TOWN OF OAK CREEK
TOWN BOARD MEETING
JANUARY 25, 2024
MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER:

Mayor Knoebel called the regular meeting of the Oak Creek Board of Trustees to order at 6:00 p.m., Thursday, January 25, 2024.

Town Officials present at roll call were: Mayor Knoebel, Mayor Pro-tem Gustafson and Trustees: Bernie Gagne, Ben Turati, Rhonda Crawford and Melissa Dobbins.

Others present: David Torgler, Town Administrator/Clerk; Kelsi Edwards, Utility Billing/Deputy Clerk; Peter Doherty, Attorney; Barry Verbosky, Lauren Verbosky, owners of The Colorado Bar & Grill; Mary Alice Page-Allen, Casey Hill; Brandyn Leu; Marcia Martindale, Lynda Ledwell, Holli Miera, Dean Goeddel, Roger Bratton, Kevin Thompson, Levi Wisecup, Stephanie Wisecup, Rion Curry and Tonya Reid.

Those present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

Barry Verbosky believes that Chief Ralph has harassed, bullied abused his authority always trying to intimidate customers at The Colorado Bar. Chief Ralph is present at all of the bars events, either inside of the bar or in his squad car parked out front. Barry says Chief Ralph claims to be present due to concern about customers being over served. Barry said that calls to the Police for service are never responded to in less than thirty minutes.

Lynda Ledwell, a south Routt resident, witnessed Chief Ralph through a tantrum on the stage (during the Man Hunk event) distracting her from the show which she'd paid for. Another officer responded and appeared to be trying to calm Chief Ralph down, but was not successful. Her concern is that the other officer then left the building with Chief Ralph being "out of control." She said that she did not feel safe and did feel targeted.

Brandyn Leu, supports the statements made by Barry Verbosky and Lynda Ledwell claims that it is harassment being tailgated inside and outside the Town limits along the highways leading to Yampa and Stagecoach; he said that he has personally witnessed several events. He believes that these activities are inappropriate.

Lauren Verbosky, owner of The Colorado Bar, and is speaking to the same subjects as Barry and Lyndia. She does not believe Chief Ralph wants to protect local businesses, claiming that he told her it is not his duty to protect any person, her, or any establishment in the Town. Lauren doesn't believe Chief Ralph should have any opinions regarding local business operations. She said that she does not feel protected based on a recent incident at the bar when she was injured and nothing was done (by the police). Lauren does not believe Chief Ralph should be part of the community.

Mayor Knoebel stated Ms. Verbosky has provided her with written typed up letters.

Levi Wisecup, stated the Chief is a liability to the Town stating that any time the Chief is challenged he cannot remain composed and escalates the situation in a negative way. Levi referenced an incident that occurred last fall at his home which is outside of the Town limits when Chief Ralph showed up and complained about the loud music and outdoor fire. Levi disagreed with him and Chief Ralph "went over the top." Levi continued saying that he's a danger, that he swerves at people he believes are speeding, an action drivers might be ticketed for.

Holli Miera, brought it up to Chief Ralph that she believes he is overly emotional in his response to disciplinary actions. She believes that he is not fulfilling his responsibilities as a public servant and that he doesn't listen.

Dean Goeddel, stated he is terrorized by Chief Ralph for parking his vehicles on the streets even though he responds by moving his vehicles for snow plowing operations. He agrees with previous comments regarding his going completely over the top when you engage him. Dean has been threatened by him and "he doesn't belong here."

Lynda Ledwell, raised an incident that occurred at the high school two years ago when he was screaming at the kids and she is concerned that people do not respect Ralph's authority, saying that he is not earning their respect by his actions.

Mayor Knoebel thanked everyone for coming in, being respectful of the three minute rule, thanked Lauren for the written letters and videos.

Trustee Gagne said that he received a call from Robin Livingston who is unable to be present at this meeting due to illness, regarding the same topics raised by the public at tonight's meeting. He offered to paraphrase his conversation with him. With Mayor Knoebel's permission, Trustee Gagne said Ms. Livingston was stopped at a stop sign where she noticed Chief Ralph's squad car stopped near or at the intersection. As Ms. Livingston proceeded to turn at the intersection she saw Chief Ralph, in his squad car, throw his hands up in a fit, screaming at her, rolling down his window, so she stopped and asked him what was wrong. Chief Ralph replied that she doesn't know how to drive, claiming that he had the right-of-way and when she replied Chief Ralph responded by screaming at her creating a bizarre situation. She offered to pull over, get out of their vehicles and discuss the matter like adults which Chief Ralph refused. She felt harassed, threatened and intimidated. Ms. Livingston drove away from the incident feeling disturbed by the interaction, convinced that this was the single most unprofessional thing that she had ever witnessed as an adult. Ms. Livingston then discussed an incident that occurred approximately six months earlier on Main Street when Chief Ralph was stopped on Main Street across the yellow lines. After waiting for a few moments Ms. Livingston slowly drove around the squad car to which Ralph responded in a manner similar to what is described above. Ms. Livingston said that she chose to not file any complaints following these incidents not wanting to draw attention to her. She described to Trustee Gagne that she does not feel safe but threatened by Chief Ralph.

