

**Bronson City Council**  
**Agenda**  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
March 10, 2025  
City Hall- 141 S. Matteson Street, Bronson MI 49028  
5:00 pm

**1. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance**

Meeting called to order at 5:00 PM

**2. Roll Call**

**Council Members Present:** Councilmember Matt Watkins, Councilmember Bill Earl, Councilmember Larry McConn, and Vice Mayor Rick Johannes.

**Council Members Absent:** Mayor Bill Rinehart

**Staff Present:** City Manager Brandon Mersman, Attorney Charles Lillis, Water/Wastewater Supervisor Jerry Rinehart, DPW Supervisor Joe Swain, Fire Chief Scot Wilber, Assistant City Manager Patrick Bird, Chief of Police Steve Johnson, and Clerk/Treasurer Tricia Rzepka

**Also Present:** James Mahaffa, Julia Turnbull, and Gareth Troyer.

**3. Public Comments**

Public comments shall be limited to 3 minutes for items not listed on the agenda.

**James Mahaffa** stated that he has seen a lot of traffic on Roosevelt Street around midnight, that does not seem to be at a time of a shift change and are speeding up and down the Street.

Chief Steve Johnson stated that he will inform the nighttime officer to keep an eye on it.

**Gareth Troyer**, with DJ Construction, just wanted to introduce himself to the council.

**4. Presentations**

1. Redevelopment Ready Communities Program Essentials Level Certification Presentation

Julia Turnbull with the Michigan Economic Development Community, presented the City of Bronson with a plaque commemorating the completion of the RRC Essential Designation Level certification. This makes the city eligible for more technical assistance funds and the Match on Main grant. Julia stated that Bronson is only the 28<sup>th</sup> community in the state of Michigan to receive this award. Julia further stated that this award shows accomplishments in Community Planning, Zoning, and the Master Plan that was presented to the community.

**5. Consent Agenda**

- A. Approval of Minutes- February 10, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes
- B. Acceptance of Monthly Reports- Police, DPW, Utilities Report, Fire Department Report
- C. Approval of monthly bills in the amount of \$76,901.54
- D. Affirm the prepayment of bills in the amount of \$22,907.23
- E. Approval of City's Investments
- F. Approval of Annual City Council Report 2024

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda made by Councilmember Bill Earl with support from Councilmember Larry McConn.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

**6. New Business**

A. Approve Schmid Farm Land Lease

City Manager Brandon Mersman presented to council that Austin Hostetler of Austin Hostetler Farms, LLC was the high bidder offering \$275.00 per acre with the ability to sublease. The City owns roughly 103.43 acres of farmland on three (3) parcels accessed off of Parham Road. There are about 98 tillable acres. The total annual revenue would be \$26,950 and over the course of the five (5) year lease it would generate a total of approximately \$134,750 in revenue. In the previous contract we were receiving \$155/acre in revenue which amounts to roughly \$16,000 per year. Motion to approve made by Councilmember Larry McConn with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

B. Council Goals for FY2026 Budget

City Manager Brandon Mersman presented to the council, the proposed City Council goals for FY2025-26 along with a marked-up copy showing changes from the previous fiscal year. It has been updated based on the passage of the new Master Plan and Unified Development Code, and receiving Essentials Certification Level from the Redevelopment Ready Communities program. Some items have been consolidated or expanded upon. Staff is looking for guidance on the document for additions or changes.

Motion to approve the Council Goals for FY 2026 Budget as presented made by Councilmember Larry McConn with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

C. Purchase WWTP Clarifier Ditch Drive Parts

City Manager Brandon Mersman presented to the council that the ditch drives in the clarifier tanks need to be repaired or replaced. Utilities Director Rinehart obtained quotes for parts for staff to make the repairs. To replace the entire unit would be \$56,665.00 for each clarifier. To replace the portion of the drives that currently need repair, the cost would be \$29,475.00 per drive. Due to the age of the unit, staff is recommending we replace the entire unit rather than repairing a portion of the drives that are over thirty (30) years old. Staff would like to do one (1) full replacement during the current budget and then do the other unit in the next budget year.

