

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NOVI  
MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2021 AT 7:00 P.M.**

**Mayor Gatt called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.**

In accordance with the provisions of the Open Meeting Act this meeting was held remotely.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ROLL CALL:** Mayor Gatt, Mayor Pro Tem Staudt, Council Members Casey, Crawford, Fischer, Maday, Mutch

Mayor Gatt, present from City of Novi, Oakland County, State of Michigan  
Mayor Pro Tem Staudt, present from City of Novi, Oakland County, State of Michigan  
Member Casey, present from the City of Novi, Oakland County, State of Michigan  
Member Crawford, present from the City of Novi, Oakland County, State of Michigan  
Member Fischer, present from City of Novi, Oakland County, State of Michigan  
Member Maday, present from City of Novi, Oakland County, State of Michigan  
Member Mutch, present from City of Novi, Oakland County, State of Michigan

**ALSO PRESENT:** Peter Auger, City Manager  
Victor Cardenas, Assistant City Manager  
Tom Schultz, City Attorney

Mayor Gatt asked City Attorney Schultz if somebody were out of Michigan could they still participate in the meeting. City Attorney Schultz replied yes, they must identify where they were at. Member Crawford asked if they could participate from another country. City Attorney Schultz said he would investigate that further. They will have to wait to hear more about that because the statute that was passed says the member is supposed to identify the City, County, and State. Mayor Gatt asked him to check into it.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Mayor Gatt added to the Mayor and Council Issues: Economic Development Director.

**CM 21-01-003 Moved by Staudt, seconded by Casey; CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**To approve the Agenda as amended.**

**Roll call vote on CM 21-01-003**                      **Yeas: Staudt, Casey, Crawford, Fischer,  
Maday, Mutch, Gatt**  
**Nays: None**

**PUBLIC HEARINGS: None**

**PRESENTATIONS: None**

**MANAGER/STAFF REPORT: None**

**ATTORNEY REPORT: None**

**CONSENT AGENDA REMOVALS AND APPROVALS:**

**CM 21-01-004            Moved by Crawford, seconded by Casey; CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**To approve the Consent Agenda as presented.**

- A.    Approve Minutes of:
  - 1. December 21, 2020 - Regular Meeting
- B.    Approval of proposed Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services adjustments to park shelter rental rates.
- C.    Approval of a DTE Permanent Line Relocation Agreement to relocate a DTE Energy underground cable at 21333 Haggerty Road, to allow for construction of a sidewalk and retaining wall included in 2020 Pathway and ADA Improvements project, in the amount of \$58,403.33.
- D.    Approval of claims and warrants – Warrant No. 1075.

**Roll call vote on CM 21-01-004**

**Yeas: Casey, Crawford, Fischer, Maday,  
Mutch, Gatt, Staudt**

**Nays: None**

**MATTERS FOR COUNCIL ACTION**

- 1.    **Consideration of proposed Sakura Novi development issues for property located on the north side of Grand River Avenue east of Town Center Drive:**
  - A.    **Request of Robert B. Aikens & Associates, LLC and Robertson Brothers Homes, for Sakura Novi, JZ19-31, with zoning map amendment 18.732, to rezone the property from Office Service (OS-1), Office Service Commercial (OSC), and Light Industrial (I-1) to Town Center-1 (TC-1) subject to a Planned Rezoning Overlay (PRO) Agreement, and corresponding PRO Concept Plan, for revised tentative approval of Concept Plan under Section 7.13.2.E.v, adding 14 multiple-family residential units as shown on phasing and utility plans dated March 13, 2020 (received December 4, 2020); and**
  - B.    **Approval of Sixth Amendment to the previously approved Conditional Agreement of Purchase and Sale, North Grand River City Property.**

City Manager Auger said over the past four years the City Council has changed many times, some of the Council Members are no longer with us. He mentioned that one member now represents us on an Oakland County Board and another member is now representing us in Lansing. Member Maday was appointed to City Council and now present at her first meeting. He said he could count three such temporary appointments.

The project itself has changed as well. Two of the largest causes were the depth of the poor soil conditions and COVID-19. There were some things that stayed the same. One World Market was still ready to launch their prototype, a larger, more appealing, and standard-setting Asian market. He said the developers were still here, Mr. Aikens and Mr. Clark have adapted and were still ready to make this project into reality. As the Mayor mentioned, there were two questions before you tonight. The first was a revisit of the tentative approval of the concept plan. The change was removing one of the smaller commercial buildings in exchange for additional residential units. Second, if the first one is approved, would be to approve the sixth amendment to the conditional agreement to purchase. He asked the developers to stand by to answer their questions. Staff and legal were also present if they need more details.

