

**Finance & Personnel Committee
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

1

1 The Meeting of the Finance & Personnel Committee of the City of Onalaska was called to order
2 at 7:15 p.m. on Wednesday, November 3, 2021. It was noted that the meeting had been
3 announced and a notice posted at City Hall.

4
5 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Ald. Diane Wulf, Ald. Tom Smith,
6 Ald. Jim Olson.

7
8 Also Present (either in person or remotely): City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch, Mayor Kim
9 Smith, City Clerk JoAnn Marcon, Financial Services Director/Treasurer Sabrina Steger, City
10 Attorney Amanda Jackson, Human Resources Manager Amy Frandsen, Planning Manager Katie
11 Aspenson, Parks and Recreation Director Dan Wick, Police Chief Charles Ashbeck, Fire Chief
12 Troy Gudie, Accounting & Payroll Supervisor Karen Marquardt, Ald. Cari Burmaster.

13
14 A quorum of the City of Onalaska Common Council, Board of Public Works & Public Transit
15 Committee were present for this meeting.

16
17 **Item 2 – Consideration and action on minutes from the previous meeting**

18
19 Ald. Wulf noted the minutes from the October 27 Finance and Personnel II Committee meeting
20 have not yet come out and said the minutes from that meeting will be approved at the December
21 8 Finance and Personnel Committee meeting. Ald. Wulf noted the committee is approving the
22 minutes from the October 6 Finance and Personnel Committee meeting.

23
24 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to approve the minutes from the October 6,
25 2021 Finance and Personnel Committee meeting as printed and on file in the City Clerk's Office.

26
27 On voice vote, motion carried.

28
29 **Item 3 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

30
31 Ald. Wulf called three times for anyone wishing to provide public input and closed that portion
32 of the meeting.

33
34 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

35
36 **FINANCE**

37
38 **Item 4 – September 2021 Omni Center Financials**

39
40 Sabrina reported the Omni Center is at 45 percent of its budgeted revenues, and 38.41 percent of
41 the facility's expenses remain.

42
Reviewed 11/8/2021 by Sabrina Steger & Amy Frandsen

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43 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to accept and place on file the September 2021
44 Omni Center Financials.

45

46 On voice vote, motion carried.

47

48 **Item 5 – September 2021 General Fund Financials**

49

50 Sabrina noted 34 percent of the city’s total expenses remain. Sabrina also noted 13 percent
51 remains of what was budgeted for total revenues, and she told committee members she is
52 confident about the city’s standing regarding both expenditures and revenues.

53

54 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to accept and place on file the September 2021
55 General Fund Financials.

56

57 On voice vote, motion carried.

58

59 **Item 6 – Gundersen Health System Parking Ramp Financials for 2021 3rd Quarter**

60

61 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to accept and place on file the Gundersen
62 Health System Parking Ramp Financials for 2021 3rd Quarter.

63

64 Ald. T. Smith inquired about the length of the agreement between the City of Onalaska and
65 Gundersen Health System.

66

67 City Administrator Rindfleisch said there is a time factor on it by agreement, and he told Ald. T.
68 Smith the parking ramp will become the property of Gundersen Health System once it is paid
69 off. City Administrator Rindfleisch promised to provide Ald. T. Smith with that date.

70

71 On voice vote, motion carried.

72

73 **PERSONNEL**

74

75 **Item 1 – Recruitment update**

76

77 Amy reported the following:

78

- 79
- Jack Hubbard filled the Firefighter/EMT position October 4.
 - Erin Duffer filled the Planning Associate position October 11.
 - Applications for the open Administrative Assistant/Paralegal position will be accepted
82 until November 15.
 - Interviews are scheduled later in November for the remaining vacancy for the Police
83

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84 Officer position.

85

86 **Item 2 – Policy Updates:**

87

- 88 • 1.10 Introductory Work Period Policy
- 89 • 1.11 Position Classification Policy
- 90 • 7.04 Jury Duty and Civil Leave Policy
- 91 • 7.05 Vacation Policy
- 92 • 7.06 Sick & Funeral Leave Policy
- 93 • 7.07 Holidays & Personal Days Policy
- 94 • 7.09 Layoff & Furlough Policy
- 95 • 7.10 Alternate Work Arrangement Policy

96

97 Ald. Wulf said all of the updates before the committee this evening will affect the city’s
98 employees, and she noted it is the Common Council’s purview to proof policies. Ald. Wulf said
99 she believes the proposals are coming from either staff and/or administration for a myriad of
100 reasons, and she said she is looking forward to hearing the reasons behind the proposals. Ald.
101 Wulf said, “I think some of these can be very delicate subjects to talk about, and I think some of
102 these will be more important to some employees or departments than others. I personally would
103 encourage everyone this evening to have open and honest, but respectful conversations about this
104 this evening.” Ald. Wulf also welcomed input from staff members who either are attending this
105 meeting in person or online.

106

107 Amanda told committee members that administration has wanted to perform a comprehensive
108 policy update for some time, and she said this is the start of a greater project. Amanda said it is
109 not possible to address all the policies simultaneously as the city does not have the staff to do so,
110 and she told committee members this is a foreshadowing of what is to come as they likely will
111 see a handful of policies each month moving forward through the next year. Amanda said some
112 are bundled together because of the way they are interconnected, and how one relates to the
113 other, and sometimes changing one policy carries through and has immediate impacts on other
114 policies. Amanda said that dictates how the city addresses this in some cases.

115

116 **1.10 Introductory Work Period Policy:** Amanda said this policy was particularly relevant now
117 because the city has had a couple of reorganizations where employees were promoted internally,
118 and there also were both internal and external hires. Amanda said supervisors and department
119 heads have stated that having to evaluate employees utilizing the city’s yearly evaluation process
120 is very cumbersome. Amanda said the goal was to make it easier for employees to be evaluated,
121 and also to have a smooth transition. The Introductory Work Period Policy addresses those
122 issues.

123

124 Amanda also pointed out there were inconsistencies in past practice, as well as the policy.

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125 Amanda noted the policy technically states that an employee may not take any vacation during
126 their six-month trial period, and she said she is not aware of that being followed in at least the
127 last decade. Amanda said employees always have been allowed to utilize their vacation,
128 whatever month that might be, upon hire. Amanda noted employees have had to wait for their
129 sick leave, and she told committee members that philosophy has been changing due to the
130 COVID-19 pandemic. Amanda said the city wants to encourage its employees to remain at
131 home and utilize sick time if they have it and are ill, and she stated, “Putting a barrier between
132 them using earned sick time doesn’t seem to benefit the staff and the employers. ... What often
133 happens is they either come to work sick or they’re using unused sick leave. They’re either
134 working sick or they’re not working. If they have sick time, we don’t necessarily find a value in
135 them taking unpaid time off. That was probably the biggest change in this policy.”

136
137 Amy said she believes the remainder of the changes were related to clarification related to the
138 introductory period (six months for employees, 12 months for department heads).

139
140 City Administrator Rindfleisch noted the proposed policy update includes language stating that
141 city employees who either are promoted or competitively transferred also will be in a
142 probationary timeframe. City Administrator Rindfleisch noted this language had not been
143 included in the past, and he said there is no opportunity to really ensure it is the proper fit for that
144 employee.

145
146 Ald. Wulf referred to language stating that the introductory trial period may be extended for up
147 to one-half of the original introductory period by the employee’s supervisor, and she said she
148 understands that the city would not want to lose a good employee or a good hire if perhaps he or
149 she needs additional training or time.

150
151 Ald. T. Smith asked if this is a revision to the existing policy moving forward.

152
153 City Administrator Rindfleisch told Ald. T. Smith that is correct and said anything that is
154 underlines is written as new, while the strike-through is being deleted from the policy. City
155 Administrator Rindfleisch said the policy exists, but it needed clarification and editing so that it
156 may become a more useful tool.

157
158 Ald. Wulf said she believes it lends clarity.

159
160 City Administrator Rindfleisch cited the example of the question regarding the salary of an
161 employee who is returned to a prior position, noting that it is not addressed in the current policy.

162
163 Ald. T. Smith said he would like all the alderpersons to provide input regarding the policy
164 changes and noted these items can be discussed under the Non-Consent Agenda at the November
165 9 Common Council meeting.

166
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167 Ald. Wulf said she has less concern about passing changes at the Finance and Personnel
168 Committee level with a recommendation, and she asked that all the changes be placed on the
169 Non-Consent Agenda.

170

171 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to approve 1.10 Introductory Work Period
172 Policy.

173

174 On voice vote, motion carried.

175

176 **1.11 Position Classification Policy:** Amanda said this one is “entirely clean-up,” and she told
177 committee members the most significant item likely is differentiating between regular part-time
178 and hourly part-time positions. Amanda noted a significant amount of overlapping terminology
179 is being utilized, and she said the goal is to establish a consistent set of terms being utilized
180 throughout the city’s policy. Hourly part-time employees, such as a couple of Finance
181 Department employees, work on a part-time basis with irregular schedules. Regular part-time
182 employees work on a consistent schedule, as is the case in the Police Department, and also with
183 the janitorial staff. Amanda noted the policy also calls out which positions that are considered to
184 be unclassified (seasonal full-time, seasonal part-time, temporary, substitute, intern).