Councilmember Matt Watkins questioned if we have checked to see what the labor charge would be is the supplier also installed the WWTP Clarifier Ditch Drive, as he would not want to see staff struggle with it only to then have someone else have to come in and complete the install?

Water/Wastewater Supervisor Jerry Rinehart stated that although they have not installed this before, he is confident they will be able to do it in approximately a week, where he felt the cost of installment would be approximately the same as parts if the supplier did it.

Motion to approve as presented made by Councilmember Matt Watkins with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

D. MERS Pension Plan

City Manager Brandon Mersman presented to the council that due to recent retirements, the cost of the City's MERS pension plan has greatly increased. Any increase is passed on to the employees as the employer rate is capped at 7.5% for Division One and 6.5% for Division Two. Going back to 2017, rates have increased

significantly for both divisions. Starting July 1st, the employee contribution for Regular Full-time Employees (non-Police) will go from 10.68 % to 17.7%. Police made a large jump in 2023 and 2024 from 13.85% to 18.13%. Police are set to go from 18.13% to 16.73%. Both divisions are now paying a large portion of their wages towards the pension plan. This will influence retention and recruitment. Mersman has explored different options with MERS to try and reduce the rate to around 14%, at least temporarily. Options included applying a portion of the surplus funds we have added over the years to help reduce the employee portion, increasing the percentage we contribute, or putting a temporary cap on the employee portion. The option that made the most economic sense while leaving our surplus funds alone is to do a temporary cap on the employee portion:

Employer	Employee	Estimated* Additional Cost
Division 1- Regular (non-Police)	10.24% 14%	\$10,596.88
Division 2- Police	8.85% 14%	\$6,108.00
Total		\$16,704.80

The cost to do this for FY26 would be an additional \$16,704.80. If Council decides to move forward with a temporary employee cap, it would be suggested doing it for one year and to reevaluate at that time based on the next actuarial report.

Councilmember Bill Earl questioned if we have looked at any other companies to handle our pension?

Councilmember Larry McConn stated that this is essential to the retention of employees.

Motion to approve capping the employee contribution at 14% for at least one year and to be readdressed before the 2026-2027 fiscal year made by Councilmember Matt Watkins with support from Councilmember Bill Earl,

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

#### E. Off Road Vehicle (ORV) Ordinance Discussion

City Manager Brandon Mersman stated that at the previous Council meeting, staff was asked to explore allowing certain ORV's on city streets along with golf carts. Staff met and discussed potential issues and concerns. Here are some things to consider during your discussion:

1. Clearly define which ORV's you want to allow. Just Utility Terrian Vehicles (UTV's)? All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV's) also?

2. How do you handle ORV's that are already road legal by the State of Michigan? They would need to be exempted from this ordinance.
3. Will helmets be required? Branch County's ordinance requires helmets if not fully enclosed. Our current ordinance does not require helmets for golf carts.
4. Will they have all of the same requirements as golf carts?
5. Will seat belts be required?
6. Will UTV's have the same inspection as golf carts?
7. Same speed limit (15 mph for golf carts)?

Councilmember Matt Watkins stated that he felt UTV's should be allowed, but not ATV's and didn't feel as though helmets should be required.

Councilmember Bill Earl suggested looking at what the county allows and not having ours contradictory to theirs.

Councilmember Matt Watkins felt that the times allowable should be the same as golf carts.

Chief of Police Steve Johnson suggested a year trial and then readjusting if needed.

City Manager Brandon Mersman will see about having a draft available for the next council meeting.

F. Approve Architecture Contract for City Hall/Police Department Building

City Manager Brandon Mersman presented that the City received overwhelming interest from architectural firms regarding the City's request for qualifications/proposals. The City received eight (8) responses in total. Martin & Riley was the low bidder, and they proposed a lump sum contract of \$48,000. That is based on an assumed \$600,000 project, if the project is lower than that the fee would be as low as \$42,000. If there are significant increases in actual construction costs or changes to the project scope or phasing that price would increase. They are based out of Fort Wayne and have done several similar projects including the City of Decatur (Indiana) that did an adaptive reuse of an old bank building, City Hall/Police Department for City of New Haven (Indiana), a City Hall and Police Department building for the City of Ligonier (Indiana), and the City of Rushville which was also an adaptive reuse of an existing building into a City Center. Martin and Riley also estimated a lower project cost of \$450,000 to \$600,000.