Mr. Aikens said they were there to request approval of three changes to the previous approved preliminary concept plan. The three changes are as follows; the relocation of the loading dock on the market to the north end of the building, the addition of 14 residential units in the former loading dock area, and the phasing has been changed to account for the impact of the COVID pandemic on restaurants and retail. No additional deviations were requested or required. They believe that they have conceptual agreement on most of the PRO Agreement terms, they have secured EGLE's approval of the wetland plan, and the purchase price has not changed. The Brownfield size has been decreased by \$1,150,000, and the CRD extended to 10 years on each phase. The project engineering for the modifications can be ready to resubmit in short order. They have an updated timeline to get them to the final approvals and start land development. He appreciated their consideration.

Mayor Gatt said this had been a very long project. He said City Manager Auger pointed out earlier that they have different Council Members, they have gone up and down and around, but one thing has remained steady. They have a developer who has invested a lot of time and money into a project that will make Novi a better place in his opinion. It was not exactly what they started out with, through no fault of anyone. He believed it was to do with poor soil and COVID-19. He believed that when COVID-19 ends, and things start picking up again, Novi would be poised to shoot like a star more than most communities that surround us in Oakland County. Novi is very strong economically. The pent-up demand that people feel to get out and do things, shop, go places will lend to a very successful project. He commended the developer and City staff for rolling with the punches, staying with the project, and not deviating a great deal. He said they may see more development in that area that will lend itself to the uniqueness that Sakura Way is going to be. He said he would support this without any hesitation.

Member Fischer said that on Page 2 of the Sixth Amendment, it talks about the \$850,000 Brownfield redevelopment. He asked for help understanding the reduction that has been quoted so far. City Manager Auger explained that in the first plans that were submitted, there were things that were probably not reimbursable. The further they got into the details, the developers realized this and took those off the schedule, those costs

will still be incurred by the developer, because it does not eliminate them from doing those steps. When they saw that those things could come off, that is where that extra million dollars comes off there. Member Fischer asked if it was just not reimbursable under the law. City Manager Auger said he was not sure. He said the developer brought it forward because they noticed it as they did their due diligence. He believed he was correct, that it was not a gift, but they are absorbing that cost to clean the site. Member Fischer asked if the \$850,000 will come from the City. City Manager Auger replied that is a reimbursement. The developer will have to do all the cleanup first, and it was his understanding that the State offers 48% or 49% of the cost of the Brownfield cleanup. The City's portion would be a reimbursement through taxes the developer pays, therefore, they will have to do the work and the cleanup. Then they must pay said taxes to be reimbursed. It is not something the City is out money for. It is something that is given back to the developer after the taxes are paid. Member Fisher said, in theory, they pay taxes and we just circulate it back to them. City Manager Auger said that was correct, it is after it is validated that the cleanup has been completed. He believed the window will be under five years. Member Fischer stated for the first five years that the City basically will be paying them back to reimburse them for the cleanup. City Manager Auger said that was correct if the cleanup was done and the taxes were paid. Member Fischer said that was the first five years. He said there is a CRD being requested as well and has been part of the contract. He said they were seeking a 10-year exemption certificate. He asked for an explanation on what that process will be and what is being requested there. City Manager Auger explained that under the Commercial Redevelopment Act they can request that City Council set a commercial redevelopment zone. He stated that this is like the 198, and the City has also used this Act once on Suburban Collection Showplace. He stated in this case, they are looking for 50% taxes for 10 years. He stated that if City Council agrees to this, this starts the clock on the 50% tax abatement, and this is based on the growth of taxable value on the site. Member Fischer said part of the agreement is to eventually abate the taxes under 210 for 10 years at 50% on Phase 1 and Phase 2. City Manager Auger said that was correct for the entire site. Member Fischer asked when they will see the full value of revenue for this development. He said it sounds like they will not see any revenue due to the Brownfield. He asked if the 10 years started right away or at the end of the five years or when the development happens. He said he was starting to see that the City will not see the full revenue from this development for upwards of 10 to 15 years. City Manager Auger said the clock starts as soon as City Council approves the CRD, and then that goes for 10 years. The only portion of the taxes that go back to the developer are the Brownfield costs, not the total taxes. They do not get reimbursed total taxes; they get reimbursed for the amount they spent. He stated that 50% on the growth of the taxes is just that; 50% for the 10 years. That will start when they receive occupancy on their buildings. It will be staggered as it goes, but it will last 10 years. Member Fischer said the point of his question on the Brownfield is if it is \$850,000 and we owe \$400,000 of it, they are only paying \$100,000 in taxes, we will circulate that \$100,000 back to them for four years before we see a single dime. City Manager Auger said the entire taxes is different than just the Brownfield, so the City portion, that is correct. He said

