

JASPER CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

Budget Meeting-12/03/2025

The Jasper City Council of the City of Jasper met in-person on Wednesday, December 3rd, 2025.

Members present: Mayor Kim Lape; Council members: Deb Plahn, Tim Houg, Stacie Smith, Zachary Kounkel;

Employees present: Clerk-Treas: Renae Thode, Deputy Clerk/Treas.: Maggie Erickson; Building and Grounds: Kevin Gum;

Pipestone Star: Kyle Kupal;

Community members: Trinidad Garcia, Michelle Haak;

Mayor Lape called the Budget Meeting to order at 7:00pm followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

It was acknowledged that there were lots of changes since the last meeting. Smith pointed out that Les Nath was to credit for a lot of it. Plahn said we should not have had to call on him. Lape said we are in it together. Plahn said Les spent a lot of time with Trinidad. Lape said she will take the blame, but reiterated we are all in it together. Plahn said we are, but said Lape was the leader. Lape said we are at 6.62% and said cuts should still be made. R. Thode reminded Lape to approve the agenda.

Agenda Approval:

Motion to approve the agenda by Plan 1st/Houg 2nd, all ayes followed.

Lape then asked for community input. Michelle Haak stood up to address city employees directly. Michelle raised her voice and said she was there because city employees have the audacity to sit there and get free health care when she struggles and drowns in medical debt and she has to pay for the city employees medical care. She continued saying her taxes are almost as much as her mortgage and that the city employees “don’t give a shit”. She continued saying it needed to be voted on and that if the employees wanted insurance, it should come out of their check like everyone else and questioned why her putting it on Facebook looks bad on the city council. She then brought up councilmember Kounkel’s video that they posted of someone “smoking out” peaceful demonstrators, accusing him of being the person to do it. Kounkel stated it was not him and told Michelle to tone it down or she could leave and that there was no reason for her to be swearing. Plahn and Smith said she had the right to be here. Kounkel said “they respect you, you respect them”. Michelle asked who it was that did that to the peaceful demonstrators. Kounkel stated that it was not him and that it was Taylor Evans. Michelle said she saw it on his videos. Kounkel said he knew who to block and Michelle said good for you. Michelle continued and said “we need to vote on this”. Plahn said that we do not disagree and continues by saying it is ridiculous to have that much healthcare. Erickson spoke up and reminded Plahn that they did vote on it. R. Thode reiterated what Erickson said. Erickson continued and said “you guys approved it so don’t sit there and say you didn’t”. Plahn said “well yeah”. Michelle asked how long it has been paid for. Maggie said “years”. Kounkel

JASPER CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

said Brian and Maggie had been here a long time and that there was no problems. He also said when Renae and Kevin were hired, it was a benefit offered. Lape said it has been this way since she could remember. Kounkel said majority of people do not like their jobs but they do it for the benefits for their family. He continued and said if we cut benefits, they would be looking for 4 new employees. Smith said that we need to correct that because there had been a lot of “bar talk”. Smith said they never said to cut benefits and that “you guys are all saying wrong things to community members too”. She continues and said they are not saying that and that things can’t stay the same either and that “you guys have to accept that too”. Smith said they are not sitting there saying that, but you guys do have to accept thing could change, pointing out that council changes, mayors change and things don’t always remain. Michelle began again and said that she heard people are threatened when they stand up or speak up and said she thinks that employees, or families of employees, should get fired if there’s any threatening of people disagreeing with this whole matter or any other matter. She continued and said it was getting old and called council and city employees a “little mafia”. She said “this is bullshit” and said she has to get a second job and asked the city employees how it made them feel. B. Thode said he has 2 jobs. Erickson also said she has 2 jobs. Michelle continued and said “so that’s ok that you have free healthcare, but I don’t. B. Thode said he had been here for 26 years. Michelle spoke over him and said her husband had been working 2 jobs since 2007 while she stayed home and took care of the kids and that she couldn’t do 2 jobs until now. R. Thode spoke to Michelle and said “I know you are directing a lot of this at us, however, council is presented with multiple options and their signing off on it was their vote on it”. Michelle said “I know”. Renae then continued and invited Michelle back in October/November when it happens so she can review it. Michelle then said absolutely. She then said some people need to be voted out as well. Plahn then said Michelle should run for council, to which Michelle said she would. Plahn said good because we need more people to run for council and that we need more community members here at meeting to express their opinions. Michelle agreed and said that you think it is operating smoothly, but it is mostly self-serving people not for the community. She said she has been hearing more and more of this. She also said we should see the responses that she got on her post and that people are upset. Lape said she hasn’t seen any post mentioned and Michelle said that is because they are not facebook friends. Lape asked if it was on the city page. R. Thode spoke again and said that Michelle’s anger should not be directed at city employees because it was a benefit presented when employees took positions with the city. Michelle said “that’s your takeaway, the anger”. R. Thode responded and said “your anger is aimed at us and I feel like it is not appropriately aimed where it should be”. She continued by saying that employees do not choose the plan and that council chooses. Michelle said it should be changed. Plan said it will be and that we will have to look at different companies because health insurance is astronomical. Kounkel said it is all insurance. Lape said it will be re-evaluated. Garcia then spoke and said last year Klozowski was to give multiple options for insurance and that it was not to take away insurance but to compare it to other insurances. She continued and said we were right that that is what was offered working for the cities and that is what brings some people to the job. She asked if they presented those options. Plahn said they had never

