

City of Eldridge Special City Council Meeting Minutes

The City of Eldridge, Iowa, City Council met in an open session at Eldridge Community Center at 5:30 pm on April 29, 2024.

Council Members Present: Dan Collins, Adrian Blackwell, Brian Dockery, Scott Campbell, and Ryan Iossi.

Presiding: Mayor Frank King

Also Present: Nevada Lemke, Jeff Martens, Allison Wright, Mark Ridolfi, RG Iossi, Craig Gehrls, Jason & Stephanie Foust, Marty O'Boyle, Darlene Finnegan, Pam White, Alice & Jon Timmerman, Emily Rae, Jenn Ruth, Jacob Rowe, Pat & Paula Steward, Keith Schneckloth, Michael Meloy, Jody Coffman, Karen Rathjen, Collin Wilson, Becky Esbaum, Rob White

Mayor Frank King opened the meeting with introductory remarks and informed the attendees on the format for the public hearing. He provided information regarding the process of removing a Board member pursuant to Iowa Codes 388.3 and 66.1A. He then read through the presentation of charges that were cited for the removal of Paula Steward from the City of Eldridge Electric & Water Utility Board of Trustees, including the underlying facts supporting each charge. Mayor King then turned the floor over to Paula Steward.

Once Paula Steward had the floor, Mike Meloy spoke first. He stated he does not represent Ms. Steward and then made a statement regarding the accusations against Paula Steward and Iowa Code 66.1A. He stated that pursuant to Code 66.1A the misconduct must be specified and he further alleged that the charges presented by the Mayor did not include specifics. He also stated that Paula Steward did not receive her notification by Certified Mail, but rather it was overnighted.

Paula Steward presented her information to the City Council regarding the charges against her for her removal from the Utility Board. She stated that she did not receive a notice of removal by Certified Mail, but that it was overnighted to her from the Post Office at a cost of \$30. She confirmed she received it the day after it was mailed. She further commented on the February 6th, 2024 Utility Board Meeting where the Utility Board, City Administrator & Mayor discussed the employee handbook. She alleged that the Utility Board had asked for a mediator at that meeting and did not get what they requested. She made statements regarding Iowa Code 388 and residency requirements. She spoke to Brock Kroeger's alleged removal from the Board and spoke about Mike Anderson not being re-appointed. She then made statements regarding the newly appointed Board members Craig Gehrls and Jeff Hamilton and the two employees that were placed on paid administrative leave. Paula made reference to the City Council's Special Meeting regarding the removal of former Utility Board member Jim Skadal and alleged that the Council acted outside of the law, making reference to a complaint that was filed with IPIB (Iowa Public Information Board). She went on to make further statements related to her investigatory meeting with the Mayor, Administrator Lemke, and Councilman Iossi, as well as the communication with the State Auditor's Office regarding the investigations and her perceptions of those communications. She also stated that in her review of the City's financial audit, that she did not identify any findings that were related to the Utility employees or funds. Paula then addressed the charges against her regarding her removal from the Utility Board. She referred to the increased wages that did not comply with the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), and claimed that the CBA did not even include wages. She alleged that the Utility Board never approved a handbook and stated that she was not given a copy of one

when she was appointed. She stated the Utility employees had never been insubordinate to the Utility Board, and alleged that those employees do not report to the City. She referred to the unauthorized fees incurred for legal services and alleged it was not thousands of dollars, but only 3.5 hours. Finally, she alleged that there was no misconduct by the Utility employees to the Utility Board.

Mayor King then opened the floor for Public Comment.

Darlene Finnegan addressed the Council and attendees, stating that she finds this all mindblowing. She believed that what Mr. Meloy and Paula Steward stated was truthful and she thinks this is all ridiculous. She referred to Paula's charges for removal as a witch hunt.

Jason Foust stated that the Mayor had stated that Paula was aware of these issues as presented in her charges and took no action. He alleged that at least 3 of the members of the Mayor/Council were aware that Brock Kroeger had moved out of City limits 3 years ago.

Stephanie Foust stated that she wants Paula Steward reinstated to the Utility Board. She alleged that the City has no facts or documentation for any of these claims.

Motion by Collins to move into Closed Session pursuant to Iowa Code 21.5(1)c "To discuss strategy with counsel in matters that are presently in litigation or where litigation is imminent where its disclosure would be likely to prejudice or disadvantage the position of the governmental body in that litigation" and Iowa Code 21.5(1)g "To avoid disclosure of specific law enforcement matters, such as current or proposed investigations or inspection or auditing techniques or schedules, which if disclosed would enable law violators to avoid detection" At 6:02 p.m. Second by Blackwell. Roll Call Vote indicated Blackwell (aye), Campbell (aye), Iossi (aye), Collins (aye), and Dockery (aye). Motion carried.

The Council resumed open session at 6:50 p.m. Motion by Blackwell. Second by Iossi. 5 ayes, 0 nays. Motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

Motion by Iossi to approve the removal of Paula Steward from the Utility Board. Second by Collins. Roll Call Vote indicated Collins (aye), Dockery (aye), Blackwell (aye), Campbell (aye), and Iossi (aye). Motion carried.

Motion by Dockery to adjourn the meeting at 6:51 p.m. Second by Blackwell. 5 ayes, 0 nays. Motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted by
Nevada Lemke

