**WADENA COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

**PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES – LIQUOR STORE**

**TUESDAY AUGUST 28, 2018**

**5:15 p.m.**

**Verndale Fire Hall**

**102 Butler St. SE**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** James Ackerson, Ardith Car, Tara Erckenbrack, Raye Ludovissie, Jim Runyan

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**  None

**STAFF PRESENT:** Barbara Holmes, City Clerk/Treasurer; Matt Uselman, Public Works Manager; Cory Carr, Police Chief; Melissa Current, Deputy Clerk

**VISITORS PRESENT:** Trinity Gruenberg, Verndale Sun; Robin Fish, Jared Coffey, David Gronlund, Mary Gronlund, Chuck Goddard, Tim Desrocher, Travis Grangruth, Jamie Line, John Rousslang, Shirley Anderson, Bob Anderson, Joe Van Dam

The purpose of this public hearing is to allow community input on the City’s plans for the Verndale Municipal Liquor Store.

Mayor Ludovissie opened the public hearing at 5:15 pm.

Ludovissie stated that the Council would not be making any decisions tonight and the Council is here to listen. Ludovissie opened the hearing up for discussion. Van Dam and Descrocher both wanted to know why the City wants to sell the Liquor Store. Ludovissie stated that the City would make more money by selling the Liquor Store then the City does now. Van Dam stated that the Liquor Store is serving a public service and is making a profit. Van Dam asked what if the City sells the Liquor Store and then it folds. Ludovissie stated that then the City would get it back and re-open it as a municipal. Derocher stated that the Liquor Store pays some of the City’s wages. Holmes stated what percentages of employee’s wages were covered by the Liquor Store. S. Anderson asked if the City needs to put it on the ballot in November if the City wants to sell it. Holmes stated that it would only have to go on the ballot if it was losing money for three years to see if the City should keep it open. Goddard asked if the City could sell the Liquor Store whenever it wants. The Council stated yes. Erckenbrack stated just to be clear, the Council did not wake up one day and say let’s sell the Liquor Store. Erckenbrack stated that the Council was approached and asked if the City was interested in selling the Liquor Store. S. Anderson asked if the Liquor Store is for sale, does it go out for bids or does it go to the first buyer that comes along. Carr stated that she thought if it was over a certain dollar amount it would need to go out for bids. S. Anderson stated that the City should check to make sure a vote isn’t required to sell the liquor Store. Holmes stated that in Bertha they did not have to get approval from the community to sell their Liquor Store. S. Anderson stated that she thought it should still be up to the community to decide. Goddard asked if ultimately 5 people get to

