

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION  
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL  
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS  
January 8, 2024

The January 8, 2024 City Council work session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 20600 City Center Blvd. Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

The following Council members were present: Mayor Raymond Soliman, City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall, City Treasurer Glen Conklin, Alderman Scott Dyke, Alderman John Vershay, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderman Darrell Jefferson, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Nate Albert, Alderman Joe Kubal.

Also present were: City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, Police Chief Ed Clark, City Attorney Mike Stiff.

Absent were: Finance Director Lisa Banovetz, Public Works Director Blaine Kline, Interim Economic Development Director Ron Mentzer, Building Commissioner Don Seeman, Interim Planner Maura Rigoni.

**TOPIC: Candidate for Cable Television**

Mayor Soliman commented that Ron Romero needed to step away from his duties and responsibilities for the City of Crest Hill as the Cable Television Specialist. Mayor Soliman commented that Jeff Prach who has many years of experience is interested in the position. Mayor Soliman asked Jeff to approach the podium and introduce himself.

Jeff thanked the mayor for having him there and gave some background information on his experience. He commented that the mayor reached out to him when he found out about Ron Romero stepping down. He also commented that he has been involved in government television station for over thirty years. He commented that he helps City of Lockport, Village of Plainfield, and the City of Joliet. He was able to look at the system already and commented that the cameras on the television side done by AVI are done very well but he did notice very quickly that the sound system needs some work. He commented that the room sound and the sound going to the recording is hollow and the microphones are from the old facility. He commented that he is the Executive Director of Technology at Northwestern University and has been in television for the last thirty years and is confident that he can handle the position.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that we are all aware that there is a problem with the sound. Jeff commented that there are good bones and just needs some adjustments. Alderwoman Gazal asked if he will be taping the meetings. Jeff commented that he will be taping them. Alderwoman Gazal also asked if the YouTube issue was resolved. Jeff commented that there are some password issues and they have gotten it resolved this afternoon.

Alderman Jefferson asked if he could repeat his background. Jeff commented that he is Executive Director of Technology at Northwestern University for the last twenty-two years, Chief Engineer at Soldier Field White Sox, Director for Chicago Fire Soccer League, have been in television for thirty years and have taught at Columbia College.

Mayor Soliman commented that Jeff will be here the next couple of months to learn and adjust the system and then he would hire an intern for the meetings.

Alderman Albert commented that Jeff forgets all the volunteerism he has done as well, and he feels Jeff is highly qualified for helping the City of Crest Hill.

Alderman Oberlin asked if we are signing a contract with Jeff. Mayor Soliman commented that Jeff is willing to assume all the duties at the same rate of pay as Ron Romero and Attorney Stiff will go over that and Jeff can review.

Alderman Gazal asked how we can contact him if needed. Jeff commented that he plans to send out his email, and phone numbers and will send reports and updates on how taping went for every meeting.

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Kubal, Albert, Cipiti, Oberlin, Gazal, Jefferson, Vershay, Dyke.

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None.

**TOPIC: White Smoke & Ash BYOB Request**

Mayor Soliman commented that they have a request for a BYOB for White Smoke & Ash. Mayor Soliman commented that Don White, his wife, and his sister Paula, who is also his attorney with us tonight. Mayor Soliman commented that they have been in business for sixteen months and have had no problems at the location. Mayor Soliman wanted our attorney to look at the draft ordinance. Attorney Mike Stiff commented that he has worked very closely with Paula, and he thinks from their standpoint this is something that can be done. There are potential risks but risks they want to take. Attorney Stiff commented that one of the things that comes up with this is if this is going to open any floodgates. It is a unique type of BYOB, it is not available to any other business other than a retail tobacco store under Illinois Law. It is not a liquor license, or a pouring license and you can add in ordinance that the business must be open for one year and have had no problems with law enforcement and following all ordinances.

Paula, their sister/attorney, commented that this has been in the works for over a year. She commented that she lives in Texas, and most of this work has been done by email. She commented that her title is Chief Compliance Officer, she is an attorney but not an Illinois attorney and does not act in illegal compacity. She commented that when the ordinance was written at the time, we wanted to be the only unique upscale lounge in the City of Crest Hill.