185

186 Ald. Wulf asked committee members if they are seeking clarification regarding No. 4 (“Part-
187 Time Firefighters”).

188

189 Ald. T. Smith and Ald. Olson both indicated they are satisfied with what is in the policy.

190

191 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to approve 1.11 Position Classification Policy.

192

193 Ald. Burmaster referred to the additional verbiage included in the Part-Time Firefighters position
194 regarding the hire date and asked if it does not apply to any other part-time position. Ald.
195 Burmaster said, “The reason we had that before is because if they were hired previous to that
196 date, we would have to pay retirement on that. It caused a benefit to have to be paid. Are we not
197 restricting that anymore with the knowledge that we know we have to pay that retirement if it
198 goes over those hours if they were a previous hire?”

199

200 Amy explained that this speaks to the Wisconsin Retirement System and said the city is required
201 to enroll individuals who meet a certain threshold. The city pays half, and the individual pays
202 half. Amy said that still exists regarding doing prior service checks on any individuals known to
203 be regular part-time employees. Amy told Ald. Burmaster it is difficult at this time because there
204 likely are 300 to 350 city employees who are classified as “seasonal,” which she admitted is
205 likely incorrect. Amy said department heads are in the process of determining the actual
206 classification of those employees and HR will be performing prior service checks on the
207 employees who would be considered regular part-time to ensure that they are enrolled, if
208 applicable.

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209

210 On voice vote, motion carried.

211

212 **7.04 Jury Duty and Civil Leave Policy:** Amanda said this also is a “clean-up,” and she noted
213 the jury duty policy is being extended to include civil leave, which was discussed under a
214 separate policy. The policy addresses the types of leave that would be covered under civil
215 service, such as serving on a jury or being subpoenaed as part of an employee’s job. Amanda
216 said there also have been edits regarding the procedure for an employee to notify a supervisor,
217 turning over jury or witness fees to the Finance Department, and proper recording in the time
218 clock. Amanda noted the policy also addresses voting – employees may take up to three hours
219 leave, with a supervisor’s approval, to vote. The employer gets to determine when that is and
220 schedule that absence.

221

222 Ald. Wulf asked if the three hours is a State of Wisconsin law.

223

224 Amanda said yes.

225

226 Ald. Wulf stated she has always appreciated how well the City of Onalaska has conducted its
227 elections and noted there had been long lines at a past election in the Village of West Salem.

228

229 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to approve 7.04 Jury Duty and Civil Leave
230 Policy.

231

232 On voice vote, motion carried.

233

234 **7.05 Vacation Policy:** Amanda said she wants to talk about the next section of benefit policies
235 collectively, noting that within the last 11 months the city has had three positions for which it
236 had extended an offer to its first-choice candidate, and those individuals have declined the offer,
237 citing the city’s benefits and the fact it does not have a formal flexible working policy. Amanda
238 said that had prompted internal discussions and self-examination regarding how the city
239 compares to the job market, the private sector, the public sector, and its primary competitors, and
240 also looking at what the city offers regarding benefits from a more holistic perspective.

241

242 Amanda said, “We found that as far as new staff coming in and days off, we are, as a whole,
243 light. Amy has put together some data, and we will get that out to everybody. It kind of walks
244 through each of those categories that we looked at: vacation, holiday, personal days. Some do
245 floating holidays. There are a lot of ways to do benefits, and each does it a little bit differently.
246 We looked at that, and that kind of influenced, as well as internal discussions. We did some
247 employee surveys that I’ll talk about later. That kind of influenced these next couple policies.”

248

249 Amanda first addressed the Vacation Policy and noted more vacation time is the number one
250 item individuals negotiate when the city extends a job offer to them. Amanda said the policy

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251 includes a proposal to increase year zero to 10 days prorated, which would be an increase of five
252 days. Amanda noted that while the city negotiates vacation for certain employees, there is no
253 formula or rationale under which this is done. Amanda said the policy now includes verbiage
254 that states, *“The city may credit a new employee upon initial hire with the number of years that*
255 *the employee spent in a position or positions that were part of the required, minimum*
256 *qualifications stated in that employee’s job description, up to a maximum number of years’*
257 *experience required by the job description, subject to approval by the City Administrator or*
258 *designee.”* Amanda said this implements a formula, a cap, and a rationale to how and why the
259 city might increase a vacation for an incoming position.

260
261 Ald. Wulf asked if an individual who the city hires for a particular position would be placed in
262 the “Year 9-15” category and receive 20 days of vacation if he or she has a minimum 10 years of
263 service.

264
265 Amanda told Ald. Wulf that individual could and said it would not be automatic. Amanda said
266 she believes there are very few city positions that require a minimum of 10 years’ experience,
267 noting a majority of the city’s positions tend to be more in the five to eight years’ experience
268 range.

269
270 Amanda noted the other changes generally are various clean-ups, and she told committee
271 members one change is employees will be able to automatically carry over their vacation.
272 Employees currently must submit a written request to carry over vacation. Amanda noted
273 employee may submit a written request if they do not wish to carry over their vacation, and she
274 said, “We will allow them those 40 hours. There is one very limited exception where [Human
275 Resources] and the City Administer could authorize additional carryover, and that is if it’s due to
276 a work-related serious illness or injury. So if you’re hurt at work and you can’t use that vacation,
277 that would be a limited exception where they could allow some carryover. Any other requests
278 would have to come to this [committee].”

279
280 City Administrator Rindfleisch told committee members that in the absence of some of the
281 specific additions in the policy, there is a significant amount of authority granted to the City
282 Administrator. City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “This does apply restrictions to that
283 authority by spelling out guidelines, in particular when it comes to negotiations. These are
284 restrictions I’m wholeheartedly supportive of because it provides the Council a direct guideline
285 to the boundaries of the negotiations. We have had employees who have come in and are no
286 longer here able to manipulate the hiring process to get probably far more vacation than I’m
287 comfortable with. But there were no guidelines that I could resist and say, ‘No, we cannot.’ I
288 am very supportive of what I see is empowering the Council and limiting the free range a City
289 Administrator would have otherwise.”

290
291 Ald. Wulf used the example of an individual who would be hired November 1 and the Common
292 Council were to approve this proposed policy at its November 9 meeting, asking if it would be
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293 retroactive.

294

295 Amanda told Ald. Wulf no and said this is a policy that perhaps at least the vacation portion
296 should be effective January 1, 2022.

297

298 Ald. Burmaster referred to the additional five days of vacation proposed for “Year 5-8,” “Year 9-
299 15,” “Year 16-21,” and “Year 22-plus,” and she said from an administration standpoint she
300 believes it would be easier to handle if the days were stated all the way through.

301

302 Ald. Wulf suggested perhaps putting the total in parenthesis after “an additional five days.”

303

304 Ald. Burmaster cited the example of the city hiring an individual who would start his or her
305 employment with 15 days of vacation, and she said, “What’s hard to administer is, how is it
306 handled from that date forward? I think that needs to be spelled out clearly when that happens
307 because do they jump to that next one the next year? Or do they have to stay at that level until
308 they hit that many years? It becomes kind of a nightmare managing that for personnel if that
309 isn’t laid out clearly.”

310

311 City Administrator Rindfleisch addressed Ald. Burmaster’s first point regarding the policy that
312 reads “an additional five days” of vacation, and he said it was based on his input that it was
313 logical at the time to change it from the number of days to “an additional five days.” However,
314 City Administrator Rindfleisch also said he could not recall why it seemed logical to do so, and
315 he stated, “The second part of the question is exactly why it made sense. It does speak to
316 somebody coming in with a modified amount of vacation. It is then the anniversary dates of the
317 time that they are here that they grant the additional five days. I think that clarifies where we
318 stand where if somebody comes in at the point of five years of experience and therefore they’re
319 getting the 15 days, this does spell out that their employment has to be here for eight years before
320 they grant an additional five days to whatever they accrued. It is confusing, but I think we can
321 put that in parenthesis. That was the attempt to clarify when does somebody advance that date.
322 If someone is granted that 15 days of vacation based on experience, at what point do they get the
323 additional five days? It is after eight years. That’s our standard practice right now, but not
324 everyone is subject to that. There are some inconsistencies, so if there is a different way of
325 writing that, I’m comfortable with that. But that is exactly what Alder Burmaster was speaking
326 to: our attempt to show when do you actually get an additional five days? It’s after eight years of
327 employment here.”

328

329 Ald. Wulf noted Amanda had stated earlier that currently, employees must make a submission by
330 December 31, and she said it appears to her that that is the most efficient use of time that there
331 automatically will be a maximum carryover of 40 hours. Ald. Wulf noted there have been
332 instances in years past where employees had wanted to carry over more than 40 hours, or there
333 have been instances when an employee wished to be paid out those hours. Ald. Wulf said she
334 believes there had been some policy changes after one payout, and she said she believes past

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335 requests to carry over more than 40 hours have always come before both the Finance and
336 Personnel Committee and the Common Council. Ald. Wulf asked if that still will be the case
337 under the revised policy.

338
339 Amanda said yes.

340
341 Ald. Wulf asked where that is stated in the policy.

342
343 City Administrator Rindfleisch said it is not, noting it is not stated in the current policy either.
344 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, "Therefore, it has to go to Council. The way it is written is
345 still, 'use it or lose it.' There is no more than 40 hours to be rolled over regardless of the process
346 that we establish." City Administrator Rindfleisch cited the example of an employee who could
347 not utilize vacation time during an election and said it is a policy exception if there is more than
348 40 hours of vacation. Only the Common Council may make policy exceptions.

