

### **Village of Ashton Board Meeting – February 14, 2022**

Village President Tim Henert called to order 7:00p.m.

Present: Steve Garrison, David Chapman, Martha Holder, Susan Larson, Tim Henert, Village Clerk Katie Koks, Village Attorney Russ Crull; Absent: Chuck Ellis, Rhonda Cardot

*Motion to approve January Meeting minutes as presented* – Holder; Second – Larson  
Voice Vote – 4 Ayes, 0 Nays, 2 Absent. Motion passed.

Holder asked what the Douglas Ave. ComEd location was on the additional bill list. Koks did not have the bill with her to look for more detail. Henert asked Koks to get the exact location and communicate to the board. The bill is not due until April. Henert asked Holder to amend her motion to exclude payment for that bill.

*Motion to accept financial statement as presented and to pay monthly bills excluding the ComEd bill for the Douglas Ave. location* - Holder; Second – Larson  
Voice Vote- 4 Ayes, 0 Nays, 2 Absent. Motion passed.

#### **Old Business:**

Koks reported that the Neptune 360 water meters were still scheduled to ship the first week of March. On the bills list was a line item from Ferguson Water Works for \$9,285.71 for the radio receiver for the new system. This was received at the beginning of February. The bill for this piece of equipment was paid when we received the radio receiver. Koks mentioned that all the meters would be arriving at the same time and that Nathan and Jeff are working up a good plan for beginning installation. Henert and Koks would be putting together a letter for residents to inform them of the process when it's finalized.

#### **New Business:**

Henert started the discussion about changing the verbiage of "Debt Service" on the utility bill to "Capital Improvement". Crull had no issue with the change and said that "Capital Improvement" is a more commonly used term and better encompasses the purpose of the charge. There were no questions or comments from board members. Henert put the proposed change to a vote.

*Motion to change "Debt Service" to "Capital Improvement" on the quarterly utility bill* -Garrison; Second – Holder  
Roll Call Vote- Chapman-Aye, Holder –Aye, Larson –Aye, Garrison – Aye, Cardot-Absent, Ellis-Absent. 4 Ayes, 0 Nays, 2 Absent. Motion passed.

Next, Henert asked the board to look at a proposed change in the timeline for utility bill due dates and disconnection. The current ordinance outlines that after the due date for a utility bill passes (approximately 20 to 21 days after issuance), there is a 10 day "grace period" between the due date and the time when late penalties are applied. There is no penalty for a payment during this period. Then the current ordinance also gives the residents 60 days past the due date of the original bill to pay the balance before disconnection. This equates to about 90 days to pay the quarterly bill for disconnection. Koks also mentioned that the ordinance says late penalties should be applied monthly, but that has not been done in the past and she was not trained to do it either.

The proposed change would remove the 10 day grace period and shorten the 60 day payment window to 30 days before disconnection. Garrison and Chapman asked Koks some questions about chronic non-payment, and what could be done to help residents that cannot afford their bill. Many households pay off the bill at the last second and the next quarterly bill is sent out shortly after, repeating the process the resident just went through. Koks again mentioned the partnership with Tri-County Opportunity Council to help residents who were behind. She is limited to what she can offer for assistance and has been directing residents to Tri-County.

*Motion to change the verbiage in the Ordinance Modifying the Overdue Bill Policy for Water, Sewer, & Garbage Fees to remove the "grace period" and shorten the time to disconnection from 60 to 30 days.*- Larson; Second Holder. Roll Call Vote – Larson-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Chapman-Aye, Holder –Aye, Cardot-Absent, Ellis-Absent. 4 Ayes, 0 Nays, 2 Absent. Motion passed.

Henert began the discussion about the new legislation surrounding annual license fees for Video Gaming terminals. The new legislation, signed in December by the governor, outlines an allowance for non-home rule communities to increase the licensing fee from \$25 to \$250 per terminal. The board members were provided with a comparison of what other municipalities are doing, a sheet with an approximate amount made by the establishments in 2021, and a sheet from the IML explaining the change. Chapman questioned the break down on how revenue is allocated to the establishment, the terminal operator, the state, and the municipality and whether the license fee increase was necessary or would do more harm than good. Henert and Koks explained that the formula that determines the split of the monthly revenue is generated by the state and could not be easily broken down.

Reports are available to the public online—the link was shared on one of the sheets in the packet. Koks mentioned that many of the other clerks in the area were encouraging establishment owners to speak to their terminal operators to work out splitting the cost of the license fee at the beginning of the next fiscal year. If the increase to \$250 per machine was passed, the Village would see an increase of approximately \$6,300 in revenue for 28 machines. Henert asked the board members to speak to the local establishments so they could put this to a vote at the March meeting.

