

LEWISTOWN CITY COUNCIL MEETING
DATE July 9, 2024

The Lewistown City Council met in regular session in the council chambers. Mayor Douglas Lafary called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Invocation: Mayor Lafary

ROLL CALL: PRESENT: Alderperson Sally Clark, Jim Long, Brad Ward, Kendall Miller, David Levingston, John Spotloe and Mayor Doug Lafary. Also present: City Clerk Cindy Goddard, City Treasurer Debby Brown, Administrative Assistant Levi Peitzmeier, Public Works Director Evinn Palmer, Police Chief Chris Ford and City Attorney Nathan Collins. **ABSENT:**

DECLARATION OF QUORUM by Mayor Doug Lafary

CLERKS REPORT/MINUTES: Cindy Goddard.

Alderperson Miller made a motion to approve the minutes of June 11 and June 25, 2024, second by Alderperson Clark, the motion carried all ayes.

Report- Windows are all in, will be a couple of weeks before starting.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Debbie Brown. Nothing tonight

ATTORNEY'S REPORT: Attorney Nathan Collins. Nothing

ENGINEER'S REPORT: Keith Plavec. No Engineer present.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS:

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance/Insurance/Zoning – Alderperson Clark: Nothing to report.

Sewer – Alderperson Spotloe: Nothing to report.

Streets & Allies – Alderperson Levingston: Nothing to report.

Police/ESDA – Alderperson Ward: Nothing to report.

Water – Alderperson Miller: Nothing to report.

Utilities/Publications – Alderperson Long: Nothing to report.

Public Buildings & Grounds – Alderperson Long: Radio address system for Porter Park will be integrated, also need more picnic tables for park.

Tourism – Alderman Miller: Junk in the Trunk is on Thursdays, Music in the Park fish fry this week instead of last week. The bicycle parade for the 4th of July was awesome.

Tax Increment Financing – Alderperson Spotloe: Nothing.

Citizens Committee – Amanda Sutphen Nothing from her this week.

Christmas Committee - Kenny Haacke will start having Christmas meetings soon since it is July.

Economic Development Committee – Erin Ahart handed out mapping information, put on by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs along with the Chamber of Commerce, 4 dates starting in August. The meetings will be at Central Middle School on August 15, 22, 28 and September 11. Everyone is welcome.

WORKS DIRECTOR’S REPORT – Evinn Palmer Director getting estimate on more electrical placed in Porter Park especially for the Downtown Christmas trees. New compressor has arrived. Filter room getting update. Oil and Chip Program is getting worked on.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discuss/Act Upon Street closure behind Presbyterian Church for the Lewistown Mobile Food Pantry on July 16th approximately 1-6 p.m. – Also need July 23, need to amend the new business request, because of Fulton County Fair being in progress food cannot be given away at the Fulton County Fairgrounds as usual. Line up down Maple and exit to Main. Motion by Alderperson Miller, second by Alderperson Long, to close behind Presbyterian Church for the Lewistown Mobile Food Pantry on July 16 and July 23 between 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., all in favor, motion carried.
2. Discuss/Act Upon Putting in place a background Check/Screening Process for new city Employees/Volunteers – Alderperson Spotloe trying to figure out if need. Table at this time.
3. Discuss/Act Upon Future of Lewistown ESDA – Statement by Mayor Lafary regarding creating ESDA in the beginning of him taking Mayor Position. See attached statement read by Mayor Lafary why Lewistown needs its own ESDA group. Need to make sure we can set alarms off with our frequency. Discussion regarding how sirens can be set off and how the storm spotters function. Mayor said that we do not have a full functioning ESDA yet. Denny Pasley wants to have an open house to get more citizens to join the Lewistown ESDA. Cuba ESDA was represented by John Martin said Cuba or Chris Helle can set their sirens off. Need to work together with the County Deputies and Lewistown City Police when there is an emergency. Mayor said we need to test sirens separate from Helle, the test is always the first Tuesday of each month at 10:00 a.m. Alderperson Spotloe said just having our own ESDA does benefit the County also. Mayor said we also need a backup of another town, will call County Board Chairman and discuss all this. They need magnetic ESDA signs made to put on their cars, also need to take some classes. They can take the classes on line. Meetings are 1st Tuesday of each month. Need radar scope that is a computer program only like \$30.00.
4. Discuss/Act Upon What to do with the Old Durango – Water department would like to have this vehicle, Alderperson Long said \$8,500.00 for new transmission, or refurbished is cheaper with no guarantee. Alderperson Miller said should we just use the money for a different vehicle. If fix it possibly share with ESDA. Motion by Alderperson Levingston,

