

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the Joint Workshop of the Brainerd City Council and Public Utilities Commission was called to order at 5:00 P.M. by Council President Bevans.

Upon roll call, the following members were noted as present: Erickson, O'Day, Stunek, Johnson, Stenglein, and Bevans. Mayor Badeaux was noted as present at 5:11 p.m. Members of the Public Utilities Commission noted as present were England, Wussow, and Matten at 5:07 p.m. Also present were City Administrator Bergman, HR Director Schubert, Finance Director Hillman, BPU Superintendent Magnuson, BPU Finance Director Wicklund, and HR Assistant Boser.

Discussion on the Draft Employee Policy Manual

HR Director Schubert gave an overview of the reasoning for the review of the Employee Policy Manual. She stated that the Employee Policy Manual was adopted in 2019, staff began work to revise the manual due to employment law changes and the desire by Department Head for more input. The changes were put on hold to accommodate time for the Charter changes that affected the manual. HR Director Schubert reviewed the major changes to the Employee Policy Manual for discussion.

Council and Commission discussion took place around changing the responsibility of BPU Department Head performance reviews to the City Administrator.

Member O'Day clarified whether there were employment law concerns previous to the charter revision. He also stated that aside from having Jennifer present for BPU Department Head reviews with members of the Commission, the day-to-day work of the Commission will not change.

BPU Finance Director Wicklund stated that he does not agree with the need for the City Administrator to conduct BPU Department Head performance reviews because he speaks weekly with members of the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and feels they know his position and it dilutes the responsibilities of the Commission.

City Administrator Bergman stated that consistency is important for uniformity across all City employees. She stated that with the Charter changes, the only duties of the Commission that changed are personnel, the Commission is still in charge of all of the utility decisions. These changes are also being proposed for pay equity across departments.

HR Director Schubert stated that the last two vacant Department Head positions have had a hiring committee for filling the position. Also with, employment law and changes over the past 10 years or so, having consistency across all employees is the best way to minimize the City's possible liability exposure.

Member Johnson stated that a compromise could be to define how the hiring committees for Department Heads are comprised to guarantee the Commission is a part of discussion.

HR Director Schubert inquired if the City should consider a Work From Home Policy in the Employee Policy Manual. She noted that job applicants and current employees have inquired about the possibility.

Member Johnson stated the Work From Home Option is very common now in the private sector and felt it should be included.

Review of the Contribution Policy Between City Council and Public Utilities Commission

BPU Finance Director Wicklund stated that with the addition of two crypto mining operations in the City, BPU will have a lot of cost to get the companies online. He proposes reducing the industrial rate per kilowatt hour (kWh) for these two projects that is contributed to the City. That rate can be reviewed in 18 months once more is known regarding the crypto mining. He proposes that the rate be reduced from .0030 to .00025 with a review of the policy at one year. This is not a rate drop for the customer, it is a reduction in the contribution from BPU to the City for utility costs.

Discussion on the Use of the Roberts Land

BPU Superintendent Magnuson stated that the Roberts land sale is not final, it is still in review by the attorneys. He also stated that a modern water plant may be needed in the future. The ideal spot for a new plant would be on the west edge of the property. He is requesting that the City hold off on making plans to develop the land until the review of the current water plant is complete.

Adjourn

The Chair adjourned the workshop at 6:06 P.M.



Jennifer Bergman
City Administrator