349
350 Ald. T. Smith asked if there will be any changes from a financial perspective once the policy
351 changes are enacted.

352
353 Sabrina told Ald. T. Smith there would be no financial effects as there is the presumption the
354 city's full-time employees work 2,080 hours. Sabrina added the city would not pay out any
355 unused vacation.

356
357 Amanda said that although employees receive their bank of vacation in January, they still must
358 earn it. If an employee leaves before he or she has earned his or her vacation, he or city must
359 pay back the city.

360
361 Ald. Wulf asked if there ever has been a situation where the amount the employee has had to pay
362 back was greater than his or her paycheck.

363
364 Sabrina said yes and told committee members that individual would be required to write the city
365 a check.

366
367 Ald. Wulf asked if the city has ever encountered difficulties receiving the check.

368
369 Karen said in her experience it has occurred once, and she told committee members an invoice
370 was sent to that employee, who no longer was employed at that time. Karen said that individual
371 did submit a check to the city, and she told committee members that to her knowledge the city
372 has not encountered difficulties obtaining the funds.

373
374 Ald. Wulf asked Amanda if part of the motion would be that this policy would go into effect
375 January 1, 2022.

376

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377 Amanda nodded her head in the affirmative.

378

379 Ald. T. Smith said it is his understanding that this policy change is being driven by the
380 competitive market and being able to find qualified employees.

381

382 City Administrator Rindfleisch said he believes Ald. Burmaster had raised a good point about
383 perhaps oversimplifying the language regarding that timeframe, and he told committee members
384 he invites discussion to determine if perhaps there is a better way of stating when employees
385 arrive at the next step. City Administrator Rindfleisch noted he had reread his suggested
386 language and said he finds it confusing.

387

388 Ald. Wulf referred to Ald. T. Smith's question regarding whether the new policy would have a
389 financial effect on the city, and she said it is her understanding there is the possibility that there
390 would be five fewer days of productivity per employee (new hires).

391

392 Sabrina said that is correct.

393

394 Ald. T. Smith said it would not affect the 2,080 hours, whether it is vacation or work.

395

396 Sabrina said that is correct and noted the only financial impact would be if an employee used
397 those 10 days and the city needed another employee, which means a seasonal employee's
398 services could be utilized. Sabrina said this already is pretty typical, especially in the Finance
399 Department if coverage is needed. Sabrina said, "We usually budget for that."

400

401 Ald. Wulf noted she had begun working in 1979 and said it was difficult to have only five days
402 of vacation. Ald. Wulf said, "[Five days] doesn't sound like very much."

403

404 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to approve 7.05 Vacation Policy.

405

406 On voice vote, motion carried.

407

408 **7.06 Sick & Funeral Leave Policy:** Amanda told committee members this likely is the policy
409 to which the majority of the changes had been made. Amanda said that while the city is on the
410 low end regarding what is offered for benefits and time off, the city was "extremely generous"
411 with its sick leave. Amanda said, "In discussions with employees and looking the number of
412 hours employees have banked, it became very clear that people are not using their sick time for
413 sick purposes – they're simply accumulating it indefinitely. Many view it as a form of insurance,
414 and also, quite frankly, as a severance payout, which is generally not the purpose of sick leave.
415 The purpose of sick leave is that if you're sick or your family is sick that you take the sick leave.
416 It's also meant to get you through a short-term illness such as an FMLA illness. Administration
417 compared ourselves to other municipalities and discussed this, and we looked at capping it at 960
418 hours, which is the equivalent of 120 work days, or four months. This will impact six employees

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419 that have a second leave bank. If the policy is approved with no concessions to those six
420 employees, they would lose those leave banks. That is something that [the Finance and
421 Personnel Committee] and the Council will have to decide if they would like to adopt the policy
422 as is, or if they would like to grandfather those six employees in with their existing secondary
423 leave banks. Out of over 100 employees, only six employees had reached that level of having a
424 second sick bank.

425
426 We did clean up language. As with all policies, there were some inconsistencies as far as, it talks
427 about using for illness and injury, and as we went through the policy it really only referred to
428 illness. We did expand that [to state] this is for illness, injury, or appointments-related to illness,
429 injury or health-related concerns. We also cleaned up the language relating to who you can use
430 this for. There were kind of two sets of rules: one for actual illness and appointments. We felt
431 that the same family members you should use it for if you're ill should be the same for
432 appointments, so we just consolidated those."

433
434 Amanda said the policy also addresses employee classifications and at which level regular part-
435 time employees would receive a pro rata amount of this benefit; notifications and the procedures
436 through which employees report their sick leave; and documentation. Amanda noted that in the
437 past, an employee had to be gone for three consecutive days in order for the city to request a note
438 from a physician. Amanda noted there are instances in which employees develop patterns of
439 illness, and there also are instances where it would behoove the city to request that
440 documentation sooner, and she said that language had been cleaned up.

441
442 Amanda next addressed the "Value at Separation" section of the policy, noting the city's current
443 policy is that an employee who is eligible for retirement at the time of his or her separation, the
444 city will pay out one-half of his or her sick leave as severance, and the city will pay out the other
445 50 percent for an employee's insurance benefit so that he or she may remain insured moving
446 forward. Amanda said that causes a significant amount of administrative work for the Finance
447 Department, and it can extend out the benefit to where the city is paying out individuals for up to
448 three years after they have left their employment with the city. Amanda said it creates a
449 significant amount of work internally, and she noted several options had been explored,
450 including paying the money into a health savings account, and having the employee deal with a
451 third-party administrator that would assume control from the city. Amanda said city staff did not
452 approve of the second option as oftentimes several fees are levied, meaning there would be a
453 charge every time a transaction occurred. There would be a charge to administer a health
454 savings account, which Amanda said city staff did not favor.

455
456 Amanda said, "Ultimately, we felt if we were going to pay the money out, then we should just
457 pay the money out. We changed it so that the entire amount of sick leave up to the 960 [hours]
458 would be paid out to eligible employees at separation. That money would be taxable because
459 you are getting it in a lump sum, but then it would be the employee's money to do what they
460 want with without concern over following IRS regulations related to using it for health or

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461 insurance.”

462

463 Amanda addressed the situation of the death of an employee, noting that under this policy a
464 payment either could be made to the surviving spouse, or to the employee’s estate if there is no
465 surviving spouse. Amanda noted few employers provide this benefit, and she said a decision had
466 been made to remove this benefit as that situation has never occurred here to the best of anyone’s
467 knowledge.

468

469 Amanda next addressed funeral leave, noting the definition of immediate family had been
470 cleaned up so that it is more up to date with the times and comparable policies. Amanda said the
471 policy also now states that an employee may take funeral leave to grieve. Amanda noted not
472 everyone has had an immediate funeral service or memorial service during the COVID-19
473 pandemic, and she said, “Your loss is not any less simply because you don’t have a funeral, so
474 we want you to be able to have that time to process that loss and to take that leave.” Amanda
475 noted there had been some internal procedures that were not included in the policy, and she said
476 there is now clarification that if an employee does not have that leave available, he or she may
477 utilize a sick day. An employee also may augment his or her funeral leave for an immediate
478 family member and utilize two days of his or her sick leave to take off one week.

479

480 Ald. Wulf said she assumes the six employees who have a second leave bank are longtime
481 employees.

482

483 Amanda said that is correct.

484

485 Ald. Wulf stated she believes the city must be fair and said she would like to engage in a serious
486 discussion regarding the six employees who, to date, “have honestly earned it, as everyone else
487 has.” Ald. Wulf said that while she has never favored banking vacation time and receiving a
488 payout, “now that I’m here and everyone else has been enjoying that privilege and that benefit, I
489 don’t know whether I would ever feel comfortable to say, ‘Now we have a new policy, so now
490 we’re going to take it away from those six people who remain.’ I’m kind of falling on the, I
491 don’t think it would be fair for us to take them away. I would like to entertain the discussion of
492 grandfathering those six employees in. But I welcome discussion of the others, too.”

493

494 Amanda told committee members the employees may be grandfathered in as the policy is
495 written, and she told them if they choose to do so she would ask that they clarify if they will
496 allow the employees to continue adding to the second bank or if that second bank will be capped.
497 Amanda also asked committee members to decide if they are only going to grandfather in the
498 employees for that small portion of the policy, or if the six employees will be left under the
499 former policy in its entirety.

500

501 Ald. Wulf and Ald. T. Smith both said their initial thought is to cap it.

502

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13

503 Ald. Burmaster addressed the second sick bank, noting there are certain things for which it may
504 be utilized. An employee must have a serious illness where he or she is gone for more than 10
505 days, and Ald. Burmaster noted it usually involves a hospital stay. Ald. Burmaster also noted
506 there is no separation value to it, and she said payment out is only on the first bank, adding that
507 there has never been a payout on the second bank. Ald. Burmaster noted there is no value to it
508 when an employee retires, and she said she does not know if that makes any difference in the
509 committee's decision.

