

MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION

September 5, 2023

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in a Work Session on September 5, 2023 at 1:00 p.m. at the Government Center, 201 1st Street NE, in Austin, Minnesota.

All members present, viz: Chair Mike Ankeny, Vice-Chair Jerry Reinartz, John Mueller, Polly Glynn and Dan Sparks. Also in attendance were County Administrator Trish Harren Gjersvik and Executive Assistant Denise Barthels.

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Midwest Regional Director Briana Broberg, Esq. appeared before the board in reference to the Welcoming America Initiative. Welcoming Week is one component of a larger global initiative to help communities understand the value that immigrants bring to a community and strategies to welcome and integrate newcomers into a community. It is "Building a Nation of Neighbors." The 2023 Welcoming Week is September 8 through 17 and the Mower County Board of Commissioners will be adopting a Welcoming Week Proclamation at its meeting to held on September 12.

Austin Artworks Festival 2023 co-chairs Jeff Baldus and Lisa Dunlop appeared before the Board to give a summary of the festival and to thank the County for supporting and accommodating the festivities on portions of county property. Over the last twelve years the festival has hosted 315 artists, 108 authors, 123 musicians and 36 demonstrations.

Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. (SEH) representatives Bob Cohrs and Brian Bergstrom attended the meeting remotely to provide the Board with an update on the public safety space study process and next steps. The company SEH was hired by the City of Austin and Mower County to conduct a space needs assessment for public safety including the Austin Police Department and the Mower County Sheriff's Department and Dispatch Center. In the update it was noted that each department has been analyzed for its individual space needs (and wish lists) as if each department were a standalone department. The next steps will be to look at spaces that can be combined for efficiencies if the departments would continue to be combined such as locker rooms, training room and fitness facilities, mechanical, and public spaces like lobbies, etc.

Senior Network Engineer Bill Banton was recognized for retirement from Mower County with 25 years of service.

A discussion was held regarding a request to create a Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee that can formalize a strategy and oversee implementation that is in alignment with the Mower County mission for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion established in 2022 with the commitment of a .25 FTE to coordinate training and programming. The

request is to form a committee to bring together staff from departments across the county to provide input and feedback on strategies to recruit and retain a workforce that is inclusive and reflects the diversity of the population the County serves.

Health & Human Services (HHS) Director Crystal Peterson along with Quality Case Management, Inc. owner Jessie Meyer appeared before the Board to discuss a proposal for Homeless Prevention Initiative Funding. Mower County has allocated \$100,000 of American Rescue Act Funds for homeless prevention and \$80,000 remains in that fund. In addition, Mower County will begin receiving an annual allocation of Homeless Prevention Aid that will continue annually until 2028. The County has received the first allocation in the amount of \$43,801. Quality Case Management Inc. proposal is to open up a portion of its building as a warming/cooling space for individuals including adults, couples and families with and without children in need of a safe place to go during times of extreme heat or cold (\$18,000). It will not be providing meals and will not be classified as a homeless shelter. It proposes to operate the warming/cooling shelters during periods of extreme heat and cold.

Human Resource Director Kris Kohn provided information for discussion a recommendation for County Attorney Office Re-classifications. A shortage of attorneys has led to a dramatic market shift in compensation for publicly funded attorneys, including public defenders and assistant county attorneys. The State led the way in reclassifications and wage increases due to their inability to attract and retain staff. This has impacted county governments who are now unable to compete to retain current assistant attorneys or attract new ones. Mower County asked our classification and compensation consultant David Drown Associates (DDA) to conduct a market study and to recommend changes to our classification and compensation structure. The county currently has five assistant county attorneys, two lead county attorneys who serve as trial attorneys and one senior attorney. In addition, there is an elected county attorney.

DDA is recommending adding a new position called associate county attorney for employees with less than 4 years public sector experience and changing classifications for the other positions as follows:

Title	Current Pay range	Current Class	Proposed Class	2023 Pay range
Associate Attorney	N/A	New	D61	88,047-118,863
Assistant County Attorney	88,047-118,863	D61	D63	95,215-128,540
Lead County Attorney	91,631-123,702	D62	E82	113,156-152,761
Senior County Attorney	95,215-134,599	D63	E83	116,740-157,599

These classification changes would put the county close to market pay of public defenders. The cost to change classifications is \$ 93,904.43. The Board will consider the recommendation at the September 12, 2023 Board meeting.

Assistant Public Works Director - Environmental Services, Valerie Sheedy provided an overview of changes made to the County Septic Ordinance since 2019, an update on the septic system inventory, and an update on the "No Fee in 2023" zoning permit program. In

addition, Ms. Sheedy reviewed survey results from townships regarding the current septic compliance inspection triggers and input regarding alternative triggers. The highest level of support was for property transfers as the mechanism / trigger for septic compliance inspections which is currently in place. Feedback regarding zoning permits as a trigger was mixed. Other options suggested included conducting a quintile septic compliance program and going township by township and focusing compliance on systems most at risk and those in the sensitive areas. Ms. Sheedy noted that the septic compliance inspection voucher program has been successful. Forty-four vouchers were given out. Twenty-two systems passed and 22 were not in compliance. One system that passed the compliance inspection was 40 years old. The goal of septic compliance is to prevent e-coli from getting into the surface water and impacting water safety. Lastly, Ms. Sheedy noted that the "no-fee in 2023" zoning permit program has been very successful and sunsets at the end of the year. To date \$22,000 in permit fees have been waived with an estimate of approximately \$36,000 by year-end. Fees will be reinstated for 2024 including a penalty for after the fact permits.

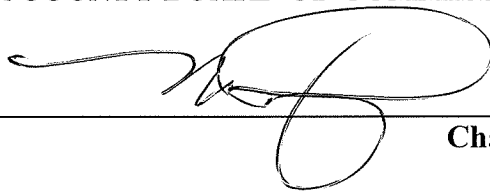
The Board recessed at 3:13 p.m. and reconvened at 3:17 p.m.

County Administrator Trish Harren Gjersvik and Finance Manager Loni Swenson presented preliminary 2024 Budget and Levy figures. When budget discussions started the preliminary budget and levy came in at approximately a 15% increase. The Finance Committee has continued to work on budget reductions and revenue options to reduce the 2024 budget and levy need. The Finance Committee is recommending the Board adopt a preliminary levy increase of 7.8% with a goal of reducing that to 6.9% for the final approval in December.

The work session concluded at 3:37 p.m.

THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY: _____



Chairperson

Attest:

By: Trish Harren Gjersvik
Clerk/Administrator