

(The following is a synopsis of the minutes of the West Branch City Council meeting. A video recording is available for inspection at westbranchiowa.org. The minutes are not approved until the next regularly scheduled City Council meeting.)

**West Branch, Iowa
Council Chambers**

**City Council
Work Session**

**August 14, 2025
6:00 p.m.**

Mayor Roger Laughlin called the West Branch City Council regular meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
Roll call: Council members present; Tom Dean, Jodee Stoolman, Mike Horihan, and Jerry Sexton.
Absent: Colton Miller.

City Staff present: City Administrator Adam Kofoed, City Clerk Alycia Horras, Park & Recreation Director Erin Laughlin, Public Works Director Matt Goodale, Police Chief Greg Hall, Police Sargent Cathy Steen, Fire Chief Kevin Stoolman, City Attorney Kevin Olson and City Engineer Dave Schechinger.
Attending via Zoom: Finance Officer Heidi Van Auken

PRESENTATIONS / COMMUNICATIONS / OPEN FORUM

Discussion – Mayor presentation of updates to the Parkside Hills Plan and discussion with Developer/Contractor

Mayor Laughlin shared his support of the project and to continue to develop West Branch. The concern is that without the plan for the Parkside Hills area that is located behind the BP/Subway locations, that nothing will happen with that area and it will remain undeveloped. The developer has applied for Workforce Housing Tax Credits and these will be used to shorten the life of the TIF credit to bring money back to all areas such as the city and school. This development will increase Main Street income through retail sales, increase revenue from Road Use Tax income, and will allow us to spread out our debt obligation through water and sewer rates with connection fees, permits and monthly utilities collected.

Administrator Kofoed shared that we currently only have 1 single family building permit this calendar year. We have to pay for the debt project that we did with the sewer plant upgrade and as with all projects, there have been more expenses than planned/expected with this project. With out the revenue from items such as building permits, connection fees, etc., the residents will be responsible for the repayment of this debt through higher utility rates. Road Use Tax and Local Option Sales Tax is figured per person in a community and the addition of the units in Parkside Hills raises this benefit for the city as a whole. The developer has chosen that for each tax credit that he is awarded, he will reduce his allotment of TIF rebates. For example, if he is awarded \$100,00.00 in tax credits, he will reduce his TIF rebate from the city by \$50,000.00 putting money back into the city budget. This plan would not happen overnight. Phase I will take 2 – 3 year and the overall plan could take 8 – 10 years to complete allowing a steady growth and not all at once.

Some council questions, concerns and statements were as follows: The TIF pledge on this project seems high. With Heritage Hill, that site was an old Concrete Plant and it made sense to make a TIF agreement on that site to make it a viable site again. There was concern of the plan being pushed quickly and not having the open and transparent communication that has been seen in the past with a project. The mayor was thanked by council members for calling this meeting to create some transparence and communication on the overall project and continued changes being made to it. Allowing the opportunity for all staff to voice their areas of concern or needs with the growth from this project was also mentioned and appreciated from the council members.as there is concerns with needing more staff for our Police, Public Works, Fire and potentially Admin areas to accommodate the growth and demand in a 100% rental area of this size.

It was stated that Planning and Zoning was asking for more green space and the ratio of 2 parking spaces to each door for the project to move forward and it was asked where that change was in the plan. A significant concern was the ability for our city water supply to keep up with the completion of Heritage Hill and then addition of the full Parkside Hills site plan. There will need to be a water study done to ensure that we are on track to sustain this much development with out a dip to our water supply. There is a high probability that we will need to look into a water plant with in the next 5 years to ensure we are planning for our future

needs. With our Sewer Plant project, we should be ok in this area, but with the water side of things, we are looking at having issues with the added housing and number of residents. It was shared multiple times that this is something that needs some serious thought and attention now rather than later to allow time for a water study and to find resources for funds to support our water treatment expansion for growth in the community.