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decide whether to keep the Liquor Store. Ludovissie stated yes, ultimately but the Council will base their decision on what is heard here. Rosenthal stated the statistics of the bar over the last 5 years. Rosenthal stated that the bar is an asset to the community. Rosenthal stated that he has signatures from 70 patrons stating that they do not want to sell the bar. Rosenthal stated that a while back he was offered $120,000 for the back bar because it is an antique that came into the bar in 1934 or 1935. Rosenthal stated that the back bar was donated to the bar from a soda company. Rosenthal stated that the City wanted to put in a handicapped bathroom. Erckenbrack stated it isn’t a want it is a federal requirement. S. Anderson asked isn’t that grandfathered in. Erckenbrack stated no, there is no grandfathering in anymore. Rosenthal stated that he has 73 signatures saying no to having one bathroom in the Liquor Store. Rousslang asked how soon is the Council thinking of selling the Liquor Store. Ludovissie stated that the Council is waiting to see what the community wants, if the community wants it on the ballot, then the City will put it on the ballot. Holmes stated that if was too late to put it on the ballot for the November elections. Van Dam expressed concern about putting a unisex bathroom in and then selling the place. Ludovissie stated that there is a person going around suing businesses for not being ADA compliant, the City has to do something. Erckenbrack stated that not everyone on the Council was on board with selling the Liquor Store. Ludovissie stated that everything is dollars and cents with him. Ludovissie stated what income the City could generate by selling the Liquor Store. Gruenberg asked what about a mail out survey, then it wouldn’t have to be on the ballot. Gruenberg stated that it could get mailed out to the residents and then the Council would get feedback on what the people want. Van Dam asked what about the surveys that don’t get turned in, are they yes votes or no votes. Erckenbrack stated that only the votes that come in would be counted. Holmes stated that a mail out survey would not be as secure as voting on a ballot. Van Dam asked if the Council could back down on the bathroom deal until they know whether the Liquor Store will be sold. Ludovissie stated that the bathrooms need to be taken care of because there are people traveling around looking for law suits. Uselman stated that he had a contractor look at the bathrooms and the contractor stated that it would be really hard to turn both of those bathrooms into one bathroom without having another bathroom. Uselman stated he was thinking that a second small bathroom would get put in and then the other two bathrooms would get torn apart and turned into one. Uselman stated that the small bathroom would be a Women’s bathroom and the handicapped accessible bathroom would be unisex. Carr and Erckenbrack both stated that the bathrooms were something that the Council was looking into and that the Council was waiting to hear from a contractor to see what would work. Van Dam asked when the Council would be doing the surveys. Erckenbrack stated that this is just an informational meeting and that no business could be decided. Van Dam asked “the City’s not sticking with one contractor are they, it needs to go out for bids, right”. Erckenbrack stated yes, it always has to go out for bids, there is a minimum of three bids. Uselman stated no, the minimum number of bids depends on the cost of the project. Rousslang stated that he thought the biggest concern for most people is that 4 or 5 people are making the decision about the Liquor Store going away without any input from the community. Ludovissie stated that if the people say no, then the answer is no. Goddard stated that the Council could make the decision to sell the Liquor Store and the community can’t stop them. Ludovissie stated that if the community says no, why would

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the Council decide to sell. Ludovissie asked the residents if they would be okay if the surveys came back and said to get rid of the Liquor Store. The residents stated they would be fine with that because it would be a majority of the people. Ludovissie stated that if the survey says to leave the Liquor Store alone then that’s what the Council will do. Carr stated that the Council represents the City so if the people say no it’s the Council’s job to listen. Ackerson stated that all the Council members agreed to have a public hearing and the Council is here to hear. Fish stated that he has been attending City Council meetings for the last three years and this is the only meeting that he has attended that has had this kind of representation from the community. Fish stated that he didn’t know where people get the idea that the Council is out to get the community and that they are trying to be sneaky or underhanded. Fish stated that the Council is very careful and continually invites people to come to these things. Fish stated that the Council would be delighted to have the communities help in a lot of these things. Fish stated that he sits in at the meetings and if the Council is conducting business and he sees something weird he raises his hand and the Council lets him talk. Fish stated it’s a good thing this is a hot button topic but, don’t let the Council get away with running the City without the community’s participation any other time either. Erckenbrack stated that one of the reasons she runs and sits on the City Council is because she is really proud of the people that sit here with her today. Erckenbrack stated that they are not up here for personal agendas and they do not push their personal opinions onto City business. Erckenbrack stated that she thought the Council works really, really well together to do the best for the City, to keep the taxes low, and to try to do what they can to help each other and be that community. Erckenbrack stated that none of the Council members try to overspend and when a contractor is hired they try to do it from the inside to the best of their abilities. Erckenbrack stated that if she didn’t think the City Council was doing a good job for the Community, she would vote somebody else in. Erckenbrack stated that she likes who is on the Council, they work well together and they have worked well together for a long time. Erckenbrack stated that the Council is here to do the best for the Community. Fish stated that the Council could always use the community’s support and advice. Erckenbrack stated that if someone truly has a complaint come to a meeting and help the Council fix the problem. Ludovissie asked if there was anymore discussion about the Liquor Store. There was no more discussion.

The Public Hearing was closed by Mayor Ludovissie at 5:55 pm.

**Submitted by: Attest:**

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Melissa Current, Deputy Clerk Raye Ludovissie, Mayor