

**City of Marine City
City Commission
Special Meeting
May 20, 2015**

A special meeting meeting of the Marine City Commission was held on Wednesday, May 20, 2015, in the Fire Hall, 200 South Parker Street, Marine City, Michigan, and was called to order by Mayor Skotarczyk at 7:00 pm.

At this time, the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Skotarczyk.

Present: Mayor Raymond Skotarczyk, Commissioners Terrance Avery, Elizabeth Hendrick, Dianne Lovett, Raymond Meli, David Simpson, and James Turner, Acting City Manager Donald Tillery, City Clerk Kristen Baxter

Absent: None

Communications

No Communications were received.

Public Comment

No residents addressed the Commission.

Approve Agenda

Motion by Commissioner Lovett, seconded by Commissioner Turner, to approve the Agenda, as presented. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

Budget Information Presentation

Acting City Manager, Donald Tillery, made a presentation on the state of the budget and the proposed PA33 Special Assessment.

Public Hearing

Establish a Special Assessment District to Defray the Costs to Continue the Maintenance and Operation of Public Safety Protection for the City of the Marine City and Levy the Special Assessment

Motion by Commissioner Hendrick, seconded by Commissioner Lovett, to open the Public Hearing to receive public comments for and against the proposed establishment of a Special Assessment District at 7:15 pm. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

Heather Warner, 345 N. Elizabeth, asked why Ft. Gratiot was used as a comparison with Marine City for the purpose of St. Clair Sheriff Department pricing. She said doesn't want to see the Marine City Police Department gone, but doesn't want to pay extra for it. Ms. Warner said the PA33 Special Assessment packet that was available at the meeting answered a lot of questions and asked the Board if they had exhausted all measures to balance the budget to avoid the PA33.

Robert Beattie, 565 N. Main Street, said that the Board should be responsible and look at the getting a quote from the Sheriff's Department, in addition to looking at other resources, before they start increasing taxes. Mr. Beattie said the Sheriff's quote should come ***before*** the tax increase.

Robert Blanchard, 622 Alger, said he didn't think the PA33 Special Assessment was a good idea and said that people are sick of tax increases. Mr. Blanchard said higher taxes would deter new people and businesses coming to town. He said the Board should put the vote to the people and that the Board should not have the attitude that they are going to pass the PA33 Special Assessment because they know what is best for the city.

Joe Moran, 710 Pleasant, said a lot of people are talking about Marine City being a prosperous, growing city with safe, clean streets. He said he supported the Board approving the PA33 Special Assessment to keep the city on a path of growth and prosperity. Mr. Moran said the Board was leading the city in the right direction.

Rosalie Skwiers, 211 Michigan, said with the average family income lower and the population down, the city has not made necessary cuts, but instead made expenditures. Mrs. Skwiers said that grant money, which was really tax money, was used to restore historic city hall. She suggested instead of taking on more buildings to take care of, make a handicapped-accessible building that people could use.

Raymond Skwiers, 211 Michigan, said the PA33 Special Assessment packet should have been provided and put on the city's website prior to this evening's meeting. He said instead of attracting new businesses, the city should focus on what they are doing for the people who already live there. Mr. Skwiers said the PA33 pamphlet said cost cutting measures were taken, but no figures were given.

Dennis Wend, 1315 S. Water Street, thanked the Board for their time and dedication and said he likes the way Marine City looks with new businesses, theatres and the town packed on a Friday night. Mr. Wend spoke about the legacy costs and the aging water system the city is dealing with and said the city is paying more for retirees than they are with active employees and, because of this, it is putting the city in a bad place.

Melvin Sawicki, 432 Little Street, said that the city needs to bring in industry to help pay the taxes. He said the city should be fixing the streets, not paying someone to water flowers. Mr. Sawicki said he is proud of Marine City and was there to keep it going.

Bill Danneels, 206 Westminster, said Marine City has done a lot for him and he hoped that the Board can come up with a solution to keep the city running. Mr. Danneels said he was glad to be alive to pay his taxes. He said he appreciates the things the Board is trying to do for Marine City and likes the quality of life he has in Marine City.

Kathy Murray, 262 S. Second, said she felt like she was talking to a wall when she spoke at the City Commission meeting on May 7, 2015. She said there was an issue of people not knowing what was going on and said they needed numbers. Ms. Murray questioned why the police chief had a city vehicle and gas allowance and said Marine City didn't need more police presence, they needed less.

James Heaslip, 455 Mabel, spoke as a citizen as well as Lieutenant of the Marine City Police Department. Mr. Heaslip asked if 41 cents a day was enough to put a price on someone's life. He explained that the additional afternoon/evening shift was necessary due to the Sheriff's Department and State Police not being as readily available for back-up support to the lone Marine City Police officer. Lt. Heaslip said he didn't want his taxes raised, but asked for community support. He asked how the city could move forward with all the negativity and said everyone should be on the same page.

Bill Haas, 203 Pleasant Street, said the Board needs to show residents a plan of what they are going to use the PA33 Special Assessment money for. He said it is almost like the Board wants a blank check. Mr. Haas made the suggestion that more time be spent on looking for grant money.

