

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE SESSION OF THE BLUE GRASS CITY COUNCIL

BLUE GRASS, IOWA

MAY 20, 2025

The Blue Grass City Council met in special session as an Economic Development Committee at 7:00 p.m. on the 20th day of May, 2025 in the City Council Chambers of City Hall, 114 N. Mississippi St., Blue Grass, Iowa, pursuant to law, with Mayor Brad Schutte presiding, with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of reflection.

Council present: Brandenburg, Blok, Hermann, Smith and Bowman. City Attorney William McCullough and City Engineer Mike Janecek were also in attendance with several residents, Developers and Commercial businessmen and women.

Mayor Schutte commented to the audience that the topic to be discussed at this meeting was intended for discussion only and that no action would be taken as this meeting was a Committee of the Whole session only.

The Mayor presented the topic to be open for discussion and opened the meeting.

PUBLIC FORUM: There were none from the audience in attendance.

Economic Development: Brandenburg started off the session by reporting that he felt it was a necessity the City Council hold a strategic planning session to begin setting goals and look into the City's future, remarking that the City's Comprehensive Plan dates back to 1995 as there have been a lot of changes since then and more coming with senior staff retiring. He said another concern was the City's revenues since the City sold both their water and wastewater utilities asking how the City was going to recoup those revenues. Brandenburg then proceeded to explain his concerns on the aging of City Hall as it was not ADA compliant; therefore, he proposed moving City Hall to the Public Safety Building (PSB) as he felt there would be some cost savings and benefits with staff being there to assist with both the Fire and Police and would like to see all City entities under one roof. The Clerk reported that she has been employed with the City for 30 years and does not foresee adding more staff and felt that City Hall should remain at its current location and as part of Blue Grass' downtown; however, she felt that the Council should concentrate more on revamping the City's downtown by installing Victorian streetlights with destination signs; decorative street signs; street banners