Staff contacted their references and other communities where they worked and received positive responses. Some portions of the project would be bid as alternates so they can be removed from the project to keep costs down. Attached is an informational document about the project along with frequently asked questions.

Councilmember Matt Watkins cautioned that the city should be careful how this looks to taxpayers.

Chief Johnson stated that education to the public is critical, as they don't see what goes on.

Councilmember Bill Earl stated that the city could look at selling or leasing our current building to cover some of the cost.

Councilmember Larry McConn reminded council that they have been conservative just for things like this.

Councilmember Bill Earl likes that there are options to add different projects at a later time.

Motion to approve the architectural contract with Martin Riley made by Councilmember Bill Earl with support from Councilmember Larry McConn.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

- G. Resolution #25-3-3 Appoint Code Official- International Property Maintenance Code  
City Manager Brandon Mersman presented that when the City originally adopted the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC), it appointed the previous City Manager as the designated Code Official for the City. The attached resolution updates it to appoint the City Manager or their designee by title rather than name. This will avoid having to pass a new resolution anytime there is a change in manager. This resolution is needed in order for the City Manager to write civil infraction tickets for violations of the IPMC.

Motion to approve Resolution #25-3-3 Appoint Code Official made by Councilmember Matt Watkins with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

- H. Resolution #25-3-4 Match on Main Grant

City Manager Brandon Mersman The City of Bronson is now eligible to apply for the Match on Main grant after earning the RRC Essentials designation. The Match on Main program, administered by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), offers funding to small business for improvements that enhance operations and contribute to local economic development. The City issued a press release and posted notices seeking applicants for the program, receiving two submissions. Under the program, the City is permitted to apply on behalf of two businesses, with a maximum grant of \$25,000 and a 10% match required from the applicants. The two applicants are Smitty's Pizza, which plans to purchase new kitchen equipment, and Economy Garage, which plans to purchase a new lift and renovate their building to construct a new entry. This resolution is needed in order for the City to apply for the grants.

Motion to approve resolution #25-3-4 Match on Main Grant made by Councilmember Matt Watkins with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

- I. Resolution #25-3-5 Consumers Grant

City Manager Brandon Mersman The Consumers Energy "Put Your Town on the Map" grant provides funding for projects that enhance community vibrancy, with a history of supporting public art initiatives. The grant offers up to \$25,000 in funding with no match required. The application deadline is March 28th, and the City intends to apply for the construction and installation of a Viking-themed public art sculpture at the City's Farmers Market Pavilion. The sculpture will serve as a unique focal point, enhancing the market's appeal while celebrating the community's identity.

This resolution is needed in order for the City to apply for this grant.

Motion to approve Resolution #25-3-5 made by Councilmember Larry McConn with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

- J. Resolution #25-3-6 EGLE Nexus Grant

City Manager Brandon Mersman that the EGLE Nexus grant is a funding opportunity provided by EGLE to support water and wastewater infrastructure projects that improve energy efficiency, enhance environmental performance, and reduce operational costs. The City intends to apply for funding to install variable frequency drives (VFDs) at Wells #4 and #5. The installation of VFDs will optimize efficiency of the wells, reduce energy consumption, and improve the overall reliability of the water system. The total project cost is \$43,814, with a 20% match from the City, amounting to \$8,762. The remaining \$35,052 will be covered by the grant. This resolution demonstrates the City's commitment to energy efficiency.

Motion to approve Resolution #25-3-6 EGLE Nexus Grant made by Councilmember Bill Earl with support from Councilmember Matt Watkins.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

K. Resolution #25-3-7 Community Project Funding Grant

City Manager Brandon Mersman stated that annually, members of Congress seek projects for Community Project Funding. The City's 2024 application for the lift station and WWTP project was recommended for funding, however, due to budget delays in Congress, the funding was not received. The City will be reapplying for FY26 funding to make updates at the treatment plant, which will include UV disinfection, RAS/WAS improvements, grit and chemical room ventilation, ferric chloride feed enhancements, and upgrades to the SCADA system. This resolution demonstrates the City's commitment to this project and ensures continued ACO compliance.