510
511 Ald. Olson said, "It would have been nice as we suggest some of these things to have us see the
512 fiscal impact of those in dollars and cents. ... There's not a problem with why you're doing this.
513 It's just that this has a fiscal impact to the people we represent, the taxpayer. It would be nice if I
514 knew what that impact was. It probably wouldn't change my mind as far as the value of people
515 we want to employ, because I don't doubt for a second that the federal government has not been
516 our friend when you're giving money away and you expect the people are going to hold onto a
517 work ethic – it doesn't work that way. I understand what you're dealing with today. It is tough,
518 and we have to be competitive. If there is a way we could have some kind of an idea for some of
519 these things, and you don't have to go deep into this because [Sabrina] is going to hate me. If we
520 can have some kind of an idea so we have something just to balance out, because there is an
521 equal benefit we're trying to accomplish here for the right reasons, and we want to be a good
522 place that people employ – I don't doubt that for a second – and we do have a good place to
523 work. But if you can just think that over, and if I'm out of line, just tell me so."

524
525 Amanda told Ald. Olson he is not out of line and said the 960 hours is the maximum the city
526 pays out under either policy. Amanda noted that that does not change and said, "We could give
527 you historically how many people each year for, say, the last five years we've paid that out to, if
528 that would be helpful. As far as the sick leave banks go, when we start to look at those
529 secondary banks for those six individuals, we have anywhere from 1,200 to over 2,000 hours
530 banked. But again, as Cari mentioned, those do have a limited use to them and we don't pay
531 those out. What often happens is the individual retires and then they just disappear because
532 they're not paid out. I don't know that there would be fiscal information related to that, but I
533 could get you the information of how many hours people have, if that would be helpful."

534
535 Ald. Olson said, "I think it's reasonable to say if we're not looking at a lot of difference it really
536 isn't worth the time for you to look that up. I'm not saying that we have to be that critical about
537 something because the emphasis behind why we're doing this is a positive thing, to have
538 employees who stay here, because we're competitive. I guess I'll leave that up to you to think
539 about."

540
541 City Administrator Rindfleisch said he can confirm Amanda's statement that there is no financial
542 impact on this particular policy and only this policy, noting the proposed payout for 960 hours
543 already is in place. City Administrator Rindfleisch further stated the banks that currently are
544 paid out, unless an employee is utilizing it for up to the 10 days for service, are not paid out

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545 when an employee retires. City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “In effect, from present practice
546 to proposal, there is zero-dollar impact on this policy. There may be other policies going
547 forward, and we’ll answer those as we move forward.”

548
549 Sabrina stated she agrees with City Administrator Rindfleisch’s statements and said the only
550 thing she would add is if an employee were to be injured and had a 2,000-hour bank in his or her
551 second bank and also in his or her first bank, he or she could be gone for one year, which would
552 have a financial impact the way the city currently operates.

553
554 Ald. Wulf asked if the second bank is anything over 960 hours.

555
556 Amanda said yes.

557
558 Ald. Wulf asked how it may currently be utilized.

559
560 Amanda said it may be used for any 10-day or greater illness, noting it could include a hospital
561 stay, a COVID-19 quarantine, or a surgery. Amanda said, “Part of the problem is where I go
562 back to referencing the insurance policy is that there seems to be this idea that if somebody were
563 injured with a major injury that required them to be out for a year that they would be paid for an
564 entire year and the city would just hold their job for them. That runs amok with FMLA. We
565 don’t have to hold somebody’s job for an entire year; quite frankly, we can’t hold somebody’s
566 job and pay them out for an entire year. Unfortunately, it does have an impact administratively
567 on the city, both from a financial cost and also a productivity cost.”

568
569 Ald. Wulf addressed the funeral leave section and noted she did not see either daughter-in-law or
570 son-in-law listed amongst the immediate family members. Ald. Wulf also noted an allowance
571 for the spouse of a child had been crossed out, and she asked if that been removed deliberately,
572 or if its removal had been inadvertent and should be put back in the policy.

573
574 Amanda told Ald. Wulf she has no objections to putting it back in, and she said, “Families are
575 diverse, and I think it becomes more and more complex. Trying to capture all of those different
576 familial members gets tricky. We can definitely add those back in.”

577
578 Ald. Wulf said it is her understanding the committee has the option to accept the policy as is, to
579 accept the policy as is and grandfather in the six current employees regarding the second leave
580 bank, or to do nothing.

581
582 Motion by Ald. T. Smith to approve 7.06 Sick & Funeral Leave Policy; to include the six current
583 employees regarding the second leave bank; and to add both daughter-in-law and son-in-law to
584 the immediate family members for funeral leave.

585
586 Amanda asked Ald. T. Smith if the six employees’ secondary banks would be capped.

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587
588 Ald. T. Smith said yes.
589
590 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to approve 7.06 Sick & Funeral Leave Policy;
591 to include the six current employees regarding the second leave bank and capping said bank; and
592 to add both daughter-in-law and son-in-law to the immediate family members for funeral leave.
593
594 Mayor K. Smith addressed the “Value at Separation” section, noting that employees who leave
595 due to retirement are paid 50 percent of their accumulated hours. Mayor K. Smith asked if it is
596 correct to say the committee wishes to change it so that they receive the entire amount.
597
598 Amanda told Mayor K. Smith yes and noted a portion of the policy that had been struck reads,
599 *“The remaining 50 percent of the employee’s accumulated sick leave shall be credited to pay*
600 *monthly premiums for continued coverage for the employee.”* Amanda said, “Assuming they
601 have 960 [hours] currently, we would be paying the whole [amount]. They get half of it as
602 severance right away, and then we slowly pay the rest out monthly as a health premium. That’s
603 our challenge administratively.”
604
605 Mayor K. Smith referred to the sentence that reads, “Any accumulated hours over 960 hours
606 shall not be paid,” and she said, “Once you got to 960, I thought you wouldn’t be accumulating
607 any more.”
608
609 Amanda told Mayor K. Smith that is correct and said she was not certain what would happen
610 with the six grandfathered employees. Amanda said, “We locked it to see what was going to
611 happen with those just to make it very clear that if you do for any reason have over 960, that is
612 what we will pay out.”
613
614 On voice vote, motion carried.
615
616 **7.07 Holidays & Personal Days Policy:** Amanda said city staff had examined benefits and the
617 amount of days that employees are receiving, and the city compared itself to its local
618 competitors. Amanda noted the city was “a little light” on its holidays and its vacation, and she
619 also noted some competitors have more personal days; some have the same number of days; and
620 some allow employees to have floating holidays. Amanda said city staff had looked at the city’s
621 schedule going out the next couple years and noticed that New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day
622 falls over a weekend. Amanda noted this means the city will close earlier and earlier not on a
623 holiday for tax bill purposes. This means the city would be closed December 29 and 30 one
624 year, and Amanda said there was some concern over that causing some confusion for taxpayers.
625 Amanda noted it will happen this year and said it could not be addressed, and she said some
626 municipalities are moving away from closing their doors for holidays that occur on a weekend.
627 Amanda noted there are only three of those: New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day, and
628 Independence Day. Amanda said rather than closing on July 6 if Independence Day falls over
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16

629 the weekend, the municipality is staying open and giving its employees a floating holiday.

630

631 Amanda said the idea was presented to city staff via a survey, and employees were asked how
632 they would like to proceed. A majority indicated they like the concept of a floating holiday, and
633 Amanda said employees were given the option of the city doing this for all holidays that fall on a
634 weekend (New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Independence
635 Day). The other option would be to leave Christmas as is, and the holidays would be limited to
636 New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, and Independence Day. Amanda noted employees
637 overwhelmingly wanted to do it for the second option, and she said she believes more people
638 travel for Christmas and have plans that go beyond those days. Amanda noted those changes had
639 been made in this policy, and she said there also were half-days for New Year's Eve and Good
640 Friday. Amanda noted no other local municipalities close for Good Friday, and she also noted
641 most are closed New Year's Eve day. Amanda said, "To give employees a full day holiday, we
642 did just shift that so that we are no longer recognizing Good Friday and closing for part of the
643 day, but we would close for all of New Year's Eve day."

644

645 Amanda noted language had been cleaned up throughout the policy, and she said language had
646 been included stating if an exempt employee works on a holiday, he or she will receive comp
647 time. Amanda said, "We believe that holidays do have a sort of sacred level to them. And if we
648 are asking, for instance, the Omni Center staff to come in and work Thanksgiving Day, we want
649 to recognize that in a way that's a little different. They're going above and beyond, and they're
650 coming in on a holiday, so we are going to give them some time off to use within the next three
651 months to compensate for them having to work on that holiday. Regular part-time employees
652 would receive holiday pay only when it falls on their regularly scheduled work day, so we did
653 clean that language up a bit."

654

655 Amanda noted there had been some clarification regarding Christmas Eve and Christmas Day,
656 also noting the city closes on Monday and Tuesday and does not follow Friday-Monday for days
657 off if the holiday days fall on a Sunday-Monday. Amanda noted this already is on the city
658 schedule and said it clarifies the practice in the policy. Amanda noted there is language related
659 to New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, and Independence Day – the city will remain open if they
660 fall on a Saturday or Sunday, and employees will receive a floating holiday. Employees will
661 receive one floating holiday in 2022 if this policy passes. Personal days have been increased to
662 four paid personal days per year – two are accrued January 1, and two are accrued July 1.

663 Amanda said that goes back to the discussion of the city becoming more competitive and
664 comparable in its recruiting.