there are other taxing entities, the schools, the county, joint taxes that we pay regionally. Yes, the City is invested to reimburse to get this site cleaned up along with the State. Member Fischer thanked him for those clarifications. He said they have seen this a couple of times, the element of the Brownfield as well as the CRD have been drowned out in a lot of what has been going on between COVID and the development. He said when he first heard about the project back in 2018, he was not on Council, but he was ecstatic. He said he went to the Sakura website today and looked back to the project and some of the quotes that were talked about. He said that Mr. Aikens was being quoted talking about "envisioning a village of vibrant entertainment, residential hub, unlike anything in the region, it will obviously have an anchor of the market with Japanese garden and four-acre lake, an entertainment venue, a range of restaurants, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Indian, and a collection of Asian focus and retail services". He said another article talks about the development, "including Asian style gardens, 50,000 square feet of office space, and then another 15,000 square feet of office space, as well as the apartments and the townhouses". He said that certainly was a project to be excited about. He said since then we have been through several councilmembers and six amendments, and now we are getting a primarily high-density residential development, plus One World Market, and then only 20,000 square feet of retail, commercial, restaurant and entertainment combined. Each one of these amendments was a detriment to that original vision and a detriment to the original plan. He said it was very important to note that they were talking about two different motions. One is the actual planning aspect and the fact that they are looking to add an additional 14 units of residential, taking away from the square footage of the commercial entertainment and restaurant. He said more importantly, they are acting in the capacity as the sellers of this property. In doing so, it is a different dynamic for Council. They have more say in what happens with the property. They do not have to sell unless they think this is in the best interest of the residents. He said he brought this up because he thought the City and the residents, and he thanked the developer and said he understood they have put in a lot of time and money. He thought that the City and the residents have invested a lot into this project. They have City Attorney time, staff time, and have been at this for five some odd years. They bought the property back in 2016 for \$2.8 million dollars. That is money they could have spent on roads, sidewalks, parks, police, fire, plus another \$100,000 for the east lot. They basically spent \$2.9 million on this property five years ago, and now are looking to sell it for \$3 million. He said by his math, that is not even a return on our investment of about 1%. He said that may be appropriate and he would be okay with that if he felt that the development and the tax base were going to be beneficial to the City of Novi but based on the recovery of the Brownfield and based on the asking of the CRD, the tax abatement, they are not going to receive the full revenue from this property for 10 to 15 years. He was convinced of that. He tried to be reasonable with developers and development. He believed his record shows that. Retaining One World Market is very important. He would be in support of using the tools and incentives that they were talking about if this proposed project were of the caliber that they talked about in 2018. He thought the cost to the residents and the taxpayers for this

development, which offers One World Market, 132 apartments, and small amount of outlot commercial space is a disservice to the Novi residents based on the tax dollars that we have invested and will still have to invest for years to come. He said he would not support any motion to agree to add the 14 units or agree to the Sixth Amendment to the sale of the property. He said he believed that Novi is very well poised to partake in this recovery that should take place, and that is why he will not accept a project that is diminished, that is so highly concentrated in residential, because he thought they could do better, especially for the amount of money that they are putting in. He said his direction since the last meeting was to take a step back. He said either they come back with a development, the likes of which they were promised back in 2018 or part ways. He said the City will hold on to the property will hold on to it for future use as a park or another facility that the City needs or another development that they feel is of the caliber that they are expecting.

