

The Cannon Falls City Council met in a work session on Monday, September 27, 2021, in the City Council Chambers. Present were Mayor John Althoff and Council Members Bill Duncan, Matt Montgomery, Laura Kronenberger, Steve Gesme, Derek Lundell, and Mary Jill Bringgold. Also present were Neil Jensen, City Administrator; Mike Althoff, Fire Chief; Tim Malchow, EMS Chief; Mitch Althoff, Police Officer; and Sarah Schwarzhoff, City Attorney (remotely).

Call to Order

Mayor Althoff called the City Council work session to order at 6:30 p.m.

Planning Commission Discussion

Council Member Duncan reviewed the current structure of the Planning Commission. He commented that most City committees and commissions consist of three to five members. He suggested reducing the size of the Planning Commission from seven members to five. He noted that it can sometimes be challenging to have a quorum of members in attendance. He suggested adding a second Council Member to the Planning Commission. He also proposed that a third Council Member be assigned as an alternate, to fill in when one of the other two Council members are not present, or to fill in when there would otherwise not be a quorum of members in attendance. He stated his understanding that an ordinance amendment would be needed in order to make these changes.

Mayor Althoff commented that the Police Commission consists of six members. It was noted that the Cable Commission, the Public Works Commission, and the Finance Committee each have three members.

Council Member Montgomery expressed agreement with consistency. He asked about the timing of the change. Council Member Lundell suggested making the change effective on January 1, 2022. Council Members expressed agreement with this suggestion. Current member terms and the appointment process were discussed. Council Member Kronenberger suggested six members, especially if two Council Members would serve on the Planning Commission. Council Members Duncan and Bringgold cited Council Members serving on other commissions and committees. Council Member Lundell suggested an odd number of members, to avoid tie votes. It was noted that committees and commissions are advisory groups that provide recommendations to the City Council.

City Administrator Jensen discussed the challenges of ensuring a quorum of members.

Council Member Kronenberger suggested a citizen alternate and a Council alternate. The challenges of recruitment were discussed.

The discussion was summarized. It was suggested to request the City Attorney to draft ordinance language for further discussion by the Council.

The alternate member options were further discussed.

Council Boards &  
Commissions Agenda  
Format

Council Member Duncan referenced the process that occurred during the last Planning Commission meeting. He noted that the City Council had previously approved a change in the agenda format, with the public input period following adjournment of the meeting. He noted that the agenda order was revised by the Planning Commission Chair, adding that the group also attempted to remove a discussion item from the agenda. Council Member Duncan suggested that the City Council establish an agenda format for Council meetings, committee meetings, and board and commission meetings. He stated that this process would be governed by an ordinance.

Council Member Montgomery spoke in support of a more formal agenda structure that would be consistent for all groups. Council Members expressed agreement with this approach. Ad hoc committees were discussed.

Public Input for  
Council, Boards, &  
Commissions  
Agendas

Council Member Montgomery suggested moving the public input portion back to the beginning of the meeting, noting that there are ways to manage this process. He discussed the purpose and value of on-camera public input, noting that the current process has disenfranchised some members of the public. He provided examples of public input procedures used by other cities. The enforcement process was discussed. City Attorney Schwarzhoff provided additional information in this regard. Council Member Montgomery suggested that the public sign up to speak prior to the meeting, indicating the requested topic of discussion. He suggested that members of the public be allowed three minutes to speak on a topic relating to City business, with no personal attacks being allowed. He suggested that members of the public be asked to address their comments to the Mayor, with no discussion offered by Council Members. He added that a pre-determined time limit, such as 30 minutes, could be established for the public input portion of the meeting, with the Mayor using his discretion in terms of managing the process.

The agenda format was further discussed, and City Attorney Schwarzhoff provided additional information in this regard.

It was suggested to develop a public input procedure to be used for all meetings and read by the meeting chair.

The timing of the change was discussed. It was suggested to initiate this process during the next Council meeting. It was suggested to incorporate this process into the agenda format for boards and commissions that currently offer public input.

Sandstone Ridge  
Report

Council Member Kronenberger provided an ad hoc committee update. She summarized discussion of options, noting that there are developers interested in developing the property. She stated that a meeting has been scheduled with the City Engineer for discussion of establishing parameters and requirements for potential developers. Council Member Duncan commented regarding the need for street improvements and potential sewer work. Park dedication property was discussed.

DMV Rental Contract

Administrator Jensen discussed interest by a private party to operate a Vehicle License Center in Cannon Falls. He reviewed the process that will be conducted by the State. He suggested drafting contract language in the meantime. Council Members Duncan and Kronenberger volunteered to assist with this project.

