a taxpayer, I cannot emphasize that enough and our tax pay is limited. Our police department has gone up, and that is where most of our tax goes. Is there a planned budget for the Fire Department? Do we have a plan or are we going to pay Roseville or St. Paul?

Mayor Lindstrom

I would like to renew my motion to terminate the Fire Chief and as a city employee, effective immediately.

Approved 5-0

H. INFORMATION/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Council Member Miazga

- My first board meeting with NYFS is tomorrow. They do a lot of good work.
- I have been working with Minnesota Management Budget to get the city registered for the upcoming bonding cycle, and this is for the Community Park.
- If anyone is interested in talking about Grants.gov or other websites that might have funds for us for municipal items, please let me know. Some community members have been working on this but can need more help.
- March 13, City Administrator Thongvanh and I will present the Community Survey results.

Council Member Leehy

- Tomorrow is the Cultivating a Caring Community Mural Making event at Falcon Heights Elementary School from 5-7pm. Community members can come and paint the mural. The project is led by Melodee Strong who is an artist and advocate and school Principal Beth Behnke. We look forward to seeing everyone there.

Mayor Lindstrom

- I was at Family Fun night at Falcon Heights Elementary School last week. I got taped to the wall by children. The fundraising event was for the mural. It was a fun night.

Council Member Harris

- I attended my first Planning Commission meeting last night. We had a public hearing on zoning code changes specifically on fences. They will make a recommendation to the council. Also two of the new Planning Commission members attended their first meeting and everything went great.

Council Member Gustafson

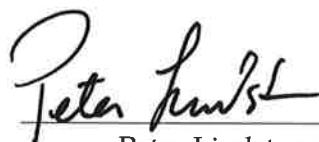
- The Community Engagement Commission did not meet this month but is holding an event as a part of "Cultivating a Caring Community" on Monday, March 18 at 7pm, City Hall. The guest speaker is Ron Rabinovitz who is known for "Letter from Jackie". Ron's story is of a kid, his larger than life hero, and the lessons he learned. Both of them were so different yet they formed a friendship that not even he can explain. Ron puts on a nice program. It is a good intergenerational speech and talks about how we can get along with each other and cross-culture.
- The Community Engagement Commission will hold the regular meeting on Monday, March 25, 7pm at City Hall. We are working to update the Neighborhood Liaison program and looking forward to community events.
- As we go forward with our Fire Department, they are still city employees and working for us. The chain of command will fall on the Fire Chief Assistant and Captains and will be responsible with all the 911 fire calls. City Council and Administration will work together and find a new Fire Chief. In order to follow the law, we will develop a process where public laws and public data privacy laws prevent us from telling anybody prior to this point about where things are going. We want residents of Falcon Heights to understand that the Fire Department is a good place and our leadership will continue to follow unless they choose not to. That would be their choice and not the decision of the City Council or the city. We must have a respectful workplace within a respectful work culture and to effectively deliver public service in the public safety here in Falcon Heights.

City Administrator Thongvanh

- Two days ago, I did a courtesy sidewalk plow on Larpenteur Ave and opened the sidewalk more. I would like to thank residents who helped clear the snow and followed city code. It has been a rough winter, we want to make sure our residents and visitors are safe. It is also going to snow again on Friday with 5-8 inches of snow.

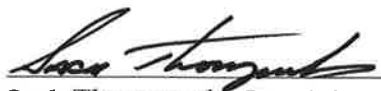
I. COMMUNITY FORUM:

J. ADJOURNMENT: 7:26 PM



Peter Lindstrom, Mayor

Dated this 27th day of February, 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sack Thongvanh', written over a horizontal line.

Sack Thongvanh, City Administrator