Mayor Pro Tem Staudt asked Mr. Aikens what he anticipated the total taxable value of the completed project to be. Mr. Clark replied that the 134 residential units at market value on the completed project for the residential would be in the range of \$33,500,000 plus the retail. That would be market value of the apartment component of it. He said he did not have the retail numbers. Mr. Aikens replied, \$25 million. Mayor Pro Tem asked if that was additional. Mr. Aikens replied, yes. Mayor Pro Tem Staudt stated that this project is upwards to \$60 million dollars. Mr. Aikens replied, yes. Mayor Pro Tem Staudt said in these extremely difficult times with many communities suffering to recover from 2010 property value levels and moving forward, they have a developer who wants to invest \$60 million into our City and these are going to be far and few between moving forward. He said he has been one of the people who have been there since day one. He said he has strongly supported this. He would like to see the original incarnation of the development, but he would like to see a lot of things change. Things have changed dramatically in the past 10 months. He was pleased that this is still moving forward.

**CM 21-01-005            Moved by Staudt, seconded by Gatt; MOTION CARRIED: 5-2**

**Approval to make a revised tentative indication that Council may approve the request of Robert B. Aikens & Associates, LLC and Robertson Brothers Homes for Sakura Novi, JZ19-31, Zoning Map Amendment 18.732, to rezone the property from Office Service (OS-1), Office Service Commercial (OSC) and Light Industrial (I-1) to Town Center-1 (TC-1) subject to a Planned Rezoning Overlay (PRO) Agreement, and corresponding revised PRO Concept Plan to be updated to reflect the applicant's proposed changes as provided to the City, and to give direction to the City Attorney to prepare a proposed PRO Agreement with (a) the ordinance deviations previously described in the City Council's motion of March 2, 2020; (b) the PRO conditions set forth in the Council's motion of March 2, 2020; and (c) any additional conditions or deviations required in connection with the revised Concept Plan. This motion is made for**

**the reasons set forth in the Council's prior motion of March 2, 2020. City Council further determines that the proposed revisions to the Concept Plan do not require further review by the Planning Commission prior to final Council action on the PRO Agreement and PRO Concept Plan.**

Member Casey said she appreciated the comments from the previous speakers. She explained where she was coming from is looking at where this project has been over the years and understanding how we got to the place that we did back in March, which was the last time that we fully saw this plan come in front of them. She did not think that any of them were thrilled with the idea of trying to give up retail and restaurant space. Understanding why the recommendation was that. She thought the challenge was that were have seen continuous changes to this project, they have seen changes even since March. She felt that they were starting to lose the feeling that was making this a special destination place. We are now in a place where we have got a significant number of residential units and a much smaller number of retail and commercial. She said from that perspective, when they talked last, she said that she was comfortable with the March plan. She said she was happy to support some changes in the phasing for the building if that made a more effective project for them. She stated there is now an increase in housing units, there is now some potential or possibility that Building B might move from where it is at, where all the commercial and retail is now in one spot to now there is an isolated retail place in the north of the property. It made her wonder what other changes are going to start coming in front of them, as they have seen quite a few. She said it felt like they have lost some of the specialness of the development. In her opinion, there is too much residential. She said she just did not feel like they were continuing to move in a direction that really is in the best interest of the City and its residents. She stated that she had been on the journey with him until the March plan. She expressed that she could no longer support the vision that was in front of Council with the increase in residential, the reduction in square footage to Building A, a possible change in location to Building B, which may or may not happen, but they will not know that it will happen until they are further along in the development. She wished them luck, but said she could no longer support the plan that is in front of them.

Member Mutch asked for confirmation that the sale price that was originally agreed to for this property was not changing. City Attorney Schultz said that was correct, the original price has been amended once. He said the price from the last amendment is not changing. Member Mutch stated he knew that was part of the conversation last time they discussed this, whether there would be a reduction in price. He thought the developer he clearly stated it either needed to be either a reduction in price or additional units and some other adjustments or they were not going to be able to make this work. He said some of the points that Member Fischer now raised were important because he thought it was important for us, not only for this project, but for any project that comes before us to really understand the financial implications of that. In all the different ways that it impacts the City, and Member Fischer was specifically touching on the tax revenue point. He directed his next comment to the City Administration. He said it was important when this comes back to City Council, if this is approved this evening, and it comes back for another approval, for instance, the Brownfield for the Commercial