The board began a discussion regarding the Ashton Splash Pad. Garrison asked what the cost was to fix or replace. Henert said that the preliminary quotes from the last time this issue was looked at were approximately \$450,000 to repair and \$500,000 to replace. Henert floated the idea of starting a committee or a task force to determine the direction to go with the splash pad. Holder asked if the Blum Foundation had been contacted. Henert said he is open to suggestions and open to help with research and communication. The discussion was then tabled for a future meeting.

**Zoning-** Nothing to report. Manheim was not present.

#### **Community Economic Development**

Garrison and Cardot will be doing some research on updates to the Village's website and what the Village would like to see updated. Garrison will begin some research and present for discussion at a future meeting. Henert asked Koks to elaborate a bit about why Village is looking into this issue. She explained that residents are more reliant on municipal websites to access standard information and the Village is also required by law to include information on "Sunshine" laws like FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) and OMA (Open Meetings Act). The Village needs to remain compliant with all state standards regarding posting minutes, agendas, and contact information. Koks does not manage the current village website or social media page.

**Streets & Alleys-** Nothing to report. Ellis was not present.

#### **Water & Sewer**

Chapman reported that the committee did meet to discuss health of the sewer lines. Chapman spoke with Adam Lanning on options to conduct testing. There are less expensive gravity flow test and a more expensive optical options – Rochelle uses this every year. Chapman spoke with Nathan and Lanning about a possible partnership with Rochelle. Crull said that his only concern with that arrangement was the use of equipment, and the priority that Ashton would have when things need to happen or in case of an emergency. Henert asked Chapman to also contact IRWA to see if some of the services could be done for free or a reduced price through that organization. Chapman expressed that he would like to keep talking about this and he is planning on another meeting within the next month.

#### **Parks**

Holder reported that they are looking to get some donations for camp programs and landscaping at Griffith Park. Koks mentioned that four of the Paw Patrol costumes were sent to the dry cleaners and the other four would go in early March. Holder said the next park committee meeting will be the first Thursday in March to discuss events for the year and put together a calendar.

#### **Liquor Commissioner**

Henert made a reminder that liquor licenses will be renewed in May.

### **Police Report**

Yater had nothing to report. Garrison asked if there was a way to get a report so residents can see what is going on in town- specifically Fourth St. and Richardson with speeders. Henert suggested we compile a monthly activity report to present at meetings.

### **Clerk's Report**

Koks asked the board to review the instructions provided in the packets to complete their Statement of Economic Interests. Public Officials are required to complete this statement and have it filed with the county clerk. Crull mentioned that there is a \$15 fine for the Village on any statement that is not turned in on time. Koks asked the board to complete their statement and turn it into her by the April Board meeting at the latest and she will bring the statements to the courthouse all together.

Koks reported that she and Larson were in the early stages of putting together an employee handbook for new employees that outlines benefits and standard employment policies. They are aiming to have it completed for board review and approval in the coming months. All current and new employees will have to read and sign and acknowledgment that they reviewed the information.

Koks provided the board with an update on the status of unpaid utility bills. The total amount billed on January 1<sup>st</sup> was \$95,609.26 for approximately 425 households. As of February 14<sup>th</sup>, the amount that remained unpaid was \$23,043.21. This is 24% of the total and around 100 households.

### **Cemetery Board**

Koks reported that the entries for the Ashton Cemetery in the Illinois Cemetery Oversight Database had been totally updated from 2016 until present. Per Illinois state statute, all burials in the cemetery must be entered in this database.

Dena McCoy submitted a new price for cemetery lawn care. A copy of the updated cost was included in the packet. The increase is due to the increase in cost for additional help.

### **Mills & Petrie Board**

Holder reported that the last meeting the board had a virtual meeting with the investment team to review our account. They also discussed some building maintenance issues and the quest to get a new computer to run museum software. Henert asked Stauffer if anything had been purchased, and she replied that she was still working on it.

### **Village Attorney**

Crull said that he will work on updating the utility bill ordinance verbiage for review and will send it to Koks to include in March's meeting packet.

### **Other**

Another Quit Claim deed from the Blum Foundation for the 40 acres on the west side of town had been sent.

*Motion to adjourn the meeting* – Holder; Second – Chapman

Voice Vote – 4 Ayes, 0 Nays, 2 Absent. Motion passed

Meeting adjourned at 7:50pm

Submitted by Katie Koks, Ashton Village Clerk