second by Alderperson Ward to put new transmission in the Durango, roll call vote, Alderperson Clark yes, Long, yes, Ward yes, Miller no, Levingston yes and Spotloe yes, motion carried.

PRESENTATION OF BILLS:

Alderperson Miller made a motion to approve all bills properly endorsed; Seconded by Alderperson Spotloe roll call vote, the motion carried with all ayes.

CLOSED SESSION: No closed session

ADJOURNMENT:

Alderperson Ward made a motion to adjourn at 7:26 p.m.; Seconded by Alderperson Long motion carried all ayes.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cindy Goddard". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Cindy Goddard, City Clerk

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In the beginning of my term as your Mayor, I was contacted by a few citizens who had past involvement with Lewistown public safety agencies about re-organizing the Lewistown ESDA.

They stated they were not happy with Lewistown's hazardous weather warning system that was being provided by the Fulton County ESDA and believed a local ESDA would provide our citizens with a greater amount of safety in case of severe weather.

They cited a need for storm spotters and the ability to activate the city's warning sirens locally.

They stated they believed this would be a good ADDITION to the current procedure of the County ESDA director activating our sirens from his location based mainly on radar observations.

They stated further that they had learned from past NWS storm spotting classes that the radar could not detect below the clouds and there was also a radar "blind spot" in the southern part of the county and local ESDA storm spotters could help fill those gaps.

I asked these individuals why they didn't join Fulton County ESDA and storm spot through them and was told that F.C. ESDA did not use storm spotters and relied solely on electronic information.

I then began searching for the best course of action on this issue and invited Fulton County ESDA director Chris Helle to speak at our June 8, 2021 council meeting to tell us about the services his agency provides.

At that council meeting, Director Helle told us that he had 21 or 22 members of which 2 were from Lewistown.

He stated that he DID NOT use storm spotters in the field and does most of his storm spotting "virtually".

Helle also confirmed, what I had been told by others, that a radar "blind spot" did exist in Fulton County and called it "a major concern."

Helle also told us that his agency has 3 vehicles, one of which is his own personal vehicle which he leases to the county for ESDA use.

This vehicle is stationed at his residence in Farmington.

Helle stated it was equipped with "mostly incident command type stuff", but added that he was never in command of any incident as that task fell upon the Chief Elected Official.

This vehicle has since been replaced with a new county owned Ford F250 equipped with the latest in emergency lighting and markings.

In addition to the standard emergency vehicle markings The F250 emblems on the side of the vehicle were also replaced with customized chrome FE1 emblems which some of us know is the directors radio call sign.

The total cost of this vehicle and its equipment was \$68,734.51.

The 2nd vehicle was also a Ford F250 and was stationed 1/2 mile north of Lewistown.

Helle stated this vehicle was equipped with a winch, lights, a power inverter, chainsaw, and safety equipment.

Helle added that he likes to keep a response vehicle near Lewistown for quicker response to us.

This vehicle is now located at the Assistant Directors residence in Farmington.

It does not have any safety equipment or a chainsaw and the Assistant who uses the vehicle has been ordered by Helle not to use the winch due to safety concerns.

The third vehicle was a Dodge Charger that was converted from a sheriff's patrol vehicle and was located at Canton Fire Dept where he also had an office.