665

666 Amanda said, "We didn't want to increase holidays. We don't want to close the city more. We
667 want to make sure the city stays open; in fact, that's why we're doing this weekend thing. We
668 didn't want to increase holidays, so we looked at personal days as an area where we could make
669 it so that we have more of an even playing field with some of our competitors – which, just for
670 the record, we considered to be the City of La Crosse, La Crosse County, UW-L, the school

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671 districts, [and] the State of Wisconsin. Those tend to be our main competitors locally, as well as
672 the private sector.”

673

674 Amy told committee members employees must be active employees to receive two personal days
675 January 1, and to receive two more personal days July 1. Amy noted someone who becomes an
676 employee midyear might not receive all the personal days, and she said someone who is hired
677 after July 1 would be given one personal day to utilize by the end of the year. Amy said, “As a
678 new employee, we’re often running into scenarios where employees have prescheduled events
679 for the upcoming months, so we’re having to write those things into the offer letter as having to
680 take that time off as leave without pay. This would offer that opportunity for those individuals to
681 have some time off for prescheduled things, whether it’s a vacation or what have you. It just
682 gives a little bit more flexibility to our employees and a little more incentive for some additional
683 time throughout the year.” Amy said employees must utilize the personal days during the year
684 and may not carry them over, nor may they be used to extend an employee’s last day if he or she
685 were to be separated from the city. Amy said staff attempted to establish parameters and allow
686 additional flexibility for employees who have situations arise that do not fall in the line of sick
687 leave or vacation.

688

689 Ald. T. Smith asked if the four personal days would be included in the 2,080 hours.

690

691 Sabrina indicated they would.

692

693 Ald. Wulf said she assumes that an exempt employee would receive one other day off if he or
694 she worked on a holiday such as Independence Day.

695

696 Amanda said yes.

697

698 Ald. Wulf said that based on her telephone conversation with Amy earlier Wednesday,
699 increasing the number of personal days from two to four is based on recruitment and retention.

700 Ald. Wulf said, “I think if there’s anything that I continue to hear in the news and read about the
701 last year-plus is it appears that more people are valuing time off than actual salary. But having
702 said that, we just did a pay study where we increased salaries, so it’s kind of a balancing act.”

703 Ald. Wulf referred to a document Amy had given her showing a table that compares vacation,
704 time off, and personal days between the City of Onalaska and the State of Wisconsin,
705 Trempealeau County, the City of La Crosse, La Crosse County, the La Crosse School District,
706 and UW-La Crosse. Ald. Wulf asked that that document be included in the November 9
707 Common Council meeting packet.

708

709 Ald. Olson said, “I like some of the thoughts that when you’re trying to think about something an
710 employee would benefit from and you tie that to a holiday, that makes perfect sense to me for
711 doing that because that’s when they want to spend time with their kids.”

712

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18

713 Ald. T. Smith said he believes it has become more of a tool in terms of recruiting employees,
714 acknowledging that it is difficult to find employees. Ald. T. Smith said, “This is another way to
715 get people here to consider us.”

716
717 Ald. Wulf said she appreciates the fact an internal poll was conducted with city staff to
718 determine how the community’s needs can be met, and also to determine what is logical in
719 determining which days the city should be open. Ald. Wulf also said it was helpful to learn the
720 practices of abutting municipalities, noting the City of Onalaska is the last municipality to close
721 at noon on Good Friday. Ald. Wulf said, “I think we need to keep current with the times and do
722 what everyone else is doing. I’m not saying we need to do exactly what everyone else is doing,
723 but I think we need to stay current with the times at the same time.”

724
725 Ald. T. Smith said he assumes that the policy will become effective January 1, 2022 if it is
726 approved.

727
728 Amanda said yes.

729
730 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to approve 7.07 Holidays & Personal Days
731 Policy, effective January 1, 2022.

732
733 On voice vote, motion carried.

734
735 **7.09 Layoff & Furlough Policy:** Amanda said city staff had looked at this policy with an eye to
736 the city’s most recent layoffs, and she noted this had been a pretty detailed policy – too detailed,
737 in Amanda’s opinion. Amanda referred to a removed sentence that said the city would attempt
738 to communicate information regarding a layoff, but the city also reserved the right not to
739 communicate information regarding a layoff. Amanda said voluntary layoffs are prioritized in
740 this policy, noting they will generally be done based on the city’s right to keep employees in all
741 function and skill areas. The city will make every effort to consider past performance and
742 seniority, and also to ensure that there is a clear recall process that states what an employee must
743 do to remain on the recall list, and how the city will handle reemployment. Language related to
744 benefits for laid off employees has been cleaned up. Amanda noted few changes were made to
745 the furlough policy, also noting most of the changes had been done to bring the policy up to date.
746 There also is clarification regarding Wisconsin Retirement – the city will examine ETF policies,
747 so some of the hours established by ETF have been removed.

748
749 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to approve 7.09 Layoff & Furlough Policy.

750
751 On voice vote, motion carried.

752
753 **7.10 Alternate Work Arrangement Policy:** Amanda told committee members this policy
754 covers several areas, and she said one of the things city staff had been asked by individuals
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19

755 during the recruiting process the last several months was if the city allows for working remotely,
756 if the city has flex time, and how the city handles remote work. Amanda said city staff has not
757 been able to give anyone a good answer because the city does not have a formal policy, even
758 though the city has some of these practices. However, Amanda said it is difficult to provide an
759 explanation to someone who is considering leaving their current position and going to a new
760 organization. Amanda said these individuals want a little more assurance that that exists.

761
762 Amanda said, "This is one of those cases where COVID-19 really did change the workplace.
763 People want more flexibility with where they work and how they work, and while not
764 appropriate for all jobs, there are jobs out there that do allow for that. One of the things we
765 looked at was, how do we put a policy in place to capture that and to formalize it in some way
766 that is flexible, but also makes sure that we're being fair and uniform, and we're ensuring that
767 the city's productivity continues to be what it should, and that we're serving our citizens in the
768 best way possible. We put this policy together in an attempt to capture all of that. We looked at
769 what our neighbors do, what municipalities across the state are doing, and we kind of took what
770 we liked from all of those different places and what we thought would work for the City of
771 Onalaska, and we put it in a very comprehensive policy."

772
773 Amanda said the policy is meant to capture three different things:
774

- 775 • **Flexible scheduling:** This means occasionally flexing an employee's schedule with a
776 supervisor's approval, and according to the operational needs of that department. A basic
777 example of this would be an hourly employee who might need to leave 30 minutes early
778 for an appointment. That employee might take an abbreviated lunch break and leave
779 early for that appointment. Flexible scheduling is to be utilized infrequently, and in
780 response to specific scheduling needs. It is temporary. It does not change an employee's
781 work schedule. It cannot be approved if it results in unauthorized overtime or
782 compensation above the regular hours scheduled. It cannot create a nonstandard work
783 schedule.
784
- 785 • **Remote work:** An employee is allowed to work at home, on the road, or in a satellite
786 location. This is considered to be both informal and formal.
 - 787 ○ **Informal:** Working remotely for a temporary time period, meaning typically very
788 short (perhaps a day or two). It must be approved for the circumstances. For
789 example, inclement weather prevents an employee from reaching City Hall. The
790 employee may work from home, and city-related business may continue. Other
791 examples include transportation issues, minor illness (employee is contagious, but
792 well enough to work remotely. Requests must be made via phone, email or text,
793 and they must be approved by a supervisor.
 - 794 ○ **Formal:** This is an agreed-to arrangement where an employee may work
795 remotely for some portion of his or her regular schedule, not to exceed three days

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796 per work week. This would need to be discussed with the supervisor or
797 department head. A form would need to be both completed and approved, and it
798 would be placed in an employee's personnel file and documented. There are
799 requirements to work remotely such as having the proper equipment, appropriate
800 work conditions, having no distractions, having an environment in which he or
801 she may work for that purpose, having an appropriate internet connection,
802 utilizing appropriate security measures, protecting city information, working in a
803 safe environment, and the hours and the days of work are agreeable to the city and
804 the employee's department, compliance with the appropriate FSLA regulations,
805 utilizing IT assistance (this could require the employee to come to City Hall), and
806 the city can halt formal remote work at any time if it is not working. There is a
807 formal process to submit requests.

808
809 • **Non-standard work schedule:** Either an employee or an entire department has a
810 different work schedule.

811
812 Amanda said this puts together criteria each department and supervisor may consider when
813 looking at all of these options and examining the department's needs and the city's needs.
814 Amanda said the onus is on each department to determine what meets its needs and what works
815 for a particular department.

816
817 Ald. T. Smith asked how such a policy would be managed, noting city employees interact with
818 the public on a regular basis. Further, departments work with contractors and vendors. Ald. T.
819 Smith noted many functions were done remotely during the pandemic, and he said that while he
820 supports the policy, he also asked who would oversee the program. Ald. T. Smith said that if the
821 policy is implemented, he wants to ensure there is consistency where it is logical. Ald. T. Smith
822 also noted perhaps there is a department that cannot have its employees work remotely because
823 of the character of that department versus another department. Ald. T. Smith cautioned that
824 remote work can cause morale issues, noting he had experienced that himself. Ald. T. Smith
825 said, "It's doable. I think it's just how you manage it."