COVID Vaccine  
Mandate Discussion

Council Member Duncan discussed the current public health crisis, noting that this is not a Republican or Democratic issue. He suggested consideration of a vaccination mandate for all City employees and volunteers, with exemptions granted for medical reasons. He reviewed approximate vaccination percentages for City departments. He stated that the City has a responsibility to protect the citizens of Cannon Falls. He suggested that unvaccinated employees and volunteers be required to test weekly and wear a mask while on the job. He suggested developing an enforcement process, including a written warning and potential termination. It was noted that the testing would be conducted at City expense.

Fire Chief Althoff commented that first responders are required to use PPE. Council Member Bringgold spoke in support of vaccination, in addition to wearing PPE. She suggested leading by example.

EMS Chief Malchow discussed current pandemic precautions and healthcare practices, noting that steps are being taken to keep everyone as safe as possible. He stated that no Ambulance Department employees have tested positive for COVID-19.

Council Member Duncan asked why some Ambulance Department employees are opposed to vaccination. EMS Chief Malchow discussed information relating to the vaccines.

Council Member Bringgold asked about current testing practices. EMS Chief Malchow indicated that some unvaccinated staff members are being tested weekly if they work for other entities. He noted that testing has not been mandated for the Cannon Falls Ambulance Department. He discussed social distancing practices in the Public Safety Building. He expressed concerns about staffing impacts if a vaccine mandate is imposed and suggested a contingency plan. It was noted that there is currently no mask requirements within City buildings.

Fire Chief Althoff discussed department procedures that were implemented during the pandemic. He discussed the vaccination process, estimating that approximately 80% of Fire Department members have been vaccinated at this point. He also expressed concerns about staffing impacts if a vaccine mandate is imposed. He discussed the challenges of testing. He reviewed safety precautions and noted no COVID-19 cases within the Fire Department related to fire calls. He stated that he understands both sides of the vaccine debate.

Council Member Duncan reiterated his position related to vaccination and masking.

Council Members discussed vaccination mandates that are being implemented by other employers. When asked how many members of the League of Minnesota Cities have implemented vaccination mandates, City Attorney Schwarzhoff indicated that many cities are waiting to see if the Federal mandate will apply to cities.

Council Member Duncan expressed concerns about unvaccinated Ambulance Department employees. Council Member Bringgold spoke in favor of a vaccine requirement for City employees, with a requirement for testing if vaccination is declined. Potential liability issues were discussed.

Council Member Duncan commented that individuals with breakthrough infections are extremely unlikely to need hospitalization. A human resources policy pertaining to absences due to COVID-19 was suggested.

The potential impacts on City services that would result from an outbreak were discussed.

It was noted that some companies are implementing a healthcare plan surcharge for unvaccinated employees.

The timing of a vaccination policy was discussed.

Policy language was discussed. City Attorney Schwarzhoff provided additional information in this regard. She noted that medical and religious exemptions would be part of the policy but would require evidence. The testing process was discussed. It was noted that there are still unanswered questions relating to the Federal mandate.

Council Member Duncan commented that a person's personal freedom cannot impinge upon another person's health or safety.

Policies relating to new hires and volunteers were discussed. City Attorney Schwarzhoff provided additional information in this regard.

Council Members discussed the drafting policy language that would go into effect on January 1, 2022.

Council Member Kronenberger expressed concerns about the effort, expense, and burden on City administration that it would take to implement a policy affecting only about 20% of City employees, noting there have been no issues. She also spoke in opposition to forcing things on people.

Council Member Duncan commented that things are forced on people all the time that they may not agree with, noting that this is a national health crisis. He described people who refuse to be vaccinated as selfish, stupid, and un-American. Council Member Kronenberger expressed disagreement with this characterization.

EMS Chief Malchow stated that even people who refuse vaccination are getting the best care possible from first responders and healthcare providers. He stated his understanding that people are passionate about their beliefs on both sides of this issue, which has led to anger and hate. He suggested looking for ways to build bridges, such as more education. He encouraged City leaders to set a good example by being positive and uplifting. Council Member Duncan reiterated his position on vaccination.

Mayor Althoff suggested drafting a letter to City employees, encouraging them to be vaccinated by the end of the year, or testing will be required.

EMS Chief Malchow discussed employee screening, noting that testing is not required at this time.

Council Members discussed the terms “strongly recommended” versus “mandate.”

The policy was further discussed. Council Members asked whether the policy would pertain to volunteers. City Attorney Schwarzhoff indicated that volunteers could be included in or excluded from the policy.

Policy enforcement and monitoring were discussed. Medical exemptions were discussed.

Council Member Duncan apologized for his strong language but stated that he is very passionate about this issue.

Council Members requested that this item be placed on next Council meeting agenda for further discussion and action. Administrator Jensen requested Council guidance relating to specific policy language. City Attorney Schwarzhoff stated that she will draft a sample policy for discussion purposes.

It was suggested to communicate information to department heads and union representatives.

Next steps were reviewed.

Adjournment

The work session adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

Adopted by the City Council of the City of Cannon Falls on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2021.

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John O. Althoff, Mayor

ATTEST:

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Neil L. Jensen, City Administrator