Helle described it as a "standard response vehicle with project lifesaver stuff in it."

Helle stated that project lifesaver was a "very special program to him" that worked with and assisted children with autism and elderly dementia patients.

The project lifesaver "stuff" that Helle spoke of is now located in the assistant directors F250 in Farmington and has needed the batteries replaced for almost 2 months.

The assistant director is in the process of using his own funds to purchase these batteries because Helle has not replaced them.

The current location of the Dodge Charger is unknown as it was ordered to be removed from its location at the Canton fire station by the city of Canton because it had not moved in over a year.

The ESDA office in the Canton Fire Dept. has also been vacated.

Helle also spoke of his many ways of communication that he described as the "latest in modern technology" but stated if that communication fails "we are all in deep trouble."

Helle continued stating that he is "a bit of a paranoid" and to combat that possible failure in communications, He keeps a large cache of 16 portable VHF radios as a "failsafe".

These radios are no longer in service and were not replaced with any other failsafe.

I ended this agenda item by stating my opinion that spotters in the field were a necessity and Helle agreed repeatedly promising cooperation.

In the days after this meeting, I was again contacted and spoke to several members of the Fulton County public safety community and learned that the majority of what Helle said in our meeting was exaggerated or just simply not true.

I learned that of the 21 or 22 F.C. ESDA members, only 2 were active including Helle.

To be clear, that is one active member and director Helle.

They have not had a meeting or training in 6 or 7 YEARS.

I also learned that any request by members to go out and storm spot were denied by Helle who always stated "it is too dangerous."

After investigating this matter, It was obvious to me that the citizens of Lewistown were not as well protected from severe weather as they could be and decided to move forward with re-activating our ESDA program.

Things were moving forward with 6 to 8 active members.

Spotters have gone out into harms way on several occasions to provide early reports and warnings for our citizens.

They have radios that are not encrypted and can be monitored by anyone who still has a scanner.

These radios allow spotters to communicate real time observations back to our base but a call to Fulton county ESDA was still needed to request the activation of our sirens.

This consumes time and slows response, and as we have heard over and over from public safety agencies.....SECONDS SAVE LIVES!

In early June of this year, I met with the radio repair service that services many of the counties radios and outdoor warning siren systems and inquired about getting our local ESDA the ability to activate our warning sirens.

This was a brief meeting that occurred under our south siren while it was being repaired by them.

I was advised that the capability to trigger our own sirens had always been available and was used in the past by the local ESDA.

I then authorized radio service to do the work and put him in touch with our ESDA member Dennis Pasley to work out the details.

On Friday, June 31st, I was advised by my Administrative Assistant Levi that he had telephoned director Helle on behalf of our ESDA and requested to conduct the monthly test of our sirens on Tuesday July 2nd at 10am.

The request was immediately denied by Helle who stated it would cause a multitude of problems and also stating that his agency held the FCC licenses for the radio frequencies used.

Having first hand knowledge of the counties radio systems, I know that Lewistown agencies have been using county radio frequencies for decades and it has never been a problem.

I was also aware that warning sirens in other towns could be activated by agencies within their boundaries. Canton, Cuba and Ellisville have this ability to name a few.

I also had knowledge that if the director or his second in command were out of position and could not activate sirens that there was no backup agency to do so.

The radio repair service has been contacted by Helle in the past because neither Helle nor his assistant were available to conduct the regular monthly test and requested radio repair test the sirens for him.

This has never been an issue in my time working in public safety in this county as the primary goal was always maximum safety for our citizens

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This has always been done through cooperation and working together to successfully prepare for and manage all emergencies.

I then recontacted radio repair and inquired if any problems would arise from us testing our own sirens.

They advised me that the only "problem" that may occur was that if two radios tried to set off our sirens at the same time, the sirens "might" not work.

If this happened, no equipment would be damaged and we would simply repeat the activation process until the sirens worked.

They also advised that our activating radio power had been turned down to limit the signals range to lessen interference and the higher powered repeater that is used by Helle would not be used.