Rehabilitation District. He believed City Council should be presented the same financial matrix that they have seen for tax abatement request in the past. It should clearly spell out to City Council the various components that are in place on how that is impacting the tax revenue coming to the City, because he agreed with Member Fischer, even after listening to the City Manager's explanation. He said he could not give a clear answer on when the City will start recouping tax dollars that are not going back out into the process. His other comment was about the memo to City Council about how this is also part of the Corridor Improvement Authority. The Corridor Improvement Authority also has a tax capture component to it. He stated it would be helpful for City Council to see everything spelled out in terms of how those play out, and what order, what the priority for those were. He stated there is reference in the agreement that talks about working with the Corridor Improvement Authority to set the prioritization for the tax recapture. He agreed that this is an important question. He stated that Member Fischer had raised the question about when this will turn into a tax generating development for the City. He pointed out that if it is not being developed at all, it is not generating any taxes for us. That is part of the conversation. He thought for City Council to be able to decide about some of these things coming forward that it is important for them to fully understand the commercial redevelopment portion, the Brownfield portion, the Corridor Improvement Authority, and have accurate valuations for the various components of the project and understanding that not all of these will develop in a timely manner. He said he would fully expect the One World Market and the residential piece to come forward, in good order, but some of these other areas from the developers own presentation may be three to five years off before they even talk about any kind of activity on these portions of the property. He stated that is something we need to fully understand. He requested that City Administration provide that to City Council. He said he made it clear at the last meeting that from a planning viewpoint and from a project viewpoint, he did not have any concerns with the additional residential units and how that impacts the density, which is not generally his position. He said this is one area of the City where he thought it is important to support not only this development, but all the surrounding commercial development that we have in the Town Center and downtown area that we have these rooftops, we have these units in place. He believed this was an appropriate place to have additional residential units. He noted while there is a trade off in terms of what was previously proposed in the location that they are proposing those additional units kind of tucked away behind One World Market. He did not see that as a significant downside from the City's perspective. That was probably an area that would be developed later anyway, and he thought it integrated well with what has been proposed there. He thought that some of the points that previous speakers had raised in terms of how this project has evolved were valid criticisms. He said at the previous meeting that he did not want this to be One World Market with an apartment complex attached to it and that is essentially the gist of it. He explained that some of these other components that are shown in the plan, that are phased early in the plan or at the beginning of the plan, such as cleanup of the pond and development of amenities around the pond was what was keeping him on board at this moment. He said multiple times, but it was important to him that when this comes to them with a PRO, those elements are clearly spelled out. He agreed that all of Member Fischer's concerns were valid. If the PRO plan comes back and it looks more like an apartment complex attached to a shopping center, he would not be afraid to walk away from that and say that does not meet his vision of the plan.

They presented a vision to the City that he thought was very exciting and was appropriate for this location. If we go too far away from that he said he was not going to jump on this and be stuck with an okay plan when we could have so much better in this area. He said he was not willing to settle for this property. He said the PRO plan and the details behind that are going to be critical for maintaining his support. He said he would support the motion to continue moving that process forward. He requested City Administration to give City Council a lot more financial detail so that they know what they are approving as they move forward with this.

Member Maday said Member Mutch said exactly what she was feeling. She was not thrilled to see the retail go away, although she was not upset about the additional 14 units going in based on its location and bringing traffic into the area. She liked the idea of a more walkable area. She thought if we keep what we have on the table going and moving forward. Making all the amenities done in the beginning rather than at the end kept her on board. She stated the one thing that was near and dear to her heart was getting that environmental contamination cleaned up. She said this does that. She verified with City Manager Auger that all the benefits from the PRO Agreement in March are going to remain the same. City Manager Auger said that was correct. He said the public benefits have not changed through this whole process in and to reiterate what Mr. Mutch says, he wants those really spelled out on the final document. Member Maday said she was okay with that and would agree to support.

**Roll call vote on CM 21-01-005**

**Yeas: Crawford, Maday, Mutch, Gatt, Staudt,  
Nays: Fischer, Casey**

**CM 21-01-006**

**Moved by Staudt, seconded by Gatt; MOTION CARRIED: 5-2**

**To approve the Sixth Amendment to the Conditional Agreement of Purchase and Sale for the North Grand River City Property and authorize the City Manager and City Attorney's office to finalize the document, including any minor amendments required.**

**Roll call vote on CM 21-01-006**

**Yeas: Maday, Mutch, Gatt, Staudt, Crawford,  
Nays: Fischer, Casey**

**AUDIENCE COMMENT: None**

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**MAYOR AND COUNCIL ISSUES:**

1. Appointments to Council Committees

Mayor Gatt said he would substitute Member Maday everywhere Member Breen used to be. She would be on the Commission Interview Committee, Parks, Recreational and Cultural Services Grant Citizen's Advisory Committee, SEMCOG as the alternate, and Youth Council as the alternate.