Don, the owner of White Smoke & Ash, approached the podium. He commented that this has been a long time coming and treats this business as he has with his other job, and they police the business so there is no problem. They want to be family to Crest Hill. He commented that they purchased the building on June 14, 2021 and people laughed at them stating the building looked like a gang hangout, but they continued because they knew Crest Hill was the right place. He commented that he and his wife took every penny they had and paid for this business with cash. He stated they did a total rehab was done in eleven

months and passed all inspections the first time. He commented that he contracted the job, his wife did the interior design and they opened in 2022. Don commented that Goofy G's allows his customers to park after hours for overflow. They have over thirty positive google reviews, several documentaries have been done at the location, and several local individuals have held events at this location.

Paula commented that it is her job to make sure everything complies and has no problems. She commented that this is a luxury lounge.

Mayor Soliman commented that Don is a man of his word. When Don told the mayor this would be a top-notch business with no problems, he kept his word. Mayor Soliman commented that this is a permit license not a liquor license. Mayor Soliman asked if there could be one change to say they will provide storage lockers for customers to store their alcohol. Mayor Soliman commented that he would like the Council to only allow one business license for this type of permit and if another same type of business comes through and wants this type of permit would need to go through the same process and be in business for one year with no problems.

Paula commented that they are adding additional lockers along with a disposal of liquor.

Police Chief Ed Clark commented that they have been very compliant and have no problems.

Attorney Stiff commented that there needs to be a Class Q BYOB from the state to be added to the code. They will also need dramshop insurance and city named additional insured on their policy.

Alderman Cipiti applauds them for the work they did on the business and thanked them for the business they have brought to the City of Crest Hill and congratulated them. He also asked if they have an age restriction. Don commented that customers must be twenty-one to enter and he cards anyone who looks under thirty years old.

Alderman Oberlin commented that she lives close to the business and goes by it every day and has heard of no complaints, thanked Don, and congratulated them as well on their business.

Alderman Albert thanked Don for the phenomenal job of cleaning up that property and investing in the community and is looking forward to the use of the permit. He appreciates the fact that we are adapting and allowing this type of permit.

Alderman Jefferson commented that the place looks fabulous, and his neighbors think highly of them.

Alderman Gazal asked how many people this establishment holds. Don commented that it will hold 182 people. She also commented that the place looks amazing, but she is not going to deny she is nervous about this. She also asked how you will control how many times you would serve alcohol. Paula commented that they will not be serving alcohol, patrons will bring the alcohol in themselves. Paula commented that the language will be put into place and the language will be in place for the customers. Paula commented that if they think they are coming into smoke and get drunk this is not the business. Paul

commented that she will make sure the language is correct for the amount of alcohol that is brought in, and it will be patrolled. It will not be allowed to come and sit around and get drunk. Paula commented that what you bring in must be consumed in the location, and any open bottles cannot be removed from the location.

Alderman Vershay asked if there will be a time limit that they can be present. Don commented that there is no time limit since some people come in and drink coffee.

Alderwoman Gazal asked if there is outside seating., she was told that there are tables up front but not going to be used for consuming outside they only can drink alcohol indoors.

Alderman Jefferson commented that this is a social atmosphere, and he has visited several locations and was always respectable, it is a very relaxed atmosphere.

Alderperson Oberlin commented that she has a lot of faith in Don and hopes everything goes wonderfully for them.

Alderman Dyke asked what the times of operations will be. Paula commented that the hours will remain the same at this time.

Mayor commented that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done with the verbiage but would take a straw vote.

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal, Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal.

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None.

**TOPIC: Division at Churnovic – 21320 W. Division Street**

Mayor Soliman commented that this is a unique situation, the homeowner, Mike Gabriel, has a driveway that goes right out into this intersection. City Engineer Ron Weideman was asked if there was a solution to help the family upon leaving his home and going east or west on Division Street.