Roger Bratton said to the Board that he was posted at the rear door and that Chief Ralph was with him; everything was fine until suddenly the Chief slammed his hand down and lost his temper, started screaming at the dancers, and he (Roger) was concerned for Lauren and Barry Verbosky because Chief Ralph was so out of control.

Trustee Gagne, with permission from Mayor Knoebel, asked how long Chief Ralph was present at the Man Hunk event. Several audience members responded that he was present prior to the show and over the next 1.5 – 2 hours he was in and out of the bar several times.

Mayor Knoebel asked Barry Verbosky if the Chief had been asked to leave the Man Hunk event. Mr. Verbosky responded that he was asked to leave and that Chief Ralph responded that he was not leaving and that he is the authority in "my town." Roger Bratton said he witnessed Barry calmly ask Chief Ralph to leave. Mr. Bratton explained that he witnessed Chief Ralph trying to intimidate everyone who came into contact with him.

Levi Wisecup said in the incident last Fall that he did call the Routt County Sheriff because the incident was escalating and he witnessed Chief Ralph contact dispatch and cancel the call. The incident at Mr. Wisecup's home lasted approximately four hours per Mr. Wisecup with Chief Ralph driving up and down the County road, driving up to the Town's water tank and shining a light at his home, and the Chief acting in a threatening manner. Mr. Wisecup said that during this incident the Chief's light was shined at his home for hours from the water tank, that the Chief parked near his home and the Chief entered his property and refused to leave when asked to. Lynda Ledwell stated that she has video footage from this incident.

Kevin Thompson introduced himself as a member of the Oak Creek Hockey Association Board, was in attendance to introduce that there are improvements the OCHA can make to the Town's ice rink. Mayor Knoebel responded that she and Town staff have met with Kyle to discuss these opportunities and she plans to have future discussions including an update to the Memorandum of Understanding, aka MOU. Mary Alice Page-Allen said that she'd like to be part of these discussions. Mayor Knoebel responded that she anticipates the South Routt Recreation Association being part of the discussions.

EN RE: STAFF & BOARD MEMBER REPORTS

Kelsi Edwards reported to the Board that the April 2, 2024 local election is proceeding well.

David Torgler reminded Board members that there will be a candidate drawing on Thursday, February 1st at 5:30 p.m., to determine ballot order for the April 2, 2024 local Town Board elections. The drawing will be followed by a special Town Board meeting to hear from the Yampa Valley Housing Authority regarding their affordable housing developments and possibly a presentation regarding a letter of support for the proposed Sarvis Creek Expansion Area.

Trustee Gustafson advised the Board that she will miss the February 1st and 22nd Town Board meetings.

Mayor Knoebel reminded Board members that WinterFest will be held on Saturday, February 24th. She is working with Alissa Hill on the activities for the festival.

Trustee Dobbins thanked the Town' Public Works staff for the repair work they did on a water main break at her home, specifically thanking the crew for the professional response and good work, and for even respecting a snow bridge her daughter had built when they did the repair work.

EN RE: EXECUTIVE SESSION

Trustee Gagne made a motion to adjourn into Executive Session to confer with the Town Attorney for the purposes of receiving legal advice on specific legal questions pursuant to C.R.S. 24-6-402(4)(b). Mayor Pro-tem Gustafson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously; the Board adjourned into Executive Session at 6:32 p.m.

Mayor Knoebel re-opened the Regular Meeting of the Town Board stating the time is now 7:06 p.m., and the Executive Session has been concluded. The participants in the Executive Session were: Mayor Knoebel, Mayor Pro-tem Gustafson, Trustee Turati, Trustee Crawford, Trustee Dobbins, Trustee Gagne, David Torgler and Peter Doherty, Attorney.

Mayor Knoebel asked that for the record, if any person who participated in the Executive Session believes that any substantial discussion of any matters not included in the motion to go into the Executive Session occurred during the Executive Session in violation of the Open Meetings Law, I would ask that you state your concerns for the record. There were no concerns stated.

EN RE: EXECUTIVE SESSION

Trustee Turati made a motion to adjourn into Executive Session to confer with the Town Attorney for the purposes of receiving legal advice on specific legal questions pursuant to C.R.S. 24-6-402(4)(b). Trustee Crawford seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously; the Board adjourned into Executive Session at 7:07 p.m.

Mayor Knoebel re-opened the Regular Meeting of the Town Board stating the time is now 8:53 p.m., and the Executive Session has been concluded. The participants in the Executive Session were: Mayor Knoebel, Mayor Pro-tem Gustafson, Trustee Turati, Trustee Crawford, Trustee Dobbins, Trustee Gagne, David Torgler, Ralph Maher and Peter Doherty, Attorney.

Mayor Knoebel asked that for the record, if any person who participated in the Executive Session believes that any substantial discussion of any matters not included in the motion to go into the Executive Session occurred during the Executive Session in violation of the Open Meetings Law, I would ask that you state your concerns for the record. There were no concerns stated.

EN RE: ADJOURNMENT

Trustee Gagne made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Trustee Turati seconded the motion; passed unanimously.

No further business coming before the Board, same adjourned sine die at 8:56 p.m.

_____
David Torgler
Town Administrator/Clerk

_____
Nikki Knoebel, Mayor

Date:_____, 2024_____