

**Alma, Michigan**  
**February 28, 2017**

Mayor Mapes called a regular meeting of the Alma City Commission to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Alma Municipal Building.

**Present:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**Absent:** Harrington.

Mayor Mapes asked the City Commission and members of the audience to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Motion by Commissioner Piccolo as supported by Commissioner Ayers to approve the minutes of the February 14, 2017 regular meeting.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**No:** None.

Motion by Commissioner Allman as supported by Commissioner Piccolo to approve the following item on the Consent Agenda for payment: \$233,618.99 to The Bank of New York Mellon, N. A. for the principal and interest due on the Michigan Finance Authority SRF and SWQF loans.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**No:** None.

Motion by Vice-Mayor Nyman as supported by Commissioner Allman to approve the request for purchase in the amount of \$1,552.00 to Industrial Broom Service, LLC for 2 main broom poly filled tubes and 12 sets of side broom filled with gutter broom wire for Street Sweeper, Unit #560.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**No:** None.

Motion by Commissioner Ayers as supported by Commissioner Piccolo to approve the request for purchase in the amount of \$5,900.00 to Bio-Care, Inc. for onsite physicals for the Fire Department personnel.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**No:** None.

Motion by Commissioner Piccolo as supported by Commissioner Allman to adopt a resolution approving the Local Governing Body Resolution for Charitable Gaming Licenses for the Alma Highland Festival, Inc. for the purpose of holding a fund raising raffle.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**No:** None.

Motion by Commissioner Ayers as supported by Commissioner Piccolo to approve the resolution to adopt the recommendation of counsel regarding the proposed settlement of the the case of Earl Griffith, as Personal Representative for the Estate of Mildred Griffith, Plaintiff, vs. Diane Fuller and the City of Alma, Defendants.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**No:** None.

Motion by Commissioner Mott as supported by Commissioner Piccolo to receive the following reports and place them on file: Alma Planning Commission minutes of February 6, 2017 and the January Investment report.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo..

**No:** None.

City Manager Moore addressed the Commissioners on the Welcoming Michigan program. In January, he received a call from an Alma resident asking if he would meet with a group called Welcoming Michigan. The heart of the issue was to make immigrants to the area feel more welcome. A meeting was scheduled for February 17th. Mr. Moore invited Mayor Mapes, Jim Wheeler of Greater Gratiot and Taryn Blanshan of the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce to also participate. Mr. Wheeler and Mayor Mapes were able to participate.

Welcome Michigan is part of the Michigan Immigration Rights Center. They are dedicated to helping immigrants integrate into the community. The initiative started in 2012. Their goal is to, "foster mutual respect among foreign born and U.S. born Michiganders." According to Welcoming Michigan in Alma, 2.3% of the population is foreign born. That means that roughly 211 Alma residents are immigrants.

The cost to join Welcoming Michigan is \$50 to \$200. We would also need to pass a resolution by the Commission and designate a point person for the effort. The City would then need to participate in one event during the year.

Immigrants play and have played an important role in our community. We have many successful restaurants and businesses in Alma that were started by immigrants. Our medical community is dependent on immigrants. Alma College has a number of foreign students on campus and number of immigrants on staff. They play a vital role in our community.

In discussing the issue with Mr. Wheeler and Mayor Mapes, the local issue is broader than just immigrants. The larger issue is accepting of diversity. We have many second and third generation immigrants in the community. We have people of many different faiths in Alma. We have a variety of cultural backgrounds in our population. Everyone should feel welcome and encouraged to participate fully in our community.

In our discussions, we believed that before we make any decisions, we should contact a number of the major employers in the community to find out their position. The discussion about being a welcoming community is probably as important and maybe more so than the actual action of joining an organization.

Before Mr. Moore met with the Welcoming Michigan, he received a letter from the Gratiot County Republican Party. They are concerned that the Welcoming Michigan organization will put pressure on the community to spend resources on Welcoming America's priorities. They are also concerned that the immigrants will not be willing to assimilate into our culture. He met with the Gratiot County Republican Party. Their main concern is about illegal immigration. They are concerned that Welcoming Michigan is trying to come into the City and then change the focus from legal immigration to include illegal immigration. They do not want to see Alma become a sanctuary city.

Commissioner Mott stated that he feels that Alma is already a welcoming community. Commissioner Ayers stated that he does believe we need to join an organization to become welcoming, when we are already welcoming. Mayor Mapes would like to see the City get involved with the citizens and the business community on gathering more information on what they think of the Welcoming Michigan

Program. Commissioner Allman read a letter from a College student who grew up in Alma. In the letter it was stated that the student did not feel welcomed or assimilated in the Alma culture. Commissioner Piccolo stated that we as the City Commission need to own the idea of welcoming in Alma. City Attorney, Tony Costanzo stated that part of what makes America great is its diversity and family traditions. He feels that the Alma Community has done a great job in being open but anything that can move us in a positive direction is a good move.

Mayor Mapes opened the floor for public comment.

Laurie Wilson of 1575 Wright Ave. agreed with bringing different cultures to Alma. She also wanted to address her concerns about car traffic watching out for pedestrians. Her sister was almost hit by a car today after leaving the drop-in center on Pine Avenue. Drivers need to do a better job of watching out for pedestrians.

John Lemmerman of 305 W Tyler Rd., Chairman of the Gratiot Republican Party, wanted the Commission to know that he wants to fully understand all the aspects of a decision to join the Welcoming Michigan Program. The cost, risks and the downsides of becoming a Welcoming city. He liked the idea that the City will look for Community input before making any decisions.

Marcy Leute of 109 E End St., a member of the Republican party that meet with Mr. Moore and as a citizen of Alma wanted to voice her concerns over asking an outside organization to tell us how to be welcoming. She feels that Alma is welcoming and that more discussions and information are needed. She stated that this is not a Republican or a Democratic issue but a citizen issue. She doesn't want the City to be labeled because we had joined the Welcoming Michigan Program.

Adelia Miller of 208 Mechanic spoke her concerns that joining this program would bring about concerns of citizens that their lives could be comprised. She does not want to see the City become a sanctuary for illegal immigrants.

Stephanie Slaughter of 185 Pineview wanted to thank us for meeting with her on considering the Welcoming Michigan Program. She did a lot of research and found that what attracted her to the program was that they don't tell the community what to do. They encourage the community by making resources available for a community to get behind welcoming. She has experienced that the citizens of Alma are not so welcoming in their actions. We need to have conversations about welcoming that will lead to making decisions on how to bring all groups of people together. She again thanked us for the consideration of how we can move forward to be more welcoming.

Matthew Caper of 709 Grace wanted to ask the Commission how he could get approval for the use of a bouncy house while renting a park shelter at Wright Park. City Manager Moore told him to speak to the staff after the meeting on how to get his request placed on the Agenda for the Commission to consider. Mr. Caper also wanted to speak on the traffic concerns at the Middle and High Schools. He feels that pedestrian safety is at a real risk. He has seen numerous times drivers not being aware of pedestrians. Mayor Mapes suggested that if he sees repeated offenders, to report it to the Alma Police so that action can be taken.

Ms. Miller added that she thought a dog park might be an idea for the Commission to consider. Mayor Mapes and Commissioner Mott said that the City has considered Dog Parks in the past and that it is a suggested item in the Park Master Plan but at this time because of budget constraints it is not possible.

Mayor Mapes asked for Commissioner comments.

Commissioner Ayers wanted to thank all who came for their comments and concerns.

Commissioner Piccolo asked that we all become listeners to each other.

Commissioner Mott wanted pedestrians to think safety first in what they do.

Commissioner Allman addressed the Pine Avenue traffic situation. A study for a year was done by the City and what has been put in action has helped alleviated the traffic situation. The Commission is still working on trying to solve the traffic problems on Pine Avenue.

Motion by Commissioner Piccolo as supported by Commissioner Allman to approve Warrant No. 17-16 and to authorize the City Treasurer to issue checks for payment of all claims.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Harrington, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**No:** None.

Mayor Mapes appreciated all in attendance for having the conversations we had tonight. He hopes that we can have open minds. In order for anything to come of this movement of welcoming, it needs to be citizen driven. The Commission can pass resolutions but it is for us as a community to come together that's important.

Motion by Commissioner Piccolo as supported by Commissioner Allman to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:03 p. m.

**Yes:** Allman, Ayers, Mapes, Mott, Nyman & Piccolo.

**No:** None.

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Gregory S. Mapes, Mayor

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Sheila Letourneau, City Clerk