826
827 City Administrator Rindfleisch said the document is clear that the operations of the city is
828 primacy. Further, no flexible arrangement can have a negative consequence to the services the
829 public expects the city to provide. City Administrator Rindfleisch said, "It's understood from the
830 employee on up that that is first and foremost. ... Supervisors have to keep that in mind that that
831 has to be in part. The great thing about being a supervisor is that the performance of their section
832 is judged on, as part of their performance review. If it's not working and there are complaints or
833 concerns from the public that this service is not being provided, that then rises to department
834 heads as well. My expectation of the department heads is that the services are provided to the
835 public, and I'll hold them responsible to make sure those services are provided to the public.
836 Then above me is you [the alderpersons]. If you're not hearing that something is working,
837 certainly it's the expectation of everyone at those levels from the Council on down to the

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838 supervisor and the employee providing service, if it's not working, as the document says, it will
839 end immediately because that has to happen. It's part of our expectations of having a motivated
840 and qualified supervisor, managers and department heads that you do manage this appropriately
841 like you manage anything else."

842

843 City Administrator Rindfleisch noted there currently already are alternative schedules in many
844 departments, one of which is Public Works. City Administrator Rindfleisch addressed morale,
845 noting he had looked at each department head when he met with them Wednesday morning and
846 stating there likely is not one of them who either is currently being recruited, has recently been
847 recruited, or could apply for a position elsewhere. City Administrator Rindfleisch described the
848 current marketplace as being "incredible for us," and he vowed to do everything he can to retain
849 the staff the city has at all levels of the organization. City Administrator Rindfleisch said, "This
850 comes up frequently, and at this point in time we have no document I can point to. We operate
851 in a vacuum, and as much as I said earlier on, in the absence of a policy of allowing it or
852 disallowing it, certain decisions have been made. But this is one where the empowerment of the
853 [City] Administrator is removed to the Council by passing a policy. It's one I'm always
854 supportive of to fall back on and point to people as either current employees or recruits and say,
855 'Here is our policy. Council has approved this one. These are the guidelines. You must abide
856 by these guidelines.' But we do have something on the books."

857

858 City Administrator Rindfleisch noted Katie had provided an example of how a very small
859 department would operate when there is interaction with the public and there is limited staff.

860

861 Katie told committee members Lead Building Inspector Brad Neumeister is at City Hall daily in
862 addition to performing inspections. Katie said Brad discovered during the pandemic that many
863 of the contractors were mobilizing on Mondays and beginning the bulk of their inspections and
864 calls for inspections on Tuesdays and then throughout the week. They were spending the first
865 day not necessarily calling for inspections, and Katie said Brad used Monday as his paperwork
866 catchup day (documentation, filing, notes and photograph entry) while he was working remotely.
867 Katie said it was a day for Brad to be "in the office" and provide all the catchup and work. This
868 allowed the Planning and Inspection Department to be completely caught up on almost three
869 years' worth of backlog and data, and Katie said it was a benefit the pandemic gave to her and
870 her staff in terms of not being distracted. Katie said, "That was our ability of what [Brad] was
871 able to produce. That's something that as a supervisor I am able to document. I can see which
872 permits in our database that he's been in. I can see how much work he's producing when he's at
873 home."

874

875 Katie said all of her department's paper documents for all of the city's permits for decades.
876 Katie noted scanning in all of the information is "a really great process," and she said staff is
877 able to answer historical questions such as when a structure was constructed, if the original plans
878 are on file, if someone has any open permits, and which permits have been pulled on a property.
879 Katie told committee members that for the last 18 months Planning Inspection Clerk Lisa

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880 Schmidt has been scanning every single permit the city has ever issued for which it has hard
881 copies. Katie said, “An example of how I could envision this policy is more on an informal work
882 basis where if I have a project, I want her to finish this project by the end of the year so she can
883 move on to a new scanning project because we have a lot of paper upstairs that we’re trying to
884 get rid of. An example would be, I want [Lisa] to spend four hours one day a week to do nothing
885 but scan. I know she has a scanner that works, she has a computer that works, and she can
886 produce those scans. I can also see because it would link up directly to our server how many
887 scans she did that day. Did she get a whole box of paper done? Did she do two boxes of paper?
888 That would be something she could work on on a weekly basis until that project is done. It also
889 would eliminate the phone calls.

890
891 In the same token, we have many backups in our system where if Lisa is gone, she can work on
892 the ___ phone. Brad is there to answer questions. I’m there to answer questions. We’ve done
893 so much cross-training in the Planning and Engineering Departments where we all have the
894 foundational information so if one of us is out, we can at least get that customer moving forward.
895 Those are two examples of how, if this policy were moved forward, how I would envision the
896 potential within my departments.”

897
898 City Administrator Rindfleisch noted those tasks are completed during the hours City Hall is
899 open.

900
901 Katie said that is correct.

902
903 Ald. T. Smith said he believes the city needs a policy and stated he is more concerned about the
904 perception from the outside.

905
906 City Administrator Rindfleisch said there is assurance that the department is open even during
907 the days that Lisa could be working on a project.

908
909 Ald. T. Smith said the key is having adequate coverage.

910
911 Katie said, “If Brad were to do it on a Monday, Lisa would not use a Monday to do her work. It
912 would be any other day of the week. Or if someone else were to do that, we would make sure
913 there would be coverage every day so there would be at least someone who could answer a
914 question if the public did come in.”

915
916 Ald. Wulf noted many of the departments at City Hall have always been very small and continue
917 to be. Ald. Wulf said, “My biggest concern would be if we were to have additional people,
918 maybe not at City Hall five days a week, whether or not a department didn’t have coverage. I
919 am going to assume that there is going to be an expectation in the Finance Department that
920 they’re going to be open five days a week, or to interface with the public. If some department is
921 not available, would any of that work come down to Finance, but that’s not their area, for

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922 example. Will they end up getting some of the questions from other departments down to
923 Finance, which they know nothing of?"

924
925 Katie noted all Planning/Zoning and Inspection Department employees have laptops, and she
926 said that with the new technology and the new telephone system built in, employees have the
927 ability for all the phones to ring their laptops and computers. Katie said staff has the ability to
928 answer every phone call and noted the public does not know that an employee is not in the office
929 at any given time. Katie said, "We would not have it so that our calls would be forwarded
930 elsewhere – they would hit someone unless someone was out sick that day, but that can happen
931 today. ... We do have that built in as a safety based on the technological advancements that
932 we've been doing the last year."

933
934 Ald. Wulf said that as challenging as the pandemic has been nationwide, she believes the
935 intelligent organizations will learn from it and will bounce back and prosper and learn how to do
936 things more efficiently. Ald. Wulf said, "They'll come out of so much smarter, and I think it's
937 upon us to do that. I personally have appreciated that administration has taken the approach that
938 those who can work remotely, or those situations when someone is ill. ... Sick leave is to be
939 used, but if you feel well enough to work from home, work from home – and I would strongly
940 encourage that. I've heard from a number of staff members the past several months, on and off,
941 regarding the flexibility that administration has had for them for a number of life events that have
942 happened, whether it was COVID or childcare or what have you. I know a number of our
943 employees value the position that administration has taken to be able to work with people,
944 whether it's the part-timers or the full-timers or whoever they may be. I appreciate that because I
945 think that bodes well for the City of Onalaska as an employer. I think it bodes well when we've
946 had a number of new employees hired this year, and we've had I believe very high-quality
947 employees that we have hired and they want to be here, so that really makes me happy."

948
949 Ald. Wulf raised a concern regarding "dark offices" as it relates to the "Types of Remote Work"
950 section of the policy. Ald. Wulf addressed "Formal" remote work, noting she has struggled
951 throughout the years to contact individuals at City Hall, but also pointing out she is personally
952 not available before noon and limited to contacting staff from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Ald. Wulf said
953 she understands that employees have sick leave and take vacations, and that they are doing their
954 jobs. Ald. Wulf stressed that she is not singling out any individuals or certain departments, and
955 she said that she discovered during the pandemic that she has had success with emailing city staff
956 regarding questions and scheduling appointments. Ald. Wulf said she is concerned about
957 allowing staff to do "Formal" remote work for up to three days, and she said that while her
958 concerns might be unfounded, she also noted the City of Onalaska is a municipal government
959 that has services it has to provide. Ald. Wulf said, "I just have a concern with how many people
960 may be here or not here."