Engineer Wiedeman commented that he has noticed trucks backing up and that makes it difficult to pull out of the driveway and there is no traffic light that allows him to safely get out of his driveway. Engineer Wiedeman commented that he contacted Meade on putting two signals and a detector in the driveway to trigger as the vehicle to pull up and turn the light to make it safer to leave the driveway. Meade came out with a quote of \$22,557.21. Engineer Wiedeman asked to except the quote from Meade, and this can be paid out of MFT funds and can be added to next year's budget and have the work done in the spring of this year.

Alderman Albert commented that he has had several discussions with Mike, and the school bus cannot stop in front of the house due to the traffic and this work should have been done from the beginning, it is long overdue.

Alderman Kubal asked what the drivers going west on Division Street will see coming up to this intersection that is different. Engineer Wiedeman commented that they will not see anything, that this will just trigger him in the line up to get a light pulling out of this driveway.

Alderman Jefferson commented that he is glad that this is being investigated and he applauds this.

Alderman Vershay commented that when the traffic light was put in there he asked about the driveway and was told it is a driveway and if it was fifty feet over it is still a driveway and means nothing and he does not have to abide by the signal. Engineer Wiedeman commented that if the driveway was fifty feet down that is correct but why the driveway was not moved, he is not sure.

Mike, the homeowner, commented that this signal increases his family's safety and anyone else's safety when exiting the driveway.

Alderman Albert thanked the homeowner for his professionalism with all of this and he understand it has been stressful.

Alderman Cipiti asked how long they have lived there and was told since 2012 before Churnovic was there. Alderman Cipiti asked about the school bus situation. Mike, the homeowner, commented that he contacted the school but was told they cannot stop at an intersection for safety and his daughter would have to walk down one hundred feet to the west or east and stand there by herself waiting for the school bus with traffic around.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that she is all for safety and is hoping Sherry Williams from Will County Board Commissioner hears what she has been fighting for on the light at McGilvrey. Safety is for everyone we do not pick and choose. Alderman Albert commented that he agrees, and we really need to get that light moved farther south

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote. The informal vote was split, the outcome was:

AYES: Ald. Kubal, Albert, Cipiti, Oberlin, Gazal, Jefferson, Vershay, Dyke.

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None.

#### **TOPIC: Burglar Alarm Residential Renewal**

Alderwoman Gazal commented that the residents have just received the burglar alarm application renewal with the \$100.00 renewal fee and are not happy. She commented that as everyone is aware this was brought before the Council last year and has fallen through the cracks. Attorney Mike Stiff commented that he questioned the fee if we were moving the fee back to what it was or doing away with the fee completely.

Attorney Stiff commented that the ordinance that he has written up states that the alarm fee was increased in 2022 and we now have determined that the residential alarms will present a disproportionate financial burden on residents and the City Council has determined there is no such burden on commercial businesses. He commented that he has changed that to require that residential alarms will still need to register but there will no longer have a fee,

but every year would have to renew the registration with no fee annually and the commercial businesses will still need to register annually and pay the \$100.00 fee annually.

Alderperson Oberlin commented that residents are trying to protect their homes, and she likes the idea of not having a fee for the residents. Attorney Stiff commented that there is still the falls alarm fee.

Alderwoman Gazal asked how many residential alarms have paid already. City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall commented that there have been approximately twenty that have already paid. Alderwoman Gazal commented that they will need to be refunded.

City Clerk Vershay-Hall asked if the Council would still like the Clerk's Office to still issue a license. Several Officials stated that they should still get a license for registering each year with no fee.

Attorney Stiff commented that a letter will need to go out to all residents with residential alarms that have not paid yet, informing them there will no longer be a \$100.00 fee for residential alarms.

Alderman Cipiti asked what if a resident does not register their alarm since there is no fee now and asked if the city still would get notified. Chief Clark commented that we do track the false alarm and would get notice of this. Alderman Cipiti asked if there would be an additional fine for not being registered. Attorney Stiff commented that the enforce mechanism is the honor system now.

Alderman Albert asked what the purpose is of being registered now since the police are still called out if the alarm is activated. Chief Clark commented that the emergency information the resident provides when registering would be available and ready when the alarm is activated, letting the Police/Wescom know who will be there and who to call.

