

Town of Mantua Council Meeting Minutes

Held on February 16, 2023

6:30 at Town Hall 409 North Main Mantua, Utah

Council Members present: Mayor Terry Nelson
Karen Nelson Justin Brown
Jared Jeppsen Matt Jeppsen - Absent
Shayla HammerStone – Recorder

Audience present: Harper Johnson Janis Johnson
Brooke & Tim Lloyd Phil Anderson Hillary Udy
Cindy Gibbons Virginia Newman Keith Johnson
Marcus Abel Miligan Jenn & Keith Gardner

Meeting opened by Mayor Nelson and the invocation offered by Terry Nelson.

Pledge of allegiance- led by mayor Nelson followed by all in attendance.

Mayor Terry Nelson approved the minutes for the meeting as well as the public hearing, both held on January 16, 2023, as printed.

Jared Jeppsen made a motion to approve the town’s bills, Karen Nelson seconded.

Karen Nelson-YES Jared Jeppsen-YES Terry Nelson-YES

MOTION PASSES

Public Comment: None.

Action Items:

Business License – James Milligan

James has a sprinkler installation and repairs company in Logan and would like to get a business license in Mantua. He said there wouldn’t be any deliveries or any parking issues as nothing happens out of his house.

Karen Nelson made a motion to approve Sprinkler Repair Guy business license, Jared Jeppsen seconded.

Karen Nelson-YES Jared Jeppsen-YES Terry Nelson-YES

MOTION PASSES

Business License – Bonnie Lloyd

Bonnie is planning to open a preschool out of her home, three days a week with eight kids maximum in the morning then in the afternoon. She would provide only prepackaged snacks. Karen said she’d need to have the fire chief do a home inspection, possibly in the summer.

Bonnie said they wouldn't start the preschool until the fall and it'd run the same length as the normal school year.

Jared Jeppsen made a motion to approve Lil' Buds Prep Academy LLC on the condition that the fire chief does an inspection and they pass, Justin Brown seconded.

Karen Nelson-YES Jared Jeppsen-YES Justin Brown-YES Terry Nelson-YES

MOTION PASSES

Full-time Employee – Shayla Hammer

As the town has had two clerks quit this week, Terry felt it was necessary to promote Shayla to a full time position. She would get a 5% increase for going full-time and a 4% increase for new classification as she will be taking over Stephanie's job. Both full-time and part-time jobs will be open as the new part-time position will take some of Brenda's responsibilities and also be able to help Janis with court.

Karen Nelson made a motion to approve the promotion for Shayla HammerStone and the increase in pay to \$18, Jared Jeppsen seconded.

Karen Nelson-YES Jared Jeppsen-YES Justin Brown-YES Terry Nelson-YES

MOTION PASSES

Delinquent Utility Fee

It was discussed at the previous meeting that when residents get a delinquent notice, they are required to pay the previous bill along with their current bill. He proposed taking the 'current bill' out of the ordinance.

Jared Jeppsen made a motion to cut the 'current bill' from the delinquent utility fee ordinance, Karen Nelson seconded.

Karen Nelson-YES Jared Jeppsen-YES Justin Brown-YES Terry Nelson-YES

MOTION PASSES

Justice Court Grant

Karen said she's ready to apply for this grant but she needs to know if the council wants her to apply for the bare minimum or to ask for more. The grant would help cover new equipment for the justice court for a broadcasting system. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is requiring courts to have both audio and video so they could check in on their sessions for compliancy. The lower amount would be around \$4,000 and the higher amount would be around \$6,000. Karen thought they should apply for the higher amount to be able to provide a chance to use it for council or emergency broadcasting as well.

Karen Nelson made a motion to put in an application for the larger amount for the court installation, Justin Brown seconded.

Karen Nelson-YES Jared Jeppsen-YES Justin Brown-YES Terry Nelson-YES

MOTION PASSES

Discussion Items:

Resolution for Electronic Meetings

Recorder Shayla Hammer explained that in order to be able to have an electronic meeting the resolution needed to be updated with provisions that the council decides on. They discussed how many times a council member could request an electronic meeting, if that member could vote, and if they could count them into the quorum. They would have to amend another resolution that includes how many times a council member could miss a meeting.