961
962 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, "I believe the 'up to three days per week' on a 'Formal'
963 remote work would be incredibly rare. I can't think of a position that would need to be out three

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964 solid days here working remotely. Quite frankly, I ask that we have a number there be three or
965 some other ‘up to’ we could include if such a position does come into play.” City Administrator
966 Rindfleisch noted the Village of McFarland, where he had served as Village Administrator,
967 operated an ambulance service, and he said a medical transcriptionist had worked completely
968 off-site because there was no reason this person had to be in an office when they worked off-site.
969 City Administrator Rindfleisch acknowledged the City of Onalaska has no such position, and
970 there is not a position he anticipates seeing currently. City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “But
971 if that position does exist, it’s three full days that we don’t need to see the person here and still
972 provide all the service. I think that speaks to the kind of position where they can provide their
973 work from home three days a week and not impact the service provided. That’s a rare position.”
974

975 Ald. Wulf asked if any city employees are currently operating under “Formal” remote work.
976

977 City Administrator Rindfleisch said no one is operating under “Formal” remote work as there is
978 no policy for “Formal” remote work. However, there are employees who are scheduling leave
979 time so that they are not there during a certain timeframe. City Administrator Rindfleisch said,
980 “It’s more of the ‘Informal’ right now.”
981

982 Ald. Wulf said, “The purpose of this is really just to get something on the policy – kind of like
983 when you talk about vacations – so you have a basis to say yes or no.”
984

985 City Administrator Rindfleisch nodded in the affirmative.
986

987 Ald. Olson said, “After listening to the positive part of this, in order for this to be as successful as
988 you would like it to be, you have to ignore the fact that people have feelings about different
989 things. My experience in that is you’re going to have people who come in here at 4:50 in the
990 morning to plow snow in November and December, and the other people never have to leave
991 their house. If you want to believe that human nature isn’t going to factor into that, I’ve got 51
992 years of dealing with the public that will tell you that’s a nice thing to think. If we have
993 everybody who feels the same, the only way that could happen is if we had electronic devices to
994 shock their brains about every 15 or 20 minutes. That’s my opinion. I think we are creating lots
995 of problems with this, but I’m only one person. I’m just looking at human nature. We have all
996 kinds of different personalities, and if somebody gets torqued off because they appear that their
997 friend gets these benefits but they don’t, is this beneficial to the city overall? I don’t know. I’m
998 just one person; I’m not making that decision. This is one of the things you get when you get
999 old. You see people interact with other people, so this is how you think because it’s reality.
1000

1001 I’m not trying to say it’s not a great idea. I guess if you want to do this, I would say this is worth
1002 trying if everybody agrees and see what happens. But if it doesn’t work out, I might be in the
1003 back saying, ‘I told you so.’ And that doesn’t mean there aren’t people who would be very good
1004 at this, because we have people who do that. But we have a lot of people who interact here, and
1005 there are a lot of comments that I’ve heard in the 24 years that I’ve been here that aren’t all

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1006 positive.”

1007

1008 Ald. Wulf acknowledged that this is a delicate subject to discuss, but she also said she believed it
1009 was necessary to engage in open, honest, and respectful conversations. Ald. Wulf next addressed
1010 Item No. 1 in the “Process for Non-Standard Work Schedule and Formal Remote Work” section
1011 of the policy, which reads, “*All requests for these alternative work arrangements must be in*
1012 *writing, using the forms provided by Human Resources, completed by the employee, and*
1013 *submitted to the supervisor and department head for approval.*” Ald. Wulf asked City
1014 Administrator Rindfleisch at which point he enters the process, or if the department heads grant
1015 approval.

1016

1017 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “As it’s written, it appears I do not,” and asked that either
1018 the line “*With City Administrator approval*” be added to the policy, or to make sure the
1019 department heads understand there will be consequences if he discovers that approval was
1020 granted and it impacts the provision of service. City Administrator Rindfleisch expressed his
1021 preference that the line “*With City Administrator approval*” be added to the policy.

1022

1023 Ald. Wulf asked if the wording, “*All requests for these alternative work arrangements must be*
1024 *in writing, using the forms provided by Human Resources, completed by the employee, and*
1025 *submitted to the supervisor, department head, and City Administrator for approval*” would be
1026 acceptable.

1027

1028 City Administrator Rindfleisch indicated it would.

1029

1030 Ald. Wulf noted that would be taken into consideration if and when the committee makes a
1031 motion.

1032

1033 Ald. T. Smith referred to his previous question regarding how this will be overseen and where
1034 the accountability lies, and he said he believes it would lie with the City Administrator.

1035

1036 City Administrator Rindfleisch said the reason he wants to have it added is for that particular
1037 reason, noting anyone serving on the Common Council can ask him if he or she has a concern.
1038 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, “I need to be aware of it so I can answer that question.”

1039

1040 Ald. Wulf referred to Amanda’s example of an employee taking an abbreviated lunch break so
1041 that he or she may leave early for an appointment, and she asked if that is currently happening.

1042

1043 City Administrator Rindfleisch nodded yes.

1044

1045 Ald. Wulf said she assumes that practice will continue.

1046

1047 City Administrator Rindfleisch nodded yes.

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1048

1049 Ald. Wulf said something she would like the committee to think about between this evening and
1050 the November 9 Common Council meeting is if there is any hesitancy with this policy. Ald.

1051 Wulf noted she had spoken with Amy and said the city could institute the policy for a six-month
1052 trial period. The policy could be brought back after six months to determine how it is working.

1053 Ald. Wulf said it will be known before that time if the policy is not working, and she said the
1054 discussion can involve whether the policy can be modified. Ald. Wulf asked City Administrator

1055 Rindfleisch if he would be amenable to a trial period.

1056

1057 City Administrator Rindfleisch told Ald. Wulf that while he believes a trial period is appropriate,
1058 the Common Council also has the right to remove a policy at any time. City Administrator

1059 Rindfleisch said, "Even if we don't necessarily spell that out as a trial period, we can revisit it
1060 midyear and the Council can decide to put it back on the agenda to change it, amend it, or

1061 remove it."

1062

1063 Ald. Wulf addressed "Formal" remote work and asked which city employees could avail
1064 themselves to this policy. Ald. Wulf said she assumes both Police Department and Fire

1065 Department employees will not be able to participate due to their contracts. Ald. Wulf said she
1066 also assumes this would not apply to Public Works Department employees.

1067

1068 Amanda said it could apply to some Public Works Department employees, noting Billing as
1069 could occasionally work remotely, and she told Ald. Wulf, "It really is an employee-by-
1070 employee consideration."

1071

1072 City Administrator Rindfleisch said "Informal" remote work occurs, particularly when
1073 employees attend conferences, and he noted City Engineer Jarrod Holter is currently attending a
1074 conference.

1075

1076 Ald. Wulf said her greatest concern is "Formal" remote work and stated she assumes the
1077 audience is "greatly narrowed." Ald. Wulf asked for Ald. T. Smith's and Ald. Olson's opinion

1078 regarding if this policy also applies to department heads. Ald. Wulf said she believes there are
1079 Councilmembers who believe that department heads need to lead and be present. Ald. Wulf then

1080 said, "We talk about flexibility, and this is what we've been talking about a lot tonight: various
1081 flexibility. As it relates to City Hall hours, right now we're open 8 [a.m.] to 5 [p.m.], and I think

1082 we've been open 8 to 5 as long as I've lived here, since 1992. Has there ever been any

1083 discussion about adjusting the hours of City Hall? I don't remember ever being part of any

1084 conversation at a Council level about adjusting our open/closed hours, or if we could give any

1085 flexibility to workers' hours, or if that would be beneficial. From what I understand, I think we

1086 may be the only one around that's still open to 5 p.m. I'm just throwing that out there. I'm not

1087 trying to throw a wrench in anything. It's just a discussion point. I'm not saying we would close

1088 at 4:30 and everyone goes home at 4:30. I'm just saying, would we be open to the public until 5

1089 o'clock? This is what we've always done, but is this something that we should continue to do?"

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1090

1091 Ald. Burmaster said that in reviewing this policy, she has no problems with the flexible
1092 scheduling or the “Informal” remote work. However, Ald. Burmaster also said she believes
1093 three days is excessive for “Formal” remote work. Ald. Burmaster noted that is more than half
1094 the week and said she has a problem with dark offices at City Hall. Ald. Burmaster said, “I think
1095 we need to man the offices here as long as the building is open. Adjusting hours may be a way
1096 to accommodate some of that; maybe we’re not open as many hours. Going into this being a
1097 new policy, I would feel more comfortable if we were saying, let’s start with one day or two
1098 days. I don’t want to start with more than half the week. I don’t feel comfortable with that
1099 number at all. I just think it’s too much. I think our citizens, even though they can reach
1100 everybody by phone or by email, everybody doesn’t know that. Some of the elderly people will
1101 come into the office, and they might even walk up to the office and there’s nobody there ... They
1102 might come in twice or maybe three times before they’ll even come downstairs to look for
1103 somebody thinking somebody is going to be there eventually. It does add up to a little more
1104 work for the other offices because they do have to take care of those people or get them a phone
1105 number and get them some way to contact those people so they can get taken care of. Even
1106 doing it the best way possible – and I know we have good solutions to it – it does fall on the
1107 people who are left here.

1108

1109 When I’m looking at the people this would apply to, I do believe we’re probably only looking at
1110 10 to 15 percent of our workforce. And unfortunately, it’s probably some of our top people. I do
1111 worry about the perception with the other employees, and how it’s going to be perceived – more
1112 of the haves and the have-nots. That is a concern of mind because I think we would be going
1113 into a morale issue with the rest of the staff here. It’s easy to work at home. It’s nice to work at
1114 home. I do think we can accommodate some days at home. But I think the real question is, how
1115 many, especially when we’re talking about the small departments and not that many people
1116 there. Could they each take a one day at home and everybody would be fine? Probably. When
1117 we’re taking three days, I think it’s going to get stretched pretty thin.

1118

1119 Some of the other issues [are], I know we’re saying we’ll have to abide by all the work
1120 regulations and things like that. My first question is, what about daycare? Are we going to
1121 require them to have daycare if they have children at home? And if you’re not going to require
1122 that, are you going to let the other people working here bring their kids to work? We have to
1123 look at how this is affecting everybody, and what we’re doing. We also got into the issue that
1124 people are not liking to use their sick leave. Is that on us, or is that on them? Are we expecting
1125 our people to work too much? If they have a sick child, should they be taking a sick day and
1126 staying home with their sick child as opposed to working? Again, I think you can get some work
1127 in while you’re there, but do we really expect them to work eight hours because they want to be
1128 home to take care of their child? That’s the whole purpose of it.