## 2. Economic Development Director

Mayor Gatt said City Manager Auger had sent City Council an email outlining the changes in City staff. They may recall that right after COVID began, they instituted a hiring freeze. He believed they have exceptions for Public Safety. He said he told City Manager Auger and staff that Police and Fire are vacancies that should be filled, but one vacancy has stood out, Economic Development Director. The City has been without an Economic Development Director for some time now. He said earlier in the meeting, it was his opinion that, when COVID ends, there is going to be a pent-up demand for movement. A pent-up demand for growth and a pent-up demand for opportunities. He said Novi will be able to avail themselves of, and we must be ready. He said he just wanted to get City Council's temperature about moving forward with the Economic Development Director position. He said they should give City Manager Auger the green light. He believed that there is going to be a lot of opportunities and while some communities are going to be struggling, Novi is not going to be one of them and we should be ready to pounce on any opportunity. He thought if we have an Economic Development Director in place with a few months of Novi training under his or her belt we might be in a better position than we are now. He said he would open this up to Council for any suggestions to this, it is not an action item. We are not going to take a vote on this. He just wanted to send City Manager Auger a message.

Mayor Pro Tem Staudt asked City Manager Auger if this position was budgeted currently. City Manager Auger replied yes, it has been budgeted. During this hiring freeze we have eliminated any of the budgeted positions, we just have not filled them. We have the funds in the budget for this program. Mayor Pro Tem Staudt said there are going to be a lot of opportunities coming forward during the next year or two, but more importantly, we need the strength of a really experienced, strong, retention specialist because there will be a lot that happens in the near future. He said restaurants will probably expect 25% to 30% closure before all this is over. There will be a lot of empty buildings. We are going to have a lot of retail space that is going to be open, but more importantly, office space is going to be more prevalent because a lot of people have discovered that keeping their employees at home is the easy way of doing things. He believed downsizing the amount of space that they are using for their operations is something we can expect to see happen soon. He thought that every one of us is affected by that right now. Having a job where you work two days in the office and have three days out, he thought a lot of businesses are going to go to that. He thought this is a position that needs to be filled with somebody that has vast experience and the ability to work at all levels. We need to be able to work with Oakland County and the State of Michigan. If somebody becomes available, he strongly suggested that City Council make it available to the City Manager to make that decision. He thought it would be inappropriate for him to have to come back to Council and ask us if a specific person is appropriate. That is his responsibility. Providing the revenue, the resources, and the ability to do that is important. He was strongly in support of keeping the radar open for an excellent Economic Development Director and make that hire at the earliest possible time.

Member Fischer said he was consistent on this, if he recalled the way the budget was set up, we had 271 positions. Council said you need to stay around 261 and if you stay within 261 you are going to have the expenses that we have, so he certainly did not have any anticipation of shackling the City Manager with certain hires. His goal was about the number of heads and the number of dollars that were spent this year and to stay within those caps. He stated that they pay Mr. Auger a salary and his job is to run the City in the most efficient manner across all departments. He said he certainly did not have an issue with him making those decisions if he is within the budget constraints that he believed Council had set when we set the budget. He said the irony does not escape him that they were at a meeting where they have conceded that commercial and office space. They gave up 30,000 square feet and 15,00 square foot of commercial and office space in one development. Yet they are now asking for an Economic Development Director, and they are back doing all that with residential. He said he was starting to see mixed messages from the City Manager and the staff. That is what concerned him, more than the hire itself. That was his message and point to the staff.

