

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
January 2, 2024

The regular meeting of the City of Crest Hill was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 20600 City Center Boulevard, Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited in unison.

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

Also present were: Police Chief Ed Clark, Public Works Director Blaine Kline, City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, City Attorney Mike Stiff, Deputy Clerk Karen Kozierka.

Absent were: Building Commissioner Don Seeman, Finance Director Lisa Banovetz, Interim Director of Community Development Ron Mentzer, Interim Employee Relations Manager Dave Strahl, Interim Planner Maura Rigoni.

Mayor Soliman asked to extend a professional courtesy to the City Attorney Mike Stiff and to deviate from the agenda.

City Attorney Mike Stiff thanked the Council and the mayor for extending professional courtesy. He explained that he has a regularly scheduled commitment on Tuesdays and thanked the Council and the Mayor for going out of order to accommodate him.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT: City Attorney Mike Stiff requested the Consideration of the Request by Reza's Automotive for a Refund of the Previously Paid Flagpole Setback Variance Fee per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

Attorney Stiff explained this had gone through the Plan Commission process and came through the Council with approval for a flagpole setback. During this process, Reza had asked for the fees for a commercial flagpole setback to be lowered more in line with what the residents fee is. He stated that the Council did agree to lower the fee and then consider the refund request. Mr. Reza paid \$1,000.00 and now we will be refunding \$750.00, which is the difference from what the ordinance now reflects for a commercial flagpole setback variance.

(#1) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderman Cipiti, for Consideration of the Request by Reza's Automotive for a Refund \$750.00 of the Previously Paid Flagpole Setback Variance Fee per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

On roll call, the vote was:

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

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

MAYOR: Mayor Raymond Soliman requested Appointment of Dave Strahl as Interim Human Resource Manager per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

(#2) Motion by Alderwoman Gazal seconded by Alderperson Oberlin, for Appointment of Dave Strahl as Interim Human Resource Manager per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

On roll call, the vote was:

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

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

City Attorney Mike Stiff commented that with this appointment and the advice and consent of the Council there was a request of an Independent Contractor Agreement be entered and accompany this appointment.

City Attorney Mike Stiff requested to Approve a Resolution Approving an Independent Contractor Agreement with Dave Strahl as the Interim Human Resources Manager Consulting Services per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

Alderman Cipiti asked how this would affect Dave Strahl's start date with the changes. Attorney Stiff commented that the way the agreement is phrased is that it is effective upon the last signature. Attorney Stiff was unclear if he was going to work and continue with any outstanding projects. The agreement does state any work done before the date of the agreement executed would be compensated.

City Treasurer Glen Conklin commented that he does have some pending work but with Council's concurrence he would like to get him on as soon as possible.

Alderman Albert commented that he thought there was going to be an opportunity to discuss the terms more in detail before voting on this.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that she knows no one likes 'HR' but she is requesting for all the staff and elected officials to treat Dave Strahl with respect, as he deserves.

(#3) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderwoman Gazal, to Approve a Resolution Approving an Independent Contractor Agreement with Dave Strahl as the Interim Human Resources Manager Consulting Services per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

On roll call, the vote was:

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

NAYES: Ald. Albert, Vershay.

ABSENT: None.

There being six (6) affirmative votes, the MOTION CARRIED.

Resolution #1199

Alderwoman Gazal asked if Attorney Stiff will be able to have the ordinance with the gun range at the next work session on January 8, 2024. Mayor Soliman commented that January 8, 2024 is full, and it will be a long night and thought he would call Chief O'Connor and see if he can make it on January 22, 2024. Alderwoman Gazal stated that she wants it on record that nothing will happen because we need to pass this ordinance. Attorney Stiff wanted more clarification on what Alderwoman Gazal means regarding nothing would happen. Alderwoman Gazal stated that she wanted to make sure before any construction is started that the city is aware and we will have this ordinance. Attorney Stiff commented that he stated before and they need to know they will have to come to the city before any plans and go through our permit process.