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Gazal, Jefferson, Vershay, Dyke, Kubal, Albert, Cipiti, Oberlin.

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None.

### **TOPIC: Ordinance and Executive Order – Intercity Buses Discussion**

Mayor Soliman commented that the Intercity Buses have been on the news and the surrounding communities have been passing executive orders and ordinances regarding the Intercity Buses. Mayor Soliman commented that surrounding communities have shared their ordinances/executive orders with us, and they all seem the same.

Attorney Stiff commented that there are very few municipalities that do not want to sit around and not do anything and have been using other municipalities ordinance. Attorney Stiff commented that the home rule municipalities have more restrictions because they have greater latitude that require advance notice, prior registration, identification of each passenger, etc. There are watchdog groups that state Kankakee Ordinance is illegal and unconstitutional. He then explained that Executive Order was brought about during holidays when an emergency arises, and it allows the mayor to use certain powers to create

an Executive Order. It was said that Crest Hill has no Metra station or bus service and does Crest Hill want to get an ordinance together to do something and put it in place.

Attorney Stiff commented that as a non-home ruled community you do have the ability to do whatever is specifically granted to you by the municipal government and that the provision of the municipal code states that you can regulate bus drivers/bus companies. He then commented that Crest Hill does have some authority to regulate the buses.

Alderperson Oberlin commented that the last thing you want in the dead of winter is leaving someone somewhere in the middle of winter who may or may not speak English and that is worrying her.

Attorney Stiff commented that we can regulate buses and bus drivers in the ordinance, and we can provide for the safety of our residents and the people getting off the buses because of the weather not being ideal.

Alderman Gazal commented that we may not have train or bus stations in the city but how do we know they will not drop them off at the City Hall. Attorney Stiff commented that we do not know.

Chief Clark commented that they have a list of services that places can provide like Aunt Martha's to the migrants. He commented that one of the issues is that there is an outbreak of smallpox. The officers are aware of this and have been told to wear PPE and contact the fire department. He commented that if they do drop them off in the middle of a field and it is snowing there is a charter out of Orland that will come transport them but that will cost the city about \$1,000.00. Chief Clark also commented that if there is a bus still there, the Police will escort the bus to Chicago to the landing address 800 S. Desplaines in Chicago, which is designated by the emergency services.

Alderperson Oberlin commented that we do not want to see this happen, but we do not want to close our eyes and walk away.

Alderman Jefferson asked if they drop the passengers off at a certain time of day or is it anytime in the 24 hours. Chief Clark commented that the buses are coming from Texas and is difficult to know when and where they are dropping the passengers. He also commented that they might be going to Joliet, but they stop in Crest Hill instead, which is when we start transporting or doing whatever we can to get them out of the weather.

Alderman Jefferson commented that Chicago is known as a sanctuary city and is there any sanctuary status with Illinois. Attorney Stiff commented that his belief is that Governor Pritsker has designated Illinois as a sanctuary state. Alderman Jefferson asked if that is the case does that make Crest Hill sanctuary under a blanket.

Alderperson Oberlin read that the Illinois Trust Act of 2017 made Illinois a sanctuary state for undocumented immigrants.

Alderman Gazal asked if we could do an Executive Order or not? Attorney Stiff commented that we really cannot do an Executive Order for this. In most towns that made an Executive Order the Council or Boards voted on an ordinance ratifying the Executive Order, but we are past that in Crest Hill. Alderman Gazal asked what we could do.

Attorney Stiff commented that we can pass an ordinance that does anything around that spectrum knowing that it is not perfect or ideal. He commented that you can pass a resolution declaring Crest Hill not to be a sanctuary city along with an ordinance regulating buses.

Mayor Soliman commented that no matter what we put in an ordinance it will be hard to enforce but at least we will have something and hopefully be to our benefit.

Treasurer Conklin commented that if you are wanting to deter a bus driver from dropping off passengers could not, we have an ordinance to show the driver that there is a \$750.00 penalty to the driver when discharging the passengers.