City staff and leadership, Chief Hall, Chief Stoolman, Director Goodale and Clerk Horras all shared their concerns and needs with resources, staffing and overall consideration before moving forward with the plan. Each wanted to ensure that their areas were set up for success with the growth and that each of their areas of concern were taken into consideration as plans were finalized and before action was taken to approve and move forward with planning and building. Some of the big items were as follows:

The access and ability to safely get fire trucks and equipment through the development when necessary. It was stated that each building would be sprinklered throughout the building and on the decks and there would be an 8" line for fire safety. The question of grills on decks and the potential of fire from this was brought up and it was stated that grills are prohibited in the 12 plex units for this reason.

From a water stand point it was stated that we currently have 1 ½ days of water in storage regularly. The DNR requests that we have 2 days. We would need to explore more potential underground storage with the continued growth to maintain our supplies. The North end of the water plant should be ok with the growth and not need much more to continue to be adequate, but the South end would need expansion and/or work to ensure we stay on track and not lose ground with our water supply. A need to address more water plant equipment and expansion needs to be in the works now as the pumps run 24 hours a day with our current size and would not be able to keep up with a significant growth. Questions as well such as how is snow removal to be handled and what streets would the city be responsible for were asked to be added to the plans for clarification. The question was asked with our current equipment, what are we looking at for a timeline for the need for work/growth with our water system. Director Goodale shared that we could potentially expect to be able to run the next 5-6 years with our current equipment and size, if we replace some of the filters at least for efficiency. Beyond that, we would have to expand/upgrade equipment. He shared that West Liberty built a very efficient water plant a few years ago, which would be larger than we need, but was at a cost of \$4million. He urged the need to look at a plan now for a water study and to start planning where the funds would come from for water plant growth stating that when he started in 2010 the water flow was 170 – 250 and now it is 370 – 450.

The street layout and width of the streets was looked at as a concern for emergency vehicles to get into the area safely. It was stated that looking at 2nd street alone a fire truck could not navigate to the right to get to housing. There would be a need to drive through parking lots and would have to take precious time to move cars out of the way to get to the area of emergency. The current plan does not feasibly allow for multiple trucks to be in the area working if needed and that is of great concern.

Developer Thomas stated that there is both a wet and dry system in the units to support fire safety and that the streets can be widened and specked out to ensure truck movement in the development. The MMS engineer at the meeting then talked to Chief Stoolman to look at areas of concern and to note what was needed to ensure that the plan was revised to alleviate the concern areas.

Concerns of the number of units and new residents was addressed by our emergency services. This puts a significant amount of added stress on these areas. There was some discussion about reducing the number of doors in the area from 227 new unites to 200 to help open the area up for movement and to reduce the quick growth overall. It was asked how much of this plan would be considered rental property and it was shared that it would be 100%. Like Heritage Hill, there would be the opportunity to buy these units as well, but it would be planned for 100% rental property. The statistic that the bulk of our police calls come from our rental areas was shared and then the discussion that with our PD staff not being at 24/7 yet was a concern as with the addition of so much rental property, there is a potential that we would need

to double the number of officers we currently have over the course of the development to keep up with the calls.

MMS Engineer John shared that there is already the reduction in doors in the works and shared the 2-unit reduction area that is being looked at to shift the overall number of units to 200. They are also looking to add a play ground to the area with the reduction to inject that into the largely populated area. Developer Thomas shared that he was looking to develop the area that was at a standstill with the previous developer. He is also negotiating for the purchase of the property that is across from the school to continue development of that area as well.

Additional comments, concerns, questions from community and commission members were: Some of the development that has gone up in Coralville from the same developer consists of brick buildings with parking underground to allow for clear passage. There are concerns with the Heritage Hill development with the parking, trash overflow, storage on the decks and how this development could be more of the same, especially as it is located as you come right into West Branch. Is this really what we want people to see? Who will police things like the no grills allowed to ensure safety measures are kept?

The session ended with Mayor Laughlin thanking everyone for coming and sharing their insight and concerns with the Council, Developer, Engineer and Commission members that were present so that it can all be taken into consideration as planning and development continues.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn by Dean, second by Sexton. Motion carried on a voice vote. City Council meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Roger Laughlin, Mayor

ATTEST:

Alycia Horras, City Clerk