

Regular Meeting of the
Committee of the Whole
2/17/2014

The regular meeting of the Committee of the Whole was called to order at 6:05 pm February 17, 2014 in the Council Chambers of the City of Rock Falls. Present were Alderman Vandernick, Reitzel, Snow, Kuhlemier, Schuneman, and Watts. Also present were Mayor Wescott, Administrator Blackert, and Clerk Arduini.

Alderman Schuneman began the meeting by giving the purpose for the Hennepin Canal Committee of which he was the chairman. He explained that the committee was tasked with finding out if annexation of 2.2 miles of the canal was in the best interest of the city, and if the citizens of Rock Falls felt it was something that they wanted. He explained that the committee hired Western Illinois University to produce a survey which was distributed to the residents of Rock Falls.

Mr. Tim Wilson from the Rock Falls Tourism Office presented the committee with some of the results of the survey. He noted that 538 surveys were returned, and that a majority of the residents that filled out the survey supported the annexation. Many of the Aldermen stated that if the city were to annex the property it would have to be budgeted as if no volunteers would be able to help. Alderman Watts brought up questions concerning the costs to maintain, and police the property as well as the possibility of keeping it the way it is currently. Alderman Snow questioned the lease agreements and the need for dredging at the boat launch. Mayor Wescott explained that the new lease agreement would bring all of the separate current lease agreements into one. Administrator Blackert explained that if the city does not have the money to improve the area, it will remain just as it is currently because the IDNR no longer has the manpower to maintain it either. Police and security should also be handled as it is now, by responding to calls rather than patrols. Adm. Blackert also explained that one of the biggest initial costs would be the annexation itself.

Alderman Shuneman stated that the Firehouse Ministries, and RRDA are already doing volunteer work along the canal with maintenance and beautification. Alderman Kuhlemier spoke in favor of the annexation because the canal cuts right through the heart of town and divides the east and west. He also noted that if it had not been for the foresight of the RRDA the towpath on the West side would have not been built. It was RRDA volunteers that started that and then they were helped by the IDNR.

Mayor Wescott spoke on the addition of a bike path on the upper trail, and possible trails on the east side. Alderman Reitzel added that things will be able to be done with annexation, and that the city needs to take care of what is given to us. Tim Wilson explained that the draw for Rock Falls is nature, and if the area does not look pristine to people coming to visit, they will go elsewhere where it looks nicer.

Alderman Schuneman stated that the new Hennepin Canal - Trails Committee will be developing a 5 year plan for the canal and trails breaking the canal into 5 sections. This coincides with the 5 year lease agreement. The new committee meeting will be held in the City Council Chambers at 12:00 Noon on the second Thursday of each month.