Motion to approve Resolution #25-3-7 Community Project Funding Grant made by Councilmember Matt Watkins with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

L. Resolution #25-3-8 Congressionally Directed Spending Request

City Manager Brandon Mersman stated that in addition to applying for Community Project Funding through Congressman Walberg's Office, the City will be applying for Congressional Directed Spending through Senator Peters' Office to support the planned renovations and expansion of the future City Hall and Police Department facility. This project aims to improve the existing space and enhance public access to essential City services. This resolution demonstrates the City's commitment to this project.

Motion to approve Resolution #25-3-8 Congressionally Directed Spending Request made by Councilmember Larry McConn with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.

4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

M. Kiwanis Park Discussion

City Manager Brandon Mersman stated that the City reached out to Abonmarche for support on submitting a Michigan Department of Natural Resources Recreation Passport grant for the construction of a dog park at Kiwanis Park. The proposed project carries an estimated total cost of \$180,000, with a required City match of \$45,000. Some of the City's match may include in kind contributions such as forced account labor and materials, which could potentially reduce the City's cash match. The proposed dog park would be located on the site of the existing volleyball courts and would feature designated areas for both small and large dogs, benches, shade trees, water fountains (including dog specific fountains), perimeter fencing, an access pathway, and handicap accessible parking.

If Council wishes to proceed with this grant application, Abonmarche has offered to assist in preparing the site plan, project budget, and planning documents at no cost to the City. Moving forward with the application will require Council to hold a Special Meeting at the end of the month to pass a resolution of support that includes finalized budget details.

Councilmember Matt Watkins stated that he is having a hard time justifying spending this on a dog park.

Councilmember Larry McConn stated that this would be an ADA compliant parking lot and fulfill that requirement.

Councilmember Matt Watkins stated that having the ADA compliant parking lot makes him rethink his initial concerns.

#### **7. City Staff Comments**

**DPW Joe Swain** stated that the last month has been a bit slow since there has been good weather. The boom truck has received new lights, materials for the water lines has been received, still looking for a vac truck, and they have starting picking up yard waste bags. Joe also stated that they have been working on the Mowry St water line repair and Douglas Park water line/service repair.

**Fire Chief Scot Wilber** reported achievements from the staff:

CPR instruction: Mitch Swinehart and Mariah Cutler

Instructor level 1: Ken Rinehart

EMS: Chloe Garr, Amber Arvizo, Mariah Cutler

New firefighters: Amber Arvizo, Garrett Belote, Skyler Cullohan

Retirements: Tom Bidwell, Roger Bohachz, Tony Rzepka, Ken Stutzman

Milestones: 40 years of service John Monroe

#### **8. City Manager Comments**

**City Manager Brandon Mersman** informed the council that the city was informed that our Congressional Direct Spending Request for just over \$2,000,000 through Congressman Walberg's will likely not be funded due to the Federal Government not passing a regular appropriations budget. The City met with EGLE at the end of February to discuss a grant opportunity for the lift station project. They approached us with this opportunity that has a very small window to submit an application. We are working with Prein & Newhof of our design team to perform the additional studies that need to be done to accept federal funds. The grant would be in the amount of \$1,329,600. These grant funds would reduce our loan from \$2,020,000 to \$690,400. The \$505,000 in principal forgiveness would not be affected.

#### **9. Council Comments**

**Councilmember Matt Watkins** congratulated Brandon Mersman and Patrick Bird on received the Redevelopment Ready Communities Program Essentials Level Certification.

**Councilmember Bill Earl** stated that the city has a great team with everyone working together.

**Councilmember Larry McConn** agreed with Councilmember Bill Earl and commended Patrick Bird for all of his hard work on the certification and looking for grants.

**Vice Mayor Rick Johannes** stated that we have great leadership in our police and fire departments continually teaching and learning. Rick also thanked Brandon Mersman, Patrick Bird, Joe Swain, and Jerry Rinehart for all of their hard work.

#### **10. Adjourn**

Motion to adjourn at 6:11 PM made by Councilmember Larry McConn with support from Councilmember Bill Earl.  
4 ayes/0 nays Motion Carried

Meeting adjourned at 6:11 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Tricia Rzepka  
City of Bronson  
Clerk/Treasurer