

**City of Fairmont
100 Downtown Plaza
Fairmont, MN 56031**

City Council Minutes
Workshop: Water Quality City Ag Land

June 11, 2024
City Hall, 4:30 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER The Fairmont City Council met for a workshop at the City Hall Council Chambers. Mayor Baarts called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Council present: Lee Baarts, Mayor
 Wayne Hasek, Councilmember
 Britney Kawecki, Councilmember
 Randy Lubenow, Councilmember
 Jay Maynard, Councilmember
 Michele Miller, Councilmember

Absent: None

Staff present: Matt Skaret, City Administrator
 Tyler Cowing, City Engineer
 Peter Bode, Planning & Zoning Official
 Hannah Neusch, Water Resources Technician
 Betsy Steuber, City Clerk
 Cara Brown, City Attorney (Flaherty & Hood)
 Jesse Walters, Martin Soil & Water Conservation District

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE The City Council and all present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA Motion was made by Councilmember Miller, seconded by Councilmember Maynard to approve the agenda as presented. All present voted in favor. Motion carried.

ROTATING VOTES Please note that votes taken by roll call are called by the City Clerk on a rotating basis; however, the written minutes list the Councilmembers in alphabetical order.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION/ COMMENT No public discussion/comments were heard.

NEW BUSINESS PRESENTATION Mayor Baarts introduced agenda item 5.1: Presentation & Discussion of City Owned Ag Land. Water Resources Technician Neusch started the

Item 5.1

presentation by indicating over 480 acres of City owned land is in production today. As farmland leases are to expire December 31, 2024 Council may want to consider reevaluating the lease agreements and current land practices. Technician Neusch shared potential restoration options (native prairie plantings, cover crops and reduced tillage) and the benefits to our water quality (reduced sedimentation and nutrient load) and potential water treatment costs. Technician Neusch indicated that none of the proposed practice/actions are the “silver bullet” in maintaining/improving water quality.

Jesse Walters introduced himself and his role with Martin Soil & Water Conversation District, to provide volunteer conservation options and grant opportunities available to enhance water quality. Walters stressed the improvement of water quality is a cumulative effort of an entire watershed – not just the lakes and not just agriculture. Walters stated the primary acres of current interest and recommended practices after the 2024 crop year are:

- Converting the 85-acre parcel of the Cedar Park Farm, ID# 230370770, to native prairie with up to \$20,000 cost share assistance currently available through Martin Soil & Water Conservation. This field was of interest due to contour, elevation, soil type, and location in the watershed – water from this field goes right into Amber & Hall Lakes and has a direct impact on drinking water.
- Having a 30' filter strip (approximately 2 acres) of native prairie along the east side of the Day Farm, ID# 230370320, to create more filtering of surface runoff.

Walters elaborated on cover crops and no-till options, with funding available to the producer, upon Martin Soil Water Conservation District Board approval. The City would not be able to receive funding for such practices, however, the City could consider such practices within the terms of their ag lease agreements.

Councilmember Kawecky stated that our lakes should be a priority, as they too are a revenue generating source for Fairmont, and if we expect others to change their ways, we, as the City of Lakes, need to set an example.

Councilmember Miller thanked the presenters and expressed her support of water quality/lake improvements.

Councilmember Lubenow sought clarification on the quality of our lakes and solutions to sediment intake, nutrient loading, curly pondweed, etc.

Neusch indicated there is no quick fix to solve all the issues we must manage. When looking at a watershed wide plan, Neusch said we are trying to address these environmental concerns piece by piece with the first step being the native plantings, reconfiguring the lease agreements and moving forward from there.

Neusch shared that native plantings take time to establish; the first couple years are slightly unsightly with plants establishing roots before shoots. Walters spoke on native prairie site maintenance with a site mow occurring within the first year after seeding to knock down weeds and encourage native planting growth followed by a prescribed burn every 7-10 years.

Waters stated the most consistent source for information on lake health is the Pollution Control Agency (PCA). They conduct a full study on the lakes, with a series of water quality testing and sampling, and compile a watershed restoration and protection strategy.

Councilmember Kawecki inquired on farmland tile and tile water treatment. Walters indicated the need for tile water treatment is significantly less if land is converted to native prairie as nutrient leaching would be eliminated due to no further fertilizer applications. Walters indicated while there is tile on the Day Farm, without knowing where the tile is coming from, its condition, size; projects could likely be implemented in the green space to filter tile water before reaching the lake. Further research would need to be conducted to provide a recommendation.

Neusch shared that storm sewers have some treatment capacity – rainwater enters storm sewer, down the line the water hits a “grate” that filters out large debris and slows the velocity of the water allowing smaller particles and sediment to drop out prior to reaching the lake. One such treatment area is in the parking lot at the Day Farm.

Walters provided a brief overview of the county improvements to JD #28 (sediment basin to slow water flow dumping into Cedar Creek aimed to reduce downstream impacts and instream erosion). Neusch has taken images to compare to next year for bank/sediment monitoring.

Administrator Skaret indicated the topic will be revisited at a future council meeting for further Council discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember Maynard, seconded by Councilmember Hasek, to adjourn the meeting, as there was no further business to come before the Council. All present voted in favor. Motion carried. The Fairmont City Council adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

ATTEST:



Betsy Steuber, City Clerk



Lee C. Baarts, Mayor