Sherry Williams, a Crest Hill resident, commented that she does not feel this is an emergency, but we need to make sure they get to a place where they are safe before we get them to where they need to be. She commented that she believes people are worried that five hundred people are going to get dropped off and that is not going to happen, but we do need to be prepared and have a plan. Sherry commented that the talk of we are not a sanctuary city, sounds like we are not a welcoming community, that we should be welcoming and have a plan in place.

Stuart Soifer, a resident, commented that he believes something should be in place. (Audio was not clear).

Attorney Stiff suggested going with an ordinance for illegal bus stops, not adding they need to show documentation on passengers. Attorney Stiff commented that the plan should be the police department plan and additional to the ordinance and it should be a safety, welfare, health issue.

Mayor Soliman asked for an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal.

NAYES: None

ABSENT: None.

Alderman Vershay asked if we could impound the bus. Attorney Stiff commented that can go into the ordinance.

Alderpersion Oberlin commented that she feels if they are going to drop off passengers, they are not going to do it where it is noticed and feels enforcing this will be the challenge but wants the plan in place if it happens.

Alderwoman Gazal asked if she brings in first aid packages in case of emergency, can we store them somewhere. Chief Clark commented that they can store these in case needed.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Abraham Garciam, a resident who lives in Romeoville, and commented he owns and operates BF Tire out of Joliet where he wholesales commercial tires. He commented that he started his business out of his garage. He commented that he has a good record and has grown and now manufactures tires. He stated the reason he is here is that he was



approached about Crest Hill Lanes and that it would be a great location because of the cost of square footage and space. He commented that the building is not in great condition and needs to be fixed and they are estimating \$100,000 to \$200,000 to get the place suitable for operations. He would not buy the property to have it sit the way it is and to be a problem for the community. He commented that he has a total of fifteen employees. He commented that he talked to some officials that were concerned that it would bring more trucks. He also commented that it would not increase the truck traffic amount since we already have trucks coming down the road. He mentioned that they would put up a fence and would have to park trailers on the lot that are fifty-three footers but would have a fence.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that her invitation was to come to a work session with plans not just discussion. Abraham did mention that he would like to know if this were something that would work before, he allocates resources. He commented that he is not in dire need of this property, and they are asking \$1.3 million for the property.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that area is not for trucking since there are businesses and homeowners in the area.

Alderman Dyke stated that he talked to him previously that the zoning will not be met and suggested a commercial area.

Mayor Soliman commented that it would require a rezoning since it is a B-2 zoning. The property must have a sprinkler system if a tire business and would probably bring problems with the residents. Mayor Soliman commented that he agrees that he would be better in an industrial area.

He does not see it being a problem there and if he does not buy it who will? What is the difference if another business goes in there that they will need to pay the cost of the property and repair to the building.

Alderman Jefferson commented that the first thing that needs addressed is the zoning which will need to go through the Plan Commission before this discussion can go any farther. Abraham commented he would rather have a straightforward 'no' instead of the run around.

Alderman Albert explained that there are certain zonings for certain properties because of the impact it has on the neighborhood and do not want to be misleading that he would be in favor of moving forward with this since it could be very impactful to the residents in crest Hill and Joliet across the street. He also commented that he feels there are other properties that would work better in the city. Abraham thanked the Council and said that is the answer he was looking for.

#### **MAYORS UPDATES:**

There were no mayor updates.

#### **COMMITTEE/LIAISON UPDATES:**

There were no committee/liaison updates.

Mayor Raymond Soliman asked for a motion to go into executive session on personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

(#1) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderman Cipiti, to go into an executive session on Personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

On roll call, the vote was:

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

There being eight (8) affirmative votes, the MOTION CARRIED.

Executive Session 9:23p.m.

(#2) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderperson Jefferson to reconvene from the executive session on Personnel 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1).

On roll call, the vote was:

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Vershay, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

There being eight (8) affirmative votes, the MOTION CARRIED.

Reconvened 9:45 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Approved this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2024

As presented \_\_\_\_\_

As amended \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

\_\_\_\_\_  
RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR