



1111 Bayou
La Marque, Texas 77568
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**City of La Marque
Special Workshop Minutes
April 25, 2014**

Minutes of the City Council Workshop Meeting of the City of La Marque, Texas that was conducted on Friday, April 25, 2014 at 1:00 p.m. at 1109-B Bayou Road for purpose of considering the following agenda:

(1) Mayor Hocking called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

(2) ROLL CALL

Mayor Hocking
Mayor Pro-Tem Bell
Councilmember Brown
Councilmember Trube
Councilmember Osteen

City Manager Buttler
City Attorney Ortego
City Clerk Eldridge

(3) Discussion and provide City Manager with direction regarding the Water Conservation Plan and Drought Contingency Plan.

Public Works Direct Mike Morgan read the introduction within the packets, hereto attached (Attachment "A") as well as reviewed the proposed Water conservation Plan section by section. Mr. Morgan explained what BMP's were and that these "Best Management Practices" would be implemented in the city's Water Conservation Plan which includes mandatory elements, such as metering, system water audit, retro-fit BMP's, school educational programs and prohibition of wasting water. Referred to a typo in Table 1, that should reflect the year 2023 instead of 2013. While still in the process of completing the Plan, he is asking for an extension from the Texas Water Development Board for submission.

The power went out causing the audio to kick off and the generators kicked in at 1:10 p.m.

Questions concerning when water meters were read, whether it is broken down into districts as far as which districts have the most water losses. It was determined that the losses are broken down into streets, which can be broken down into districts. Some of the large water losses are due to old pipes, contractors accidentally breaking lines, and old water meters. It was discussed to bill and follow up on those contractors that do break or puncture lines and cause a large amount of water loss, making them responsible.

Vacant water accounts with unlawful use of water was said to also be a problem. The usage of door hangers when a high water consumption was detected was also discussed as well as bringing back as previously used in the city, an alarm system that would sound off in the truck when



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driving by a house or business that was using a higher consumption of water than normal, that detecting some sort of a problem existing.

Mayor Hocking recessed the Workshop at 2:06 p.m.

Mayor Hocking reconvened the Workshop at 2:23 p.m.

Councilmember Osteen asked what the enforcing powers for citizens that continuously waste water and that if the city didn't have anything in place, it needed to get one in place.

Some incentives were discussed as per Plan that included crediting participants in the replacement program, of toilets that would use a lower amount of water (ultra-low flushing toilet). Using and creating more visible ways of reaching citizens through pamphlets, flyers, leak detection kits and other means to educate the public on the importance of water conservation. The reuse of water was also discussed briefly as well as desalination of water. Water would have to be collected least twelve miles offshore in order for it to be clean enough to use otherwise it would be too muddy run it even through a purification plant. Keeping a close eye on the readings of meters and replacement of meters was also discussed. A Water-Wise Program was discussed to go into the local schools and educate school age children the importance of water conservation. The City can purchase the Water-Wise kits from the Harris-Galveston Subsidence District and receive credit for 84,000 gallons of well water for each kit purchased. The City will have twenty years to use this credit, which can be combined with other credits.

Further discussion included Park Conservation, rain sensors on all automatic irrigation systems, and the possible reuse of reclaimed water.

City Manager asked in the verbiage in the Plan it states that the City will do this and will do that, and that these are practices, and not mandatory, since we are requesting an extension anyway, can the wording be adjusted to read that the City will make every attempt to, instead of saying that the City will do something that in actuality due to budgetary constraints will not be able to do. So that when we do submit the Plan, it will be more realistic. All of City Council contributed to this discussion. Certain section are required, but others can possibly be reviewed by TCEQ by request and ask for a waiver.

An idea was presented to the possibility of using a vacuum truck to recycle water from the sewer plant, for the purpose of reusing this water in certain areas of the City.

The City Manager gave Mr. Morgan direction to look into this.

City Manager Carol Buttler directed a question to Mr. Morgan, "On the Drought Contingency Plan, since we know the region is working on more of a comprehensive standard practice for all of us, is everyone going to continue to operate under their current plan until Mr. Langford decides he has everyone in uniform?"



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Mr. Morgan answered, "At the last Board meeting, they were trying to get someone to Chair a committee to research all the plans and try to get a "uniform stage" of water conservation plan, since most of the plans that the surround cities are using are very similar with the direction being close to the same.

Mayor Hocking added, "Also in that regard, in my role as President of the Galveston County Mayors and Councilmembers Association, I am going to propose a resolution that the County as a whole to consider a Comprehensive Drought Plan uniformly for all the cities to adhere to."

Mayor Hocking wanted for staff to begin the preparation of the bidding process for the water audit as quickly as possible since the money has been appropriated for this audit. It was discussed hopefully by the end of June it should be ready to go. The La Marque EDC will be funding this audit; they will recommend an action item to City Council asking permission to spend the amount that they allotted.

Discussion continued as to how with the new homes coming in, will create more revenue that will help offset the cost of the extra water being used, by using this revenue to repair our water lines and replacing the meters that need to be replaced.

Mr. Morgan continued, "With the new subdivisions beginning to develop and another subdivision getting close to getting started, we will have an additional 1500 to 1600 new residents, which is an additional 140,000 gallons of water, per day, for the City to provide water to those homes."

It was determined and briefly discussed, that those new subdivisions that were previously pre-platted, there will be adequate water for those new homes and also available for each home that currently exists.

Mayor Hocking recessed the Workshop at 3:26 p.m.

Mayor Hocking reconvened the Workshop at 3:42 p.m.

(4) Discussion and provide City Manager with direction regarding Water and Sewer Rates and related Utility Billing items.

City Manager Carol Buttler began by stating that the City does not propose to increase the water or sewer rates at this time. "We should really being reviewing these rates annually, so that we see where we stand in relation to everyone else in the area."

Director of Finance Suzy Kou, started by saying that online payments have been quite a success, since implemented, and added, "We are trying to minimize the human side into the whole process and still allow 24-7 service to the public."

Ms. Kou provided an overview of the current water and sewer rates, as compared to other cities. Loss in revenue does not always mean water leaks, it could mean that an accurate reading isn't being delivered due to the age of a meter; the older the meter, the slower it runs, thus giving it a



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false sense of the amount of water running through it. Gradually, the department is taking care of different items by identifying the different problems, be it leakage, personnel or revenue.

We will be changing some of the policies that are in place, one being the adjustment policy, to which I haven't found in writing yet. I would like to have a policy or an ordinance in place. The unwritten policy in place now, it that everyone is entitled to one adjustment within a twelve month period as long as the reason fits into a certain criteria. For instance, if the consumption exceeds fifty percent of a citizens six month average consumption.

The Mayor asked, "How does this encourage water conservation?"

Ms. Kou answered, "It doesn't. This is just what the City has been doing. I need direction from Council, whether you want us to continue with this practice or not. We will do whatever Council decides."

M Councilmember Bell asked " How much money does the City lose annually when we adjust these water accounts?"

Ms. Kou responded, "I can provide you with a report that will show you that."

Discussion continued regarding outsource billing, and getting away from the postcard type bills. The printer that we are currently using to print the water bills will be obsolete in a few years. They no longer make to parts to repair this printer. Some cities only send one bill, they don't send out delinquent bills, it is a cost saving factor. They discussed using envelopes, and that this could be good as a source of information relayed to the public in with the bills. Outsourcing was not favored among Council. The possibility of purchasing a new printer and printing our own was discussed and that it would be costly.

How many people are signed up for online billing? Who all have requested electronic bills? What is the timeline for a kiosk? These are a few questions that would need to be answered before Councilmember Trube before making the decision to go to envelopes.

Logo on the envelope, information of Councilperson on the bills, advertising water restrictions, hurricane preparedness.

Councilmember Brown asked when the last time that the water meters were upgraded. It was said to have been ten to twelve years and it took three years to change them out. Some meters are twenty years old, and some are not working at all.

Councilmember Osteen said he liked the idea of the envelope and to keep the billing in-house. Asked how many employees could be let go if we went to outsourcing. The open position in that department will not be filled.

Councilmember Bell was against outsourcing. I will be willing to entertain in-house and having a bill that we can get information out to the public.



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The Mayor is not in favor of outsourcing and in favor of doing the research for using envelopes and Council having knowledge as to what information is placed on the bills.

Ball park figure of the cost of a new printer was said to be around \$8,000.00. Council was in favor of having this a future action item to get the expenses and cost of the printer, paper and all costs relating to this type of billing, and brought to Council during the budget process.

Ms. Kou asked Council, "Do we still want to continue with four billings per month? If we only did two billings per month, it would cut the cost of postage in half."

Mayor asked, "What recommendation would you have as Finance Director, that you are willing to stand behind with your job?"

To what Ms. Kou answered, "Two billings a month, but we could also place something on the bill to remind the citizens of the due date."

Councilmember Trube suggested calling citizens to remind them.

Changing from two to one billing cycle was discussed and explained by Mike Morgan that one cycle billing would actually be better for several reasons. First, he could get a better idea of water loss on his reports in a timely manner. The audit also recommended the one billing cycle.

The direction from Council was given, if one bill would work and not disrupt and place a hardship to those on a fixed income.

The unwritten adjustment policy was brought up again and everyone was in favor of not giving away water to, but to consider an adjustment if it is on the City's side; or in the case of an "emergency" such as a busted pipe, proven repair with a receipt for a significant amount of money. We need to define what is a legitimate emergency is, something catastrophic that happened to where a person has lost thousands of gallons of water. An adjustment needs to be considered on a case by case basis.

Consumption reports will be run showing in what situations that adjustments were given and will bring back to City Council, that will help to show the criteria that has been given in the past.

(5) Discussion and provide City Manager with direction regarding Code of Ordinances Section 41-115 (Subdivision) and Sections 44-7 (Weeds) as they relate to mowing of ditches throughout the City.

After a brief discussion, direction was given to the City Manager to leave the ordinances as they stand, and take requests for the mowing of ditches on a case by case basis. Per ordinance, it is somewhat of a liability, since it requires persons to mow their ditches, it was suggested to look at each ordinance in the Code of Ordinance Book and see the significance of each, we may not need a lot of the ordinances on record at this time. This would also familiarize us all as to what



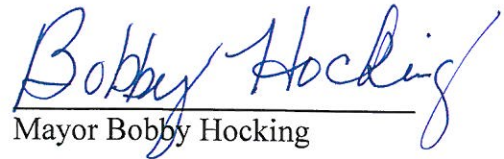
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ordinances we do enforce. If this ordinance is repealed, there could be an in-house policy for the ditches. The goal is to begin these workshops reviewing now ordinances, between now and July.

(6) ADJOURNMENT

** Councilmember Osteen made a motion to adjourn at 5:28 p.m.

** Councilmember Trube seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**


Mayor Bobby Hocking

ATTEST:


Robin Eldridge, TRMC
City Clerk