Alderwoman Gazal commented for the record she wants to make it clear that she is not against Lockport Township Fire Department that she is against the gun range by their homes and against how the process goes in the city when some are aware of it and the Council was not notified. She commented that she believes the 'fire thing' will be a nice addition to Crest Hill but she is not for the gun range.

Attorney Stiff commented that is this ordinance is to change our zoning that will require public hearings, but he would let the Council know what the process would be to amend the zoning ordinance which could be a text amendment that would have to go through the Plan Commission.

Attorney Stiff commented that City Planner Maura Rigoni believes since it is a governmental use it will still be a special use even though it is not allowed or prohibited in the code.

Aldersperson Oberlin commented that she finds it alarming that we have nothing in the code regarding gun ranges, but we have everything else in the code like flagpoles at businesses.

Attorney Stiff wished everyone a Happy New Year.

Mayor Soliman announced that Dr. Bob McBride, the Superintendent of Lockport Township High Schools, is in attendance tonight.

Dr. Bob McBride approached the podium to give an update on Lockport Central Campus and Lockport Township High School and the referendum that will be on the agenda for the primary on March 19, 2024.

Dr. McBride thanked the Council for having him there to update everyone on the shaping of our future with the Township High School District.

He commented that in 2020 the Board realized that it has been a decade since the referendum failed to build a new building at a property they own in Homer Glen. They began to think about Central Campus since it is a vintage building that is 114 years old. A structural analysis of the building was done in 2020 and was found to be a very sound structure and there was a recommendation for \$500,000.00 worth of work to be done in terms of life safety structural repairs. Also, in the report was noticed that the larger and more major mechanical pieces of the building will need repairing. Then in 2021 every repair suggested in that report was completed but realized that we have come to the end of

putting \$500,000.00 into Central just to keep it going. In 2022, a demographic projection was done to see in the next ten years what the district would be within the seven 'feeder' districts, which were primarily in housing which have families that come to school. The conclusion of that was that we would not see a huge population decrease or increase and would stay around 4,200, which is very steady. It was stated that in the sixty-five square miles that we serve we have every demographic trend in the United States which makes us highly diverse. The summer of 2023, a traffic study was done and in conclusion of that report it stated do not bring more traffic to this site, there is already traffic congestion, and more traffic would lead to more congestion.

Dr. McBride commented that with all this information they had decided to put together a citizens' committee which had about 16-20 people that were involved with architecture, construction, and superintendents from the feeder districts. This committee's job was to look at whether Central should remain a school and that committee had decided that yes investing in Central Campus would be a good idea and should remain a school. They commented that it is centrally located, and renovation is half the cost of new construction. He also mentioned that he found that many people have not been in the building, so they are offering touring every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. until March 19, 2024.

In October, the Board had decided that the full renovation was too costly and would be a burden on taxpayers and asked Dr. McBride and the architects to go back to the drawing board and produce a more modest renovation proposal. In November they looked into costing out three options:

- Renovations Cost: \$85,000,000.00
- New freshman building Cost: \$145,000,000.00
- Brand new 471,000 square foot high school building. Cost: \$180,000,000.00

The board decided that renovation preserves the historic building and would be the least cost burden on taxpayers.

It was asked then if they should do only the infrastructure improvements or do general remodeling to modernize classroom spaces. They decided to endorse both solutions. The infrastructure improvements would be ADA compliance, new sprinkler system for fire suppression, HVAC, electrical wiring, roof, and window solutions. The estimate for all infrastructure improvements was approximately \$40-\$45 million.

Most classrooms are about five hundred square feet and most classrooms in other schools are eight hundred square feet. The architectures believe that if some of the old mechanical was taken out, they could start adding space to classrooms. It was commented that they only use about 67% of the building, leaving 30% that is not used and if that space is reclaimed, they could open the building up. The general remodeling estimate would be approximately \$55-\$70 million, for a total of \$95 -\$115 million. The Board of Education asked them to go back and scale down a few things from the Concept Plan and focus on ADA, Life Safety, major mechanicals, and classroom size. Photos were shown on a slideshow to show areas of the school that could be reclaimed space.

The Board decided not to move forward with the large common spaces, renovation of auditorium, cafeteria due to cost and instead focus on modernizing, expanding, and upgrading the classrooms, the Media Center, collaboration spaces for students, and staff offices.