1129

1130 I think there are things we need to evaluate, and I would like to see those working hours staying
1131 as close to the 8 to 5 as possible because that’s when the majority of the work is being done by

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1132 the other departments, so it's much easier to keep that communication open. And again, like
1133 Tom was talking about [regarding] the accountability of everybody, it would be nice to have
1134 some kind of a system even for people who are at City Hall to know, is this person in the office
1135 today? Are they at home today? What time are they working? How long are they working?
1136 There is no system in place for them to know that information. Communication is the biggest
1137 piece of this, and we have none of it. I think there are a lot of things to be worked out on it
1138 before we can go forward with that.

1139
1140 First and foremost, I know hiring is an issue, and I know it's hard to recruit people. But on the
1141 other hand, being with city government, it's like part of our job here is to work with the public. I
1142 think the people who want to be here and work with the public are still our best candidates. I
1143 know it gets harder and harder to find that, but again, when you look at statistics out there, there
1144 is 25 percent of the workforce that is working remotely. There is still 75 percent of the
1145 workforce that is not. Everybody wants to talk about the 25 percent, but what about the 75
1146 percent? We still have a lot of people out there who are not working remotely. I think we can
1147 make a change, start small if we find out it's working. If we find out maybe we need to do a
1148 little more, I think it would be easier to go up than down. I would agree to starting with
1149 something a little bit smaller."

1150
1151 Ald. Wulf said, "I think my position would be ... There are a lot of components to this. Some of
1152 this we're currently doing, but there's nothing in place. I think it would be a positive if we do
1153 put something in place, but I would recommend that ... My recommendation as Chair would be
1154 to forward this to Council next week without a recommendation from [the Finance and Personnel
1155 Committee] so we can all sit on this and chew on this until Tuesday, and then introduce this at
1156 Council next Tuesday and get everyone's input."

1157
1158 Amanda said, "My only question would be, taking some of the feedback we got tonight, would
1159 you like us to clean this up a little bit and bring a new version for Council next week, including
1160 some of the language regarding the City Administrator's approval? We could formalize some of
1161 the communication that Cari mentioned as far as we put a process in place as to how we would
1162 capture and process it, but also how we would communicate it out to other departments and city
1163 employees if an employee were working remotely. We could also look at adjusting that three
1164 days downward."

1165
1166 Ald. Olson said, "The only thing that crossed my mind is that when this moves on for other
1167 discussion, the greatest pontificator in the world is going to get a hold of this and we're going to
1168 be here for an hour and a half."

1169
1170 Ald. T. Smith said this policy will generate far more discussion at the Common Council meeting.

1171
1172 Ald. Wulf said there should be more discussion about this policy, and she stated she wishes to be
1173 respectful of everyone with this conversation. Ald. Wulf said, "This is very important. This is

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1174 how our [employees] work. ... We want to be fair. But I think as we are so conservative with
1175 how we spend our dollars, we're also very conservative with how we do business and set
1176 policy."

1177
1178 Ald. Olson asked Ald. Wulf and Ald. T. Smith if they want to consider Amanda's suggestion.
1179

1180 Ald. Wulf asked Amanda if the committee could have a consensus in place of a formal motion.
1181

1182 Amanda told committee members that administration will meet and review the policy, taking
1183 some of the feedback heard this evening, cleaning up some of the language regarding the City
1184 Administrator's approval, communication of remote work and that process, and also examining
1185 the days that "Formal" remote work is allowed. A revised version of the policy will be presented
1186 at the November 9 Common Council meeting.
1187

1188 Ald. Wulf noted there was very little with which she could disagree regarding Ald. Burmaster's
1189 statements, especially with starting small and moving up versus the opposite direction. Ald.
1190 Wulf said, "I think I'd rather have a really good foundation and build on that because at the end
1191 of the day, what I continue to say here is that I want to set us all up for success and not failure. I
1192 think if we have a really good foundation, we can build up and build on that."
1193

1194 Ald. T. Smith said, "I think it's important that we get it more organized and [have] good
1195 framework so there is communication at all levels, because this is important to the staff too. I've
1196 been through this, and it can work well. And I think we need a policy; I don't think anyone
1197 would disagree. But let's not rush it through until we think out some of the ramifications."
1198

1199 Ald. Wulf noted there is a consensus amongst committee members that Amanda and
1200 administration will revise the policy and bring it forward Tuesday evening.
1201

1202 City Administrator Rindfleisch referred to the comments regarding "dark offices," noting that
1203 several of his employees had begun their working day prior to 8 a.m., and also noting that he had
1204 met with the department heads for two hours Wednesday morning. Further, City Administrator
1205 Rindfleisch also pointed out the departments heads also had worked with the public Wednesday
1206 outside of their offices, and he told committee members he had engaged in discussions
1207 Wednesday afternoon with City of La Crosse officials. City Administrator Rindfleisch noted he
1208 had not stepped into his office until 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, and he said, "Anybody who was
1209 claiming I wasn't working prior to that at 6:30 needs to step in my shoes someday. That also
1210 means every department head that was with all morning was also with that same schedule, and
1211 then those department heads I was with through negotiations later on. It's 9:30 at night, and
1212 those department heads are still here.
1213

1214 The perspective I ask you to have is, we talk about the employees and flexibility and dark
1215 offices. There is a person behind those offices, and the assumption of offices are dark and

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1216 therefore people are off having fun or not working is not an accurate perspective that people may
1217 have of those department heads. The other perspective I ask you to examine between now and
1218 Tuesday is, what happens in the event that a policy does not pass? We're operating right now in
1219 a vacuum, and I'm creating some flexibility. I am uncomfortable continuing that in the absence
1220 of a policy. I ask that we do at least come out of here on Tuesday with some kind of policy
1221 written that we can stand behind, because I would say that a failure of the policy is positive
1222 action taken by the Council saying, 'We will not allow flexibility.' I do not think that is the case
1223 of the Council. Do consider that if you are not supportive of this another alternative that you can
1224 support so we have some direction for the departments after that. I did effectively communicate
1225 with the department heads that in the event the policy does not pass, the surviving language and
1226 the existing language of the policies really only allow on a department-by-department basis to
1227 apply for flexible schedules. The department heads were made aware that they should start
1228 getting that documentation together for those non-standard schedules that we already have.
1229 Positively, I think we're making great progress. I think we have some advocates on the Council
1230 to do that, but I just ask for those two perspectives between now and Tuesday."

1231
1232 Ald. Wulf said, "I'm not sure how I was supposed to interpret that, so I will just respond. I'm
1233 not sure whether I'm interpreting it incorrectly. My response would be ... First of all, earlier this
1234 evening ... Any comments that I've made this evening were not meant to be directed at any one
1235 department or any person regarding anything. I don't know whether it's your impression or if
1236 you took that personal about the dark offices. That was not directed ... I don't know if you took
1237 that ..."

1238
1239 City Administrator Rindfleisch said, "My example would be that effectively today, most of my
1240 department heads were out of their office and under my guidance."

1241
1242 Ald. Wulf said, "My point was, I was just reflecting what my experience has been. But do note
1243 that I said ... I also recognize that people ... They could be on vacation. They could be out on
1244 sick leave. They're at conferences. And I finished with, 'plus, they're working.' Or they're at
1245 site visits or what have you. I don't know whether you interpreted or misinterpreted – that
1246 certainly was not my position because I think if anything, I think people know here I'm one of
1247 the strongest and biggest advocates for the workers here. I'm just saying what my personal
1248 experience is. I struggled trying to find people because I'm one alderperson who is here a lot
1249 and asks a lot of questions. I just need answers, and that's why I struggled with trying to find
1250 people. My remark about 'dark offices' is not to be interpreted as negative. It's just been my
1251 personal experience, but I know people are working. I'm just trying to get answers, and it's just
1252 been a struggle. I found a new way to do it where I just go online and schedule an appointment
1253 or [make] a phone call, and it's working. I know Katie's been the subject this last year of a lot of
1254 those phone calls – and Amanda also, and you also, Eric – and it has worked. It took me a long
1255 time to figure that out for myself, but I learned how to manage myself. Once again, it was not
1256 directed at any one person. It was not meant negatively. It's just that's what my experience has
1257 been."

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1258

1259 **Item 3 – Deletion of Policy 7.08 Sabbatical Leave**

1260

1261 Motion by Ald. Olson, second by Ald. T. Smith, to delete Policy 7.08 Sabbatical Leave.

1262

1263 Amanda said she is not sure what this policy originated from, and she told committee members
1264 city staff had reviewed it and had not thought of a scenario where it would be beneficial to the
1265 city, or even likely approved.

1266

1267 City Administrator Rindfleisch said he does not know how the city would function giving any
1268 employee, even unpaid, that amount of time off.

1269

1270 Ald. Burmaster, who formerly served as City Clerk, noted there had been a Parks and Recreation
1271 Department employee who had taken a one-year sabbatical and returned to school. Ald.
1272 Burmaster noted that employee had returned to their position with the city.

1273

1274 On voice vote, motion carried.

1275

1276 **Adjournment**

1277

1278 Motion by Ald. T. Smith, second by Ald. Olson, to adjourn at 9:33 p.m.

1279

1280 On voice vote, motion carried.

1281

1282

1283 Recorded by:

1284

1285 Kirk Bey