Member Mutch asked City Manager Auger if this was something he was actively pursuing or have an interest in pursuing if City Council was willing to support this concept. City Manager Auger said yes, they have been looking for the right person for the last several years who would meet our personality and our needs. City Manager Auger agreed with the Mayor and he thought the time was right. He thought one of the things that we need is to refresh our contacts within our own businesses here in Novi. We must continue to build on the relationships that our businesses have here. A lot of the companies have moved positions around or out and we need to keep our old school rolodex up-to-date and build those relationships because those are some of the best leads if we are going out around the country or the world bringing in other people. He said our own companies, smaller companies, what do they need and when do they need it. That is where we need more boots on the ground here. Member Mutch wondered if he anticipated the budgeted position. He asked if this person would still be functioning in the same kind of framework that we have had previously. He was said when Mr. Auger became the City Manager, he moved some folks around to align things the way that he wanted to. His concern was that he felt like this position has gotten shuffled around and we have not had people in that position taking full advantage of the potential. He wanted to understand where the City Manager saw this person fitting in. City Manager Auger said this is a director level position, and he did see it as a great opportunity. He said that we have had some vacancies for long periods of time. He thought we have taken advantage of between Mr. Cardenas, Mr. Boulard, and Mrs. Walsh-Molloy. Each has pitched in and he thought they have learned a lot about economic development programs and the relationships that need to be built. He believed they have seen a lot of growth in economic development just between those three positions. He thought that we have a good bench and support staff, and now it is time to bring somebody for the next five years to build a good foundation. We are looking at sustainability long-term. Member Mutch said he appreciated that. He echoed some of the comments made earlier. He thought Member Fischer raised some good points in terms of the framework that they adopted for the budget. He felt that at the same time, he thought that they had to have some flexibility and looking ahead to what are some opportunities going forward. He said he would fall into the hopefully optimistic camp that over the next six to

nine, maybe 12 months, that things will get better on the COVID front. While we may not be at a normal point that we are moving away from kind of the dark and gloomy phase. He thought there are potential opportunities out there, and again, it is not our job to pick people for the position, it is more a high level what the budget looked like. He always felt that the Economic Developer Director position is a critical one for a city like ours. Having been vacant, the number of times that it has, he thought while it has presented some opportunities obviously for existing staff, they are still functioning within a framework that is a missing key piece to that. He stated his conclusion was that he was open to the concept, he was not opposed to it. He believed we must be willing to adjust as we are moving forward.

City Manager Auger said we have a new player in the field now, which is the Detroit Regional Partnership, that we never used to have. They are spending a lot of money and gathering data and reaching out like other regions of the country have been doing for a long period of time, but our region has never done that. We have had some regional groups doing some work, but he has never seen, in his 30 years of this, he has never seen our region have a group like this that is willing to invest. He stated that his is all private sectors driven and the funds raised through the private sector doing it. They are starting to gear up and have more meetings that is stretching our current staff thinner and thinner. He thought to be where Novi needs to be, is that we need to not only be involved in those meetings but exercise some leadership roles in those meetings. He would see this position doing that as well.

Member Casey echoed her support. She agreed that this is the time for them to be talking about this, the comments that have been made relative to the need to be looking at retention because COVID has really impacted so many businesses, retail, and commercial. She agreed with Mayor Pro Tem Staudt regarding office space. She said she supported City Manager Auger in moving forward and finding the right candidate.

Member Maday agreed with everything that everyone said previously. She stated that obviously these are different times than were living in a year ago. Those are the obvious points that have been made, but she also wanted to reiterate the importance of communication with our City. She felt that communication with the residents was just as important as communication with the businesses. She said she supported that.

Member Crawford said he did not have anything to add; he was in support of trying to find an Economic Development Director. He thought that we were at that stage in our City's history for several months, if not years now, and we need one to contact the local businesses and to encourage other folks to come to town.

Mayor Gatt said everyone had their opportunity to voice their opinions, he believed City Manager Auger got the message.

Mayor Pro Tem Staudt stated that there is going to be potentially trillions of dollars of federal government aid for business coming down the pipe in the next year. He thought it was critical that we have someone who is laser focused on how that money can come to our businesses because other parts of the world are going to be going after it. We did

a good job with the Cares Act dollars; we need to be in the same exact position when these federal dollars become available. He believed it is important we do this sooner than later.

Mayor Gatt said his only concern was with the list that City Manager Auger sent out, and that was with Public Safety. He said they should fill those positions. He asked if there were Police and Fire openings. City Manager Auger said there were a few. They were stretching the dollars across the board throughout the year. Mayor Gatt said with Public Safety Council was quite clear. He wanted to focus on getting those things built up. The residents are very well taken care of on the Public Safety side.

**COMMUNICATIONS: None**

**CONSENT AGENDA REMOVALS FOR COUNCIL ACTION: None**

**ADJOURNMENT** – There being no further business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned at 8:02 P.M.

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Cortney Hanson, City Clerk

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Robert J. Gatt, Mayor

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Transcribed by Deborah S. Aubry

Date approved: January 25, 2021