Cindy Gibbons

Cindy works for a dog rescue where the owner now is unable to run it. The owner has asked Cindy if she could run it from her house and Cindy wants to know what she needs to do. Terry asked how many dogs she would have. Cindy said, in addition to her own dogs, she could train up to twenty-two puppies at a time until they're nine weeks, when they go to their new home. She clarified that she'd most likely have only one or two litters at a time. The council couldn't find anything restricting the amount of puppies under four months in the ordinance or the Land Use Management Code. She would at least have to have a business license and the council will investigate it more.

Keith Johnson – Park Updates

Keith had four main things to discuss; pets in the park, the lights, the open and closed times of the park, as well as the grant. They discussed different times they could potentially close the park. Currently the timer only goes for sixty minutes before it turns off. Terry asked about the brightness and Keith said that he already turned it as low as he wanted to go. He says if they go any dimmer it could be detrimental to the safety of the snow hill. Keith talked with those who had concerns and they are content with how it is now. They discussed with planning and zoning, their main concern being the lack of light between the hill and the parking lot. The council and Keith discussed what times they thought would be best to have the park open and if that should be just in the winter or should they include summer as well. Next they discussed the problem with dogs in the park and what they could do to minimize that. Keith then updated the council on the grants and how much the town will have to pay and what will go into the next phase, and what new grant they're going to apply for.

Farming Behind the Fire Department

Terry said he had been approached by someone who wants to cut the grass below the fire station. They had gone about this a few different times in the past and talked about if they would take bids or how they would pay for it. Karen wanted to advertise it and will be putting it in the newsletter and on the town website.

Finances:

Brenda presented the half-year report for profit and loss, going over the budget from last July to December. Everything was where it should be, either it was right on track or they were under

budget. She then read a statement that she requested to be read without interruptions and to be included in the minutes in its entirety.

Public Works

Harper gave updates on the snow with more storms coming in, and he is worried about flooding problems in the spring. He said they have about 1,500 sandbags they could fill but he'd rather wait to get the sand so it doesn't freeze. Another project that would be coming up the following year would be an inventory of all the water lines, looking for any that have lead in them and replace them. He wanted to offer an apology to Shayla. He had asked her to send out an email to the council containing information from the ordinance review committee that he had attended. He believed that since it was a public meeting, the information was public and he didn't mean for her to receive backlash for something he requested. He praised Marcus and said he's been a great asset. Justin commented to Harper that he may have been able to receive about 1,000 more sandbags through a donation for the town. The biggest concern would be to those that have homes in the campground right next to the river.

Grants

Karen said that Keith is working on the two grants he mentioned, there's also one for Dane's park, 100 West, the justice court and she had put in for \$500 for the fire department. She'd let the council know any updates.

Council and Mayor Comments:

Karen Nelson gave an update on the employee dinner. She also talked about the long list of responsibilities that Brenda had given her, saying she will be missed and has been invaluable.

Jared Jeppsen also said that Brenda will be missed and that she's done great work here.

Jared Jeppsen made a motion to adjourn, Karen Nelson seconded.

Karen Nelson-YES Jared Jeppsen-YES Justin Brown-YES Terry Nelson-YES

MOTION PASSES

February 16, 2023

Mayor Nelson and Council Members,

I would like to read a statement without interruption and have it attached to the Minutes in its entirety.

Although I'm not perfect, I have always strived to have the highest levels of integrity. Anything less than perfect integrity is simply not an option in my job. I have been dedicated and performed my job to the best of my ability. Six years of clean audits is a testament to this. I know from experience that if I'm asked to provide a report to this Council regarding wage increases or benefits that will benefit me personally, the auditor will always go over it with a fine-toothed comb to be sure that I have given you accurate information. I have never made demands for myself, and I have always tried to be transparent and fiscally responsible.

With that being said, why would I lie to you as has been insinuated by Justin Brown in council meeting or by journalists in the newspaper? I told you that I had a state payroll audit and that the auditor and I had a verbal discussion about the equity of the H.S.A. contributions, and that's true. I did not report that the audit was done by the State Auditor's Office, I did not change what was "originally claimed" as written in the newspaper, and I certainly did not say that if we didn't change the policy it "could be a problem in the future" as written in the newspaper. In fact, when Justin asked if leaving it as it was could cause a problem in the future, I said I couldn't answer that question. Apparently, I didn't mention which state agency did the audit, so I later clarified which agency it was when I was asked. However, I did not change my story. If I inadvertently said, "state auditor", then my statement simply lacked the clarity of a longer description.