Dr. Mc Bride commented that they often are asked why not new construction on East or the property in Homer Glen and the answer is the cost on taxpayers, need of a building now and not having the time to build, and the differences between communities.

He discussed what is going on now. He stated that on November 1, 2023 a third-floor plastered ceiling from 1928 had collapsed due to age. He stated that there were no signs of stress; it just was old, there was no cracking, bulging, or warping. The Board then decided to close Central since a significant number of other rooms had a similar type of plaster construction. On November 7, 2023, they had decided that this was going to be a long process and they did not want to do remote learning any longer and they began talking to Lincoln Way School District 210 and discussed the idea of the students going to Lincoln Way North. Lincoln Way North had closed this building and in a week the building was opened and back for the children.

He then commented that Crest Hill students were spending a lot of time on the bus now and they would prefer them to spend more time in class.

Dr. McBride commented that in conclusion the Board felt that having a place for all seven districts to come together in one place for their education is an important thing.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that she is thankful that her daughter and all the children are safe. She asked if the children would be going back to school this year. Dr. McBride commented that there are two opportunities to move which would be Spring Break or June. It would be extremely difficult to move back in while school is in session. Alderwoman Gazal also asked why we are spending money on the ceiling now when you will be doing renovations. Dr. McBride commented that they are trying to avoid removing the ceiling and placing a temporary structure up that would only be taken down if the referendum passes. Alderwoman Gazal then asked if it is only a couple classes on the upper floor can they not manage having the children there and not use or lock the upper floor. Dr. McBride commented that it is not only the third floor but also the second floor and first floor since there is a 1928 section of the building where they found the plaster ceiling method was used on all three floors. She also mentioned that the reason they say they cannot build East is because of the traffic but what about all the traffic for the sporting events that are held? She commented that she does not think an excuse for East is traffic. Dr. McBride commented that when they have multiple events like that, they are having more traffic come to the campus than that for which it is really designed for. He also commented that the other reason behind not building East is the cost since it would be a \$600-\$800 increase a year in taxes, and we need a building now and do not have the time to wait.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that there are high school groups, and the Homer Glen parents that are making comments that Crest Hill should be eliminated from the school and that would solve the problem. She also commented that as a parent and taxpayer they are concerned and wonder if this move will happen soon. Dr. McBride commented that unfortunately that is rhetoric and it is still out there and the community needs to face the

fact that in the sixty-five square mile area that these are our children and you can think how you want about if they are 'Homer kids', 'Fairmont kids', 'Lockport Kids', 'Romeoville Kids', or 'Orland Kids', or 'Crest Hill kids' they are the children of the community. Alderwoman Gazal asked if Crest Hill children will continue to be safe going to Lockport. Dr. McBride commented that they hope so and when focusing on Central we do have Crest Hill in mind.

Alderman Albert thanked Dr. McBride for his leadership in all of this and have done a great job in being transparent. He also asked what happens if this referendum goes down and what happens to all students. Dr. McBride commented that there is always a Plan B strategy and the reason we want the referendum and once we go above the dead limit we must go to the voters and let them democratically decide if they want to fully renovate the building or only complete the major mechanical. We need a functional building now so we would only address the major mechanical.

Alderman Albert commented that he appreciates that they are trying to keep the freshman center concept. He commented that speaking from experience going from a small catholic grade school in Joliet to Lockport Central with a thousand other children just in his class was very overwhelming.

Alderman Oberlin commented that she attended school there and is very happy that they are attempting to renovate the beautiful building and hope it can be preserved and updated.

Mayor Soliman commented that the learning concept at the Freshman Center is unbelievable, it works and is very effective. He commented that it is a great transition no matter what school you come from and where you will make your friends. He also commented that we need to give our young individuals of our community every opportunity that is available to give them, so they have a fighting chance into their adult life and give them the best education they can receive.

Michelle Redman, a parent, and a teacher who teaches in Richland, thanked Dr. McBride, and stated seeing our little school with a hundred children who leave Richland and go to Central is eye opening but if they had to go to East without having a Central, that would have children struggling academically and emotionally. She commented that she hopes the community will vote Yes.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Mayor Soliman presented the minutes from the Regular meeting held on December 18, 2023 for Council approval per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

(#4) Motion by Alderman Jefferson seconded by Alderwoman Gazal, to Approve the Minutes from the Regular Meeting Held on December 18, 2023 per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

On roll call, the vote was:

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

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

Mayor Soliman presented the minutes from the Work Session meeting held on December 26, 2023 for Council approval per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

(#5) Motion by Alderwoman Gazal seconded by Alderman Dyke, to Approve the Minutes from the Work Session Meeting Held on December 26, 2023 per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

On roll call, the vote was:

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

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

CITY ATTORNEY: There were no agenda items for discussion.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR: There were no agenda items for discussion.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT: Public Works Director Blaine Kline commented that he has no agenda items for discussion but wanted to let the Council know that the two doors in the executive room are finished being soundproofed. Alderman Cipiti asked if the executive session room will be ready to be used now. Director Kline commented to his understanding that was the last item needing done in that room.

Director Kline wished everyone a Happy New Year.

CITY ENGINEER: City Engineer Ron Wiedeman had no agenda items for discussion but is happy to answer any questions the Council may have. There were no questions or comments.

POLICE DEPARTMENT: Police Chief Ed Clark had no agenda items for discussion but wished everyone a Happy New Year. He also wanted to update the Council and inform them that the thirty-third officer, Edgar Dorado, has started the Police Academy and they also have started a new Administrative Clerk, Jackie Hogan.

MAYOR: Mayor Raymond Soliman commented that everyone is back to work from the holidays which is why the agenda is light.

Alderman Albert commented that he really appreciates how quickly the owners of Gas N Wash have taken care of some of the concerns that were stated at the last meeting and asked the mayor to relay the message to the owner.

CITY CLERK: There were no agenda items for discussion.

CITY TREASURER: City Treasurer Glen Conklin presented the regular and overtime payroll from December 4, 2023 through December 17, 2023 in the amount of \$241,919.27 per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

City Treasurer Glen Conklin requested Approval of the list of bills issued through January 3, 2024 in the amount of \$311,124.37 for Council approval per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

(#6) Motion by Alderperson Oberlin seconded by Alderman Jefferson, to Approve the list of bills through January 2, 2024 in the amount of \$311,124.37 per the memo dated January 2, 2024.

On roll call, the vote was:

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

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

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: There were no unfinished business items on the agenda.

NEW BUSINESS: There were no new business items on the agenda.

COMMITTEE/LIAISON REPORTS: There were no Committee/Liaison reports on the agenda.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: Alderperson Oberlin commented that everyone should give some deep thought regarding what Dr. McBride from Lockport Township High School said and that she would agree with him stating that our children are our future and if we want a brighter future than we need to take care of our children. She also commented that she knows everything is costing more these days but so does education.

Alderman Vershay wished everyone a healthy, safe, and happy new year.

Alderman Dyke wished everyone a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2024.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Maureen Denny, a resident at 1837 N. Burry Circle Drive, commented that she has lived in Crest Hill for thirty-three years. She commented that she observed the vacant house at 1839 N. Burry Circle Drive having a running stream of water coming out of the back area. This home has been vacant since September 1, 2023 and she called the Public Works Department, and they were there within 5-10 minutes. It was discovered that a pipe had burst inside the house and Public Works workers had turned the water off to the house. She explained that there is more to this since it really affects everyone living in Crest Hill. This home in question has been a rental property for years

and it is slowly sliding downwards, and the tenants even complained to her and the absentee landlords and no one fixes these properties. She commented that the couple who lived there were great people and she really liked them but too much was wrong with the house to stay. Since they moved out no one has come to that house in over three months, then one day there was a lockbox on the home and in a week, she found out that a bank in Desplaines, Illinois owns the home. She then stated that she found out that the home had been sold but the bank would not give any information. She just stressed that she is concerned with the homes that are boarded up and rundown in Crest Hill which is affecting her home value and would like to know how we can change this and pressure these absent landlords into fixing their properties.