Keith Jenken, 809 S. Water Street, said when times get tough, the Board should be telling the city what is needed and residents and business owners should support them. He said he hears complaints about needed road repairs and about the proposed tax hike. Mr. Jenken said community members need to start working together as they all want the city to progress. Mr. Jenken said the city can't move forward without generating revenue.

Bill Blanchard, 921 West Boulevard, said he doesn't feel that the Board did its homework, that there is not enough information to ask residents to support an increase. He said the Board needs to make cuts and get spending under control. Mr. Blanchard said he wants to see the city move forward but said that it was hard to be supportive without getting information and answers.

Janet Demist, 308 Ward Street, said that residents are all stretched out. She asked to Board not to burden tax payers with an increase.

Kim Turner, 361 N. Main Street, said that the Board did get their homework done with their regular meetings, budget meetings, and a town hall meeting, all of which are open to the public. She pointed out that board members all have full-time jobs and that they should get recognition for their dedication. Mrs. Turner said that she has never seen as much activity downtown in her lifetime.

John Sapienza, 426 Broadway, said he was opposed to the tax increase, but wants all the services to stay as they are. Mr. Sapienza said he loves Marine City and said there needs to be more creative ways of spending money.

Rosalie Skwiers, 211 Michigan, said much of the negativity surround the proposed PA33 Special Assessment, could have solved if information regarding PA33 would have been put online prior to today's date. She said an increase of 42 cents is a lot of money to some people. Mrs. Skwiers said that paying for someone to water flowers is an expense that needed to be looked at.

Heather Warner, 345 N. Elizabeth, said that everyone in attendance tonight was there because they loved Marine City. Ms. Warner presented an unofficial petition containing 309 signatures to the Board, in opposition to the proposed PA33 Special Assessment.

Dennis Wend, 1315 S. Water Street, said that no one wants to raise taxes. He suggested lists be made of what needs to be done in the next five and ten years. He said the big picture needs to be looked at and what needs to be completed.

Keith Jenkins, 809 S. Water Street, suggested a meeting be arranged with Heather Warner and Mary Ellen McDonald (City Treasurer/Finance Director) so Heather is supplied accurate information to get the information out to residents.

Bill Danneels, 206 Westminster, said that the City Commission has been forthright with citizens. Numbers have been made available at regular and budget workshop meetings, which are open to the public. He said he strongly supports to the restoration of the afternoon/evening police department shift as the officers need backup assistance. Mr. Danneels asked residents to give the Board credit and look to them for guidance.

Motion by Commissioner Avery, seconded by Commissioner Simpson, to close the Public Hearing at 9:14 pm. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

NEW BUSINESS

Resolution #08-2015 ~ Establish & Levy a Special Assessment District

City Attorney Downey explained that there are two alternatives to the PA33 – ad valorem assessment or uniform fee special assessment. Mr. Downey said that the city’s auditor, Curtis McBride, expressed a strong preference for an ad valorem assessment which is a progressive assessment based on the value of the property. A uniform flat fee is a regressive assessment with everyone paying the same amount with two tiers: residential and commercial.

A discussion took place on whether to split the tax between the summer and winter tax bills or place the entire amount on the winter bill due to it being a much smaller tax bill and would cause less of a burden on taxpayers.

Mayor Skotarczyk spoke and said if the special assessment goes to a vote, it won’t pass. Mayor Skotarczyk continued that the city has probably not communicated as effectively as it could in getting figures out there, but he said the cuts are not good for the city and the amount of the tax increase they are proposing is not going to put undue pressure on citizens. Mayor Skotarczyk said, without the tax increase, many non-essential services could be cut, such as Parks & Recreation, Channel 6 coverage of City Commission meetings and football games, Police Department third shift, and Code Enforcement and capital improvements. The Mayor said the city *can* cut to a balanced budget, but it is the wrong thing to do for the city and he does not suggest it.

Commissioner Hendrick said she posted a list of cuts that could be made from the budget and still keep the level of services the same. Commissioner Hendrick said there was incorrect information in the PA33 pamphlet and it should be corrected. In addition, she said that raises should not be given out when the city is broke. Mrs. Hendrick said she doesn't think the proposed PA33 Special Assessment should be pushed to a vote because it is a waste of taxpayer's money.

Commissioner Lovett said to not move forward, is to move backward. She said new people and businesses were willing to invest in our community when we weren't even investing in ourselves.

Commissioner Simpson said the proposed tax increase is not the easy thing to do, but the responsible thing to do. Further, he said it will fix long-term issues and give the city administration the tools to address issues well into the future.

Commissioner Meli said he is worried due to proposed utility bill increases, in addition to the tax increase. Mr. Meli said he is still very interested in getting a quote from the Sheriff's Department and said another option is the State Police. Mr. Meli said if the State Police came into Marine City, they would police it for free. Commissioner Meli asked if the city is spending money wisely.

Motion by Commissioner Lovett, seconded by Commissioner Simpson, to approve Resolution #08-2015 to Establish & Levy a Special Assessment District (item #8-A¹ - Ad Valorem Tax), as presented. Roll Call Vote. Ayes: Skotarczyk, Avery, Lovett, Simpson, Turner. Nays: Hendrick, Meli. Motion Carried.

Adjournment

Motion by Commissioner Hendrick, seconded by Commissioner Meli, to adjourn at 10:09 pm. All Ayes. Motion Carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Baxter

Kristen Baxter
City Clerk