I tried to make it very clear to the Council that when I explained to the auditor what our policy was and how it was equitable, she accepted that explanation as being sufficient. I also tried to make it very clear that there was no "finding" written in the audit report regarding the matter, that the recommendation I referred to was given verbally as part of our interview and was optional. I tried to make it clear that the auditor did not tell me that it was necessary to change the policy nor did she tell me how to change the policy. I thought it was clear that the proposed change was written by me in an attempt to propose a simple solution that could provide more equity without costing the Town more money. I did this because I was asked to do it by a member of the Town Council. Perhaps I over-stressed the auditor's recommendation as there was nothing in writing from her, or perhaps I misunderstood the nature of what she was telling me. Looking back, I realize I should have done more research before presenting it to the Council. If I had known that certain people would blow it out of proportion and try to turn it into a controversial issue, I would never have suggested it. Nevertheless, I brought the proposal to you in good faith. When the action was tabled pending more information and work, I was ready to drop it because I didn't have time to work on it.

After talking with Karen about my job-related stress and my option of quitting my job and of getting insurance through healthcare.gov, she asked me to write my history regarding my insurance and H.S.A. benefits as an illustration about why I felt our old policy was less than equitable along with some details about how the new proposed policy could work and how the younger employees might not need to lose any H.S.A. contributions they were currently receiving. I did as I was asked.

I couldn't be there when you voted, so I asked Karen to tell you that Seth Oveson, from the State Auditor's Office, wanted you to know that it was not their office that conducted the audit, and that they were fine with our policy the way it was. I hoped that if you did vote, his statement would help you to vote based on what you felt was fair rather than because of a misunderstanding in thinking it was required. But if you made a decision based solely on the recommendation I reported to you in the previous meeting, and current

information has changed your mind, or if you were confused by the issue, you are free to change that policy back to the way it was. I have not yet made any payments into H.S.A. accounts under the new policy.

Although a newspaper article questioned my integrity pertaining to getting you to change a policy for my own benefit, the truth is that I never expected it to help me much because my husband and I have been discussing my employment exit plan for over a year. The scope, magnitude, and outside pressures of this job have become extremely stressful and the stress is affecting my health. I really appreciate the pay-raise you gave me and for your vote which has tempted me to stay longer, but I knew I would be leaving soon. I have not been quiet about this in the office as I've tried to give fair warning, but I've been undecided about when to leave. However, the recent attack on my integrity by Justin Brown and Jen Gardner has tipped the scales. I hope that the new policy will benefit my replacement because they might have a family. My decision has been made, and I am at peace with it. No matter what is said or written, or by whom, I have the peace of knowing my integrity is intact. My husband and I have plans to serve a mission.

Gardner's personal social media posts and articles over the past two years seem to make it clear that she harbors malice against this town, its employees, and its administrators. However, she seems to be Brown's personal cheerleader. Mr. Brown has allegedly tried to discredit all employees who worked at town hall while he was police chief. I'm not sure why, but perhaps it's because we are all witnesses of his true character, we don't trust him, and we cannot be manipulated by him. Justin reminds me of Don Quixote who fights imaginary dragons at Town Hall, but those imaginary dragons are just windmills which work very hard every day with honor and integrity to keep the Town running responsibly and ethically.

I have grown to love this town and the people in it. I feel honored to have worked with people at Mantua Town Hall who have the highest level of integrity and who do what is best for the Town even at their own sacrifice. I want to thank each of you who are honorably and ethically serving your community with a special shout-out to Mayor Nelson and Karen who work very hard for the benefit of the Town. I honor former Mayor Michael Johnson who served at great personal sacrifice when no one else would serve. I was told that Sean Hales from the Box Elder News Journal once talked about how much he respected Mayor Johnson because he always wanted to do what was best for the Town and did not have a personal agenda. I honor retired Recorder Jan Palmer who exemplifies the highest levels of integrity and dedication to the Town. She would become physically ill if she even thought she had made a small mistake. I honor Janis and Harper Johnson for their many years of service and dedication to the Town. Their collective knowledge is a valuable resource that cannot be replaced, and I know for a fact that Harper does not report all the hours he works on his timesheet. I honor each of them for their integrity and sacrifice in serving this Town. They have all been an example to me, and their selfless service and dedication have motivated me.

I will miss my co-workers and the good people of this town with whom I've had the privilege of rubbing shoulders. I hope and pray a good and qualified replacement can be found to take over the accounting clerk position as this town continues through its growing pains. I have faith that it can overcome the division caused by those who sell controversy. I hope you will continue to be a united and close-knit community who love and support one another.

Sincerely,

Brenda Dixon