

Mayor Charles L. "Skip" Lee called a virtual meeting of the Sterling City Council to order at 6:30 pm on Monday, January 4, 2021. Roll call. Present: Aldermen Retha Elston, Josh Johnson, Joe Martin, John Stauter, Christine Wilen and Jim Wise. Absent: None.

Also attending were City Attorney Tim Zollinger, City Manager Scott Shumard, Finance Director Cindy Von Holten, Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt, Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader, Police Chief Alex Chavira, Interim Fire Chief Michael Dettman and City Clerk Teri Sathoff.

Mayor Lee, City Manager Shumard, Police Chief Chavira and City Clerk Sathoff were present in the council chambers, everyone else attended via Zoom. The meeting was recorded and will be kept on the city hard drive. All members in attendance could hear the other members in attendance.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- A. Approval of Minutes.
- B. Approval of Bills and Payroll.

Motion seconded by Alderman Stauter. Alderman Stauter questioned the replacement of a garage door at Public Works, Schrader advised it had frozen to the ground and was in bad shape, the door was in the building during the fire and it has been a source of trouble due to its age. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Stauter, Johnson, Wise and Wilen. Nays – None. Motion carried. Alderman Martin was having issues with his audio and was unable to vote.

Mayor Lee opened the discussion about the 1st Avenue road project, he read the following background information;

The City intends to rebuild 1<sup>st</sup> Ave from 5<sup>th</sup> Street to LeFevre in 2021.

The idea of converting one-way streets to two-way streets has been brought up several times in recent years in various planning meetings including the comprehensive plan, strategic plan and riverfront plan, and in conversations with the national and local Main Street programs.

One-ways came to prevalence in the 1950's for the sole purpose of expediting travel times for vehicles, especially in and out of a downtown setting. This was valued in

Sterling when the Mill and other downtown factories were employing thousands of people in the area. Now that National, Lawrence and NWS&W are gone from the downtown, their appeal has diminished.

There is a growing push to convert two-ways to one-ways for the benefits the two-ways bring. Two-ways slow traffic due to "friction" as engineers call it and allow for better local access. These are benefits to both residential areas like 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue north of 5<sup>th</sup> Street, and to downtowns. Downtowns also benefit from having less confusion for people, especially out-of-town travelers.

- Pros of a two-way:
  - Directness of travel and ease of way finding
  - Economic Vitality and lower vacancy for downtown businesses
  - Safer vehicular speeds
  - Increase safety and convenience for pedestrian and bicycle travel
- Pros of a one-way
  - Lower vehicular travel times
  - Higher vehicular traffic volumes

If the City wants to work toward the earlier goals of a more pedestrian and commerce friendly downtown by eventually converting the one-ways, this is likely the easiest place to start. This is the best time to do it as the road will be under full construction and the new pattern will be easier to implement at reopening than at any other time.

Further, it's safer for pedestrians in the neighborhood, it should slow traffic, make navigating easier, improve the value of the properties and increase the sense of a residential neighborhood feel vs a throughway road. Once reconstructed, speeds will increase and a two-way will help mitigate some of that.

The staff and consultants strongly recommend the City move forward with the conversion of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, north of 5<sup>th</sup>, to a two-way.

Alderman Stauter stated a year ago he would have been completely on board with this, however after speaking to residents he is hesitant. The residents he spoke to were either against it or did not have an opinion. Stauter is concerned about the safety at the intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street. Stauter stated the pros that are listed for conversion is lower crime, lower auto theft and higher property values and he doesn't see that as the case with 1st Avenue. City Manager Shumard said they are trying to give 1st Avenue more of a residential feel and to lower the speeds. Alderman Stauter stated 1st Avenue is not the only street vehicles speed on.

Alderman Wilen questioned the claim that property values would rise on two-way streets as opposed to one-ways. Mayor Lee stated the property values could be impacted on commercial property but not necessarily on residential property.

Alderman Elston stated she spoke to homeowners in the area and she heard concerns that the road is not wide enough in areas. She understands that will be addressed during reconstruction. Elston stated she watched traffic on 1st Avenue for a while and she noticed the speed as well as one wrong way driver. Alderman Elston feels that this would be the time to make the change. She emphasized the need to keep the citizens informed of the progress.

Alderman Wise feels this is something that will create positive change for the downtown area. Wise stated the design will help control traffic. He feels this is a good idea and will facilitate future conversions.

Alderman Johnson stated that change is hard to accept. Johnson also stated that past meetings on downtown revitalization emphasized the need to uncouple the one-ways. He feels this is necessary change.

Alderman Stauter questioned if Fourth Avenue will be on the radar for change as well. Shumard advised that Willett Hofman has been asked to investigate if it is wide enough to convert from a one-way to a two-way.

Alderman Martin stated his concern is the safety of the 1st Avenue LeFevre intersection, his concern is the CGH entrance on LeFevre causing traffic accidents.

Alderman Stauter asked the Mayor if 1st Avenue becomes two-way would we eventually be able to travel south on 1st Avenue across the bridge. Mayor Lee answered, theoretically, yes but that is a long time down the road.

City Manager Shumard posed the question to the council, what are the pros to keeping it a one way. Alderman Stauter stated the pro would be to avoid change. Stauter stated the change would be okay in a commercial area as opposed to a residential area.

Deputy Fire Chief Dettman notified the Council that all but five of the firefighters have received their 1st vaccinations for COVID-19.

Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader advised that clean up from the winter storm continues. The main focus keeping the snow routes cleared. The amount of snow

and ice created a situation where they were unable to start the residential streets as soon and they would have liked to.

City Manager Shumard stated that Brian Zinanni had withdrew from the fire chief's position. Sterling and Rock Falls will be meeting to discuss next steps.

Alderman Elston confirmed with Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt that Christmas tree pick up is through January 15, 2021 and to place the trees in the area where you would place your trash. Alderman Elston also thanked Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader for the snow removal progress.

Alderman Wise asked for clarification if a decision had been made on converting 1st Avenue from one way to two-way. City Manager Shumard stated that he felt the consensus of the council was in favor of going forward with the change. Alderman Wise questioned if the City is considering all of the one ways in the city. Mayor Lee stated the long term goal is to decouple all the one ways in the city.

Alderman Stauter thanked Officer Stanley for taking care of 2 vehicles that were parked on the road in front of his residence for several months.

Alderman Martin advised the Mayor that he is currently under COVID-19 quarantine due to his wife testing positive.

Mayor Lee wished everyone a happy New Year and stated he hopes this year will be better.

The meeting adjourned at 7:10pm.

Teri Sathoff  
City Clerk