On Monday, July 1st, I had an exchange of text messages with Helle advising him that we were going to test our sirens at 10am the following day.

A copy of that exchange is included in your council packets.

In these texts Helle acknowledges that the repeater will not be effected and then states that our testing the sirens may still effect the "zoned" sirens in the county.

I am aware of the zoning of sirens and knew that it was a project that was started but never finished by Helle and the completion of that project hadn't been attempted in years.

My belief has always been that testing any emergency equipment is done to lessen the chance of failure in an actual emergency and a test must be performed to see if any of these issues exist.

Having no confidence in the decision making abilities of ESDA director Helle, and the fact that this was only a test of a system that must be performed prior to implementing emergency procedures, I ordered Pasley to conduct the test at 10am the following day.

I thought that If we are going to have problems, wouldnt it be better to find those problems in a test, rather than an emergency when lives are at stake.

I was working out of town on Tuesday at the time of the scheduled test and called Pasley at approximately 11am to see if he had conducted the test.

Pasley advised me that he was unable to perform the test stating that an email had been received at city hall that morning from Helle advising us not to do the test.

A copy of this email is included in your council packets.

This email was also sent to the Chairman of the Fulton County Board John Spangler, Vice Chair Laura Kessel, Safety Chair Karl Williams and Aldermans Ward and Spotloe who, as you know, is also our Fire Chief.

I did not receive this email.

Pasley informed me that he was disregarding the email and prepared to carry out my order and activate the sirens at 10am when Helle activated them from his location 1 minute early at 9:59 am.

By this action, Helle was successful in keeping us from testing our sirens causing our citizens to be less safe from severe weather for at least another month.

Since I became your Mayor, my main concern has been and will remain the safety and well being of every citizen of Lewistown.

A local ESDA, with members who are also committed to public safety, will make our citizens and our surrounding communities safer.

But will it be as safe as it could be with our primary backup agency protecting a bureacracy more than the people?

I say no.

This not only endangers our civilian population, it causes our ESDA and other first responders to be less safe by Helle's leadership.

Helle has made our county ESDA an agency that exists on paper only and is more concerned with the computer world and how many facebook followers he has instead of the real world and the people in it.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines a Bureaucrat as "An official who is rigidly devoted to the details of administrative procedure."

The definition of sabotage is "the deliberate attempt to damage, destroy, or hinder a cause or activity."

Chris Helle is an unelected bureaucrat that has sabotaged our efforts to start our own ESDA and has made our citizens less safe by his actions just to protect himself and his power.

I reiterate, I have No Confidence in Helle's abilities as ESDA director.

Since this incident I have spoken with our neighboring Mayors of Canton, Cuba and Bryant.

All have had negative experiences with Helle and have stated to me that they also have No confidence in his abilities leading ESDA.

I have also spoken with neighboring Fire Chiefs from Buckheart, Cuba, and Smithfield, and they also state they have had negative experiences with and have No Confidence in Helle's abilities.

I am now bringing the issue back to this council and request your input on the direction and future of our ESDA program but first I will ask you to reflect on a core ARMY value that I learned almost 40 years ago as a young Millitary Policeman and still live by today.....MISSION FIRST!

PEOPLE ALWAYS!

The floor is now open for councils discussion.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. H.' or similar, written in a cursive style.

9 JULY 29

In closing, I would like to say that there used to be a core group of people in this county, who truly cared about public safety.

Those who were just trying to do what was right.

To SERVE and PROTECT.

Well.....Some of us are still here and we do have attitudes.

I just hope that you can see some of the reasons for our attitudes.

This is not about power or who is in charge.


I have followed orders all my life.

As a Soldier, a Volunteer Fireman, a Jail Officer, and a Deputy Sheriff.

Lawful orders, that saved lives, not endangered them.

This is a serious violation of the public trust and **MUST BE ADDRESSED BY OUR COUNTY BOARD.**

Thank You.



09 JULY 24