JOINT CITY SCHOOL WORK SESSION SUMMARY

CITY OF BAXTER/BAXTER COMMUNITY SCHOOL

BAXTER COMMUNITY CENTER

APRIL 5, 2023

**PRESENT:** Baxter City Mayor, Bryan DeJong; Baxter Council members, Josh Meckley, Dan Kunkel, Josh Lokenvitz, Jason Robinson, City Clerk, Katie Wilson; Baxter School Superintendent, Mickolyn Clapper; School Board Members, Colette Kunkel, Debbie Meyer, Cory Robinson, Kim Tichy, Jon Northrup; Baxter Economic Development Chairman, Katie Petermeier; Baxter City/School Librarian & Hometown Pride Member, Marie Van Beek; Baxter Wellness Center Representative, Stacia Vansice; Baxter Rec Representative, Travis Henderson; Chamber of Commerce Representative Natalie Moorman; Baxter Food Pantry Volunteer, Bruce Connelly; Growing Greatness Learning Center Directors, Melissa Brummel and Lindsay Bethards; Baxter Police Chief, Bill Daggett; Jasper County Supervisor, Brandon Talsma.

The joint work session began at 6:00 p.m. with Mayor Bryan DeJong welcoming those in attendance. The following overview briefly highlights discussion in regards to current community and school related issues.

**JASPER COUNTY SUPERVISORS** – Brandon Talsma was in attendance to give a brief update on county projects. The county is initiating more presence online to promote JEDCO. ARPA funds that were received will be designated towards repairing Chichaqua Valley Trail between Baxter & Ira. A new nature center is in the works for Jasper County Conservation. Over the last six months they have been developing a comprehensive plan to focus on improving certain sections of the gravel roads. The county will advertise the dates of these meetings on Facebook for the gravel road program.

**GROWING GREATNESS LEARNING CENTER** – Directors, Lindsay Bethards and Melissa Brummel reported. Current enrollment at the center is 87 children. There has been many improvements and renovations made to the new building since their purchase two years ago. The biggest challenge they are facing at the time is finding staff. They have made efforts to modify the culture of the company and provide a more welcoming environment. The 3 & 4 year old program is currently operated out of the High Street apartments, and school age program out of their location on Main Street.

**BAXTER FOOD PANTRY** – Bruce Connelly was in attendance to provide a brief update. The food pantry has been hosting a breadline once a month at the community center. These breadlines are open to the community, regardless of income. The food pantry is ran by 3 volunteers, and funded entirely from individual donations from citizens and churches.

**BAXTER WELLNESS CENTER** – Stacia Vansice provided a report. The committee has been looking into new fundraising ideas for the facility and will be hosting kickball at Baxter Fun Days this summer. There has not been any new equipment installed at the facility, and treadmills are currently getting repaired. The committee is always looking for new members to help with the center. The committee is entertaining the thought of charging an annual fee to help pay for the cost of repairing and replacing equipment.

**BAXTER REC** – Travis Henderson, President, was in attendance. Henderson stated they are always looking for directors to help run the youth sports programs. The committee is working on modernizing sign-up froms via Google Docs. They have received donations from local businesses due to marketing efforts. Baxter Rec provides sports teams for football, wrestling, volleyball, basketball, baseball, softball, and soccer.

2023 Leagues:

Football – 75 players (K-6) Flag football

Volleyball – 47 players

Wrestling – 2 meets have been scheduled

Basketball – 66 players – Purchased new basketballs and hoops

Baseball/Softball – 103 players – Committee is still looking to find 5th & 6th grade coaches. BAMBAM ball has been set up for the younger ages.

Soccer – These leagues will be playing games at the YMCA in Newton

**CHAMBER OF COMMERCE** – Natalie Moorman, Chamber chairman, was present. The Chamber has hosted 2 ribbon cuttings in the past year. The Welcome Bag project that started during COVID-19 is still operating well. New residents receive a welcome bag upon setting up utilities with the City. 57 businesses and community organizations participated with including items in the welcome bags. The Chamber is hoping to purchase new bike racks and trash bins for the Main Street Beautification Project. Due to lack of participation at Chamber meetings and the need to work more closely with BEDCO, the Chamber of Commerce meetings will be void and conjoined with BEDCO meetings. The Chamber also intends to draft a survey to send out to all business owners to start publishing business spotlights.