Maureen asked Director Kline if they contacted the owners or how does that process work. Director Kline commented that they came out and did their part, then they worked with the Building Department to let them know it was vacant and then the Building Department goes out and does their process.

Mayor Soliman commented that he will contact the Building Commissioner and he guesses there is already a paper trail. He commented that there is a process with rental property and sometimes it takes longer than some like, but we would look into it.

Linda Dyke, a resident at 1700 Kelly Avenue, approached the podium regarding her concern for four different homes: 1709 Wilcox, 1815 Wilcox, 1618 Prairie, and 1809 Innercircle. She commented that three years ago the rental property at 1709 Wilcox a resident and her dog were attacked by someone at this residence, and she was told by the Police that she should not walk her dog on that street and not go near that home. Since then, there have been many occurrences at this residence. She commented that on December 10, 2023 a resident called Scott and herself to let them know that a vehicle had been parking in a driveway running all night long and people are also sleeping in the garage. She continued to state that on December 23, 2023 the Will County Sheriff's Police pursued a vehicle who eluded them to that residence. She also stated that she received another call on December 24, 2023 regarding a girl driving a bicycle from that residence with her pants down and she stated that she followed this girl on the bicycle and observed her going to three different cars at three different houses trying the doors of the vehicles. On the 1700 block of Clement Street this girl was inside a vehicle and her bike was at the curb and while she continued to follow her someone else had called the police. She observed this girl going to a gas station with everything she had stolen and put the items behind the gas station. Linda commented that when the police officer arrived, the officer asked Linda how she knew that was not her car.

She also commented that on December 27, 2023 Joliet Police had a police chase of a stolen vehicle and the vehicle ended up hitting a tree in the 1800 block of Kelly Avenue and was apprehended at 1709 Wilcox.

She continued to another incident that happened at 1815 Wilcox where a car with the doors open was throwing items out of the car and the police rode by and never stopped. She then stated that she drove to where an officer was at on the 1600 block of Wilcox, and she stated that she stopped the officer and asked the officer if he was going to question that car or pull them over and the officer asked her who she was and how does she know what happened. Linda informed the officer that she is Linda Dyke, a resident of Crest Hill for sixty-six

years and the wife of an alderman who lives on the corner and I am taking back my community. She then stated the Canine Officer seated next to this officer chuckled and she asked him if it was funny because she does not think it is a joke.

Linda commented that she is appalled over this home. This home has had one hundred police calls to this residence and never had a rental inspection. She also stated that the house on Prairie has had twenty-two police calls. She stated that there is an ordinance for this, and it is not worth the paper it is written on since it has never been enforced.

She also stated that she told her husband, Scott, that when they retire, they do not have to move, they can just open a brothel and a drug house because they would be in more trouble if they left their garbage cans at the curb because.

She informed the mayor that we are losing this city. Linda stated that residents call her to tell her they are afraid to sit in their yard and want to know what will be done about this.

She commented that if anyone is looking for a good time just ask her, she can tell you where to go.

She commented that there is a dead tree that has fallen at one of the properties. Alderman Dyke commented that there have been citations assessed to them and nothing has been done. Alderman Dyke commented that it needs to be taken to a higher Court than what is being done here at City Hall but there is a lot of properties that just continue.

Linda commented that she is not against the Police, she has a son who is a police officer but when someone thinks it is a joke when you are calling. She commented when she has to get in the car and take a ride, her husband, Alderman Dyke tells her she is going to get shot and she commented if that is what it will take. She also commented that she should get a gun license since this is out of control.

Mayor Soliman commented that he knows the Police Chief has worked diligently on these issues and we go after the landlord and the landlords are not cooperative. There is a process, and it is difficult.

Linda stated that twice people have been in her garbage can and she is going to run them over because she has had enough.

There being no further business before the Council, and no action needed from the executive session, a motion for adjournment was in order.

(#7) Motion by Alderman Dyke seconded by Alderman Vershay, to adjourn the December 18, 2023 Council meeting.

On roll call, the vote was:

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 p.m.

Approved this _____ day of _____, 2024

As presented _____

As amended _____

CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR

DRAFT