JASPER CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

seen them. Garcia said when they come, they typically only speak to employees. Plahn said they need to come to council. Garcia said that she doesn't think it is wrong to look at multiple options to see if there is a better option. R. Thode said the first place to look would be outside of Kozlowski because they seem to charge quite a bit just for their portion of it. Plahn said she emailed 8 or 9 different towns to ask then what they have got and who with. She said there are very few towns that pay health insurance and there are several different insurances. She then spoke about the Public Employee Insurance. Kounkel asked Plahn if she asked those towns what they pay their hourly employees. Plahn said she did not ask them that because she didn't think they would have told her. Smith spoke and said that they had upped city employees pay by a lot this year, twice, so that card can't be played much. B. Thode said he didn't know about that and said he could go over to the city in Edgerton, whom he has spoken to about this topic over the last year. He continued and said the guy in Edgerton makes \$7 more an hour, but he does pay \$300 a month for insurance. Smith said there is give and take with that. B. Thode said that if we are going to start paying for insurance, then we have to match the cities around here and what they pay their employees because that was a big deal on the wages. Smith agreed. B. Thode said it was a big deal on the wages and said the wages are low compared to other towns. He said that he makes \$28 and asked Plahn if she asked Hills what they start at. Plahn said she didn't. B. Thode said for a wastewater operator is it \$26-\$27/hr, where Luverne is closer to \$28-\$30. Plahn said she had several people ask why there are two full time public works employees and two full time office people. Lape said we have always had 2 full time public works. B. Thode said we were hand in hand with the bar back then. Plahn said the office was a full timer and a part timer. Plahn said we have to look back on that. Smith said she didn't disagree with looking at wages to make compensation if city employees had to pay part of their insurance. Smith said she thinks that in general that we should look at other insurance. Lape asked if we could invite them to next week to look at all insurances. Garcia said you may cut Klozowski, but find another person. B. Thode said they are just the underwriter. Garcia said you do not want to remove him and not have another person to do it because the responsibility would fall to Renae to do all of the stuff Kozlowski is doing. She continued to encourage council to look at the entire process because it could stick the other person in a spot, they are not familiar with. She said she looks at being Renae's shoes and that it is a lot to put on that person when they don't have the insurance for that piece. She also said that everyone is looking at the cost of wages and insurance, and that they are two big things, but everything needs to be looked at. She pointed out that the city pays for outsourcing for repairs and that maybe it would be better to cut back on supplies. She said the whole picture needs to be looked at. She continued saying that when she first came in, she was trying to get her arms around where things are at and at first you are trying to see what is going on, and then you when you start looking at it you you're like, oh okay, but then you give yourself time because maybe you're not seeing the whole picture. But then after a while being here a while and looking at stuff, you will start questioning why we pay "this for that". She said she doesn't think that has been looked at for a long time. She gave the example of maybe public works employees could do more before outsourcing. Plahn said she thinks a lot of the outsourcing is unnecessary and that we should be

JASPER CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

able to take care of ourselves, giving the example of plumbing for simple things. Lape asked if anyone else had anything from the community.

Minutes Approval: Motioned by Houg 1st/Smith 2nd

Budget Review:

R. Thode started and said there have been edits up until the end of the day and that she had been given incredible insight from Les. She said they were able to get things down quite a bit and that many things in 2025 would go to capital and not really reflect on the budget (referred to as cabined in meeting room and the roof. Lape asked what the balance of the Money Market account was and what the reserve requirements are. R. Thode asked Smith because she is at the bank. Smith said she didn't know. Plahn said she had a question about page 6. She asked why the mayor is separate from the council. Plahn said that their handbook stated the mayor and the council are the same thing. Lape said it is just a category. R. Thode confirmed it is just a category and to categorize it by legislative and executive, just like the federal government. Smith said that Les had told her that when it is sent off, it is reviewed by category. R. Thode confirmed. Garcia said it is more summarized when sent to the state and that this one is more detailed. Garcia said the costs of the cabinet and roof should offset because those funds were pulled from Money Market. She mentioned the splashpad. Lape said there should be an easier budget to read. Garcia and R. Thode said there is another one. Garcia said that she would use the other one because it is easier to look at. Lape said that for sure the insurance a pay is a big hit. R. Thode pointed out that insurance is definitely a lot smaller now and said it was at 140 something and now it is at 107. R. Thode also pointed out paid leave is a small amount as well. Garcia asked what percentage we were at. R. Thode said that in talking with Les, we got it down to 6.62. Smith said to give that cushion, we need to be at 7.5. Garcia said that is reasonable and Smith said she thinks it is average. Lape said there are still things to consider, such as insurance, possibly removing dental completely, maybe selling some properties in town. Houg said that would be a good idea. Plahn said you can't count on that because you don't know what you will ask and if anyone would buy it. Lape said it is something to consider and that it won't happen right now, but in 6 months, let's consider it. Smith said it won't change this. Lape said in the long-term, let's start thinking about down the road. Plahn said that eventually, if Bollig gets the grants, we will have another building to insure. Smith said the best part is that if we get some properties sold and we get it back into residents or into business, that regenerates revenue. She also said that just being new to council, she wishes she would have sat through it last year and that talking to Les really opened her eyes and that he taught her a lot and that it would have made her much more reserved. She said it gave her a lot more understanding. Smith said that she encouraged anyone that does want to run for council, she recommended they go through the process. Lape said for the insurance, down the road, they have to take baby steps. Smith mentioned plans where the deductible is higher, but the premium is lower, which could make it a non-issue. Lape suggested something like an HAS. Plahn said we need to get someone here at the council meetings to talk about the insurance. R. Thode said that the tricky

JASPER CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

part with that is when they have it ready, it falls between council meetings. She continued by saying that they wanted her to give the answer before council but she told them it was not an option. She said Nicole Meester is the person who had to go to the co-op and make sure they were even ok with waiting until the 20th instead of the 18th. Smith said we could look at other agents. Lape suggested Buffalo Ridge. Smith suggested to look at Peoples Insurance as well and support local. She said to start there. Lape asked if they do health insurance too and she said yes. She continued by saying not the Jasper location, but Rock Valley. She continued saying there are many different options to look at and their costs might be lower. Lape said we will see an increase every year. R. Thode said that's insurance and that it has an increase every year. Kounkel said it doesn't hurt to get quotes. R. Thode agreed. Plahn said we need to look at the public employees insurance and Lape agreed. Lape asked if there was any further discussion on the 2026 budget. Plahn said she wished there was something online or a workshop about budgets. R. Thode said there is a guideline. Plahn said she would like someone to come and explain it. Garcia said there is an online budget course through the league. She also suggested talking to Lisa Silva who is a good reference and has walked through budgets with other clerks. Plahn said it would be a good idea for all council to go through a training. R. Thode said maybe they would be willing to come in July to a council meeting, that way we can be ready for the rest of the year. Smith asked Garcia if there were set limits of what people can approve for spending. Garcia said that was a grey area because sometime people would say \$500 but not for everything. She continued and said that on her end, she started having the head of the department sign off on the invoices. She said she struggled with that when she started because she wasn't sure what was approved to be paid or not. She asked B. Thode if when he outsources, is an approval needed. B. Thode said it was \$500 years ago. Smith said it had never been set. B. Thode said it is probably in minutes from 25 years ago. Garcia mentioned the fire department as well, if it is \$500, it doesn't go that way and that there is no approval process. Plahn asked if there are ever problems with where to put certain things on invoices. R. Thode said traing to figure out where it's put, such as if it is gravel, where did it actually go. Sometime it comes in email or in the mail and you don't know who used it or where. B. Thode said that that is when you just ask me and that Chris Rodman used to call all the time and asked what it was for. Garcia said she did the same with B. Thode. Garcia said R. Thode will learn it. R. Thode mentioned the EMS building, but it has to be broken down into its specific department. Smith said that is something we should consider is putting the expectation and an amount and anything over comes to council to try and help. Plahn said we seriously need to consider outsourcing a lot of stuff. Lape asked B. Thode what we use outsourcing for. B. Thode said plumber and welding shop, otherwise it isn't that much. Plahn said they can't do electricity. B. Thode said he doesn't understand the outsourcing because there isn't much of it. He continued saying that there are some emergency situations, if the limit is a small amount but we need it done, there will have to be a special council meeting and "ladi dadi da". But if it is an general repair to where you have to fix it immediately. Lape jumped in and said if we are going to put a stop to outsourcing, then we better not outsource payroll. Smith said she doesn't think we can because the lawyer advised because of the family ties. Plahn said that is why she got

JASPER CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

the quote from someone for \$275. R. Thode and Lape said that is not a bad price. Plahn said that if we go with them, which she thinks we should, it would be helpful to talk to them in person. She also said that if we agreed to it, to let her know and that they would need to have some things put onto the computer because they use quickbooks. R. Thode said quickbooks is a fantastic tool. Plahn said timecards would have to be scanned and emailed to her. She continued that she told the person what she thought we needed in regards to Minnesota revenue. Lape asked if there are other things we outsource and that we will have to address it when it comes up. R. Thode said she couldn't think of much. Garcia suggested that R. Thode run a report by vendor YTD and it will show you everything. Plahn said that would be a good report to have quarterly. R. Thode agreed and said that in talking to Les, there are a lot of meeting that she is looking forward to for January. She continued and said that it would be meeting with the mayor and council members and their designated committees. She said they need to be getting together so we are able to stay on top of the budget so it doesn't turn into this craziness where none of us understand it come November. She continued and said that we should all be aware of it all year round, no just when it is time to approve it. Smith addressed Houg and said she had been speaking with R. Thode about having been invited by the ambulance quite a few times. R. Thode said she would love to be invited to that as well. Lape said Rural will be having their meeting coming up soon as well. R. Thode said she would like to be able to meet with each committee to check in and make sure everything is good and update the budget and make sure everyone is aware of the committee they are on. She also said that things shouldn't be a surprise come council meetings or any meeting. Smith said that it was a good idea. R. Thode joked that they may get sick of her, but all said that is all right. Lape asked if there is anything else and if we wanted to approve the budget. Garcia asked to see the budget and R. Thode pointed out where they were. Garcia pointed out \$681 in receipts and \$688 in disbursements. R. Thode said that with Bollig, the receipts is likely to change. Lape asked if there is a motion for it. **Motion to approve the budget – Motioned by Smith 1st/Kounkel 2nd, all ayes followed.**

Upcoming Meetings:

- TNT meeting, Tuesday, December 9th, 6:30pm
- Council Meeting, Tuesday December 9th, 7:00pm

Kounkel asked if we talk about the cameras tonight or the next meeting. R. Thode said the next meeting. Garcia reminded that the TNT meeting is where the budget and levy is finalized.

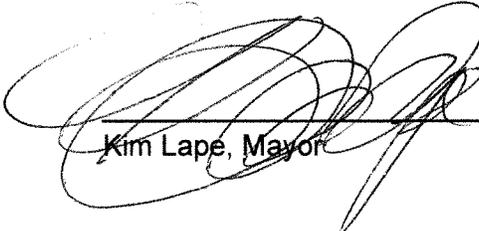
Motion to adjourn – Motioned by Kounkel 1st/Houg 2nd, all ayes followed. Budget meeting adjourned 7:40pm



Renae Jennings Clerk-Treas.

1-13-26

Date



Kim Lape, Mayor

1-13-26

Date