**BAXTER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION** – Katie Petermeier, BEDCO President, reported. The committee has been working closely with Jeff Davidson (JEDCO Director) to take advantage of grant opportunities and seek professional guidance. The committee’s current initiative is to sell the trailer park property to see that develop into duplex style housing. BEDCO conducted a community-wide survey to see what Baxter residents want. Many responses included interest in single family/senior housing. BEDCO is trying to accomplish this with duplexes on S. West Ave. The committee has been looking at ideas for developing East Ave. property, and will need to work closely with the City due to the nursing home. Realtors for Westfield Horizons are providing monthly reports to the committee. One of the walk-out lots in Westfield Horizons has been sold and will be closing mid-April. The Chamber of Commerce has been absorbed into BEDCO. Petermeier stated anyone is welcome to review the community survey results.

**HOMETOWN PRIDE** – Hometown Pride member, Marie Van Beek, was in attendance. Progress continues at the park with the construction of the shelter house. The shelter house roof was ordered in September, they are hoping to have it this summer. The committee has ordered picnic tables, grills, and fire pits. The committee is researching the cost of a splash pad – using a water vs. recycling water system. Three primitive camp sites will also be placed in the northwest corner of the park.

**COMMUNITY/SCHOOL LIBRARY** – Librarian, Marie Van Beek, reported. Van Beek announced Baxter’s new summer programs for this year include Blank Park Zoo passes & Science Center passes for families. Library hours will be changing for summer shortly. They have been utilizing an online program through the state for e-books, audio books, and magazines. This program provides a much larger selection of reading material for all ages. The summer library schedule will be placed on the city website calendar.

**BAXTER SCHOOL BOARD** - School Board President, Cory Robinson, reported. Enrollment in the district is 334, down 3 from last year. Open enrollment has increased by 14. Total enrollment is 457 for K-12 students, which is up 5.5 from last year. The school has experienced budget constraints and a shortage in teachers. Many new policies have been implemented by the state. The school has been looking to add more security to the buildings. The Fire Department has been communicating with the school on those areas of needed safety improvements.

**BAXTER CITY COUNCIL** – Mayor Bryan DeJong reported. The city has published a new Request for Proposal for redevelopment of the nursing home property. The city has hired a new city clerk, Katie Wilson, and a new utility clerk, Erin Suttek. DeJong discussed the city recently declared EMS an essential service to our community and the new initiative is to pass the essential service levy to keep Baxter’s EMS services. Discussion was held on how our ambulance is currently funded and the importance of passing the levy. Gliem, EMS Director, is preparing information to present at a community town hall meeting. Discussion about sharing the cost of seal-coating Geise Park as a joint effort between the school and City. One-Way street is still operating smoothly in front of the school. Mayor DeJong addressed the need for relocation of the food pantry due to the fire department’s growth.

**FIRE REPORT** – Brock Hansen, Baxter Fire Chief, submitted a report prior to the meeting. The report addressed concerns and top priorities the fire department is addressing with the school to make improvements for safety measures.

**EMS REPORT** – City’s EMS Essential Service initiative discussed earlier in the meeting.

**POLICE REPORT** – Chief Bill Daggett was in attendance. Daggett announced he is pleased with how the SRO program is going with the school and with the Baxter community. Daggett gave brief updates on his reserve program and the training of his officers. Daggett acknowledged the need for shared community parking.

**FUTURE EFFORTS**

Superintendent, Mickolyn Clapper, recognized the reassurance the police presence in the school provides. The school is looking at many facility updates to improve safety. This funding would be used on cameras, signage to number doors, radio repeater (large safety button to dispatch all officers in state), and to also have a separate entrance to the community/school library so patrons that are non-students do not need to walk through the school to enter the library. The school’s long-term goal is to build a fieldhouse.

Mayor Bryan DeJong thanked everyone for their participation in the annual work session. The session ended at 7:25 pm.

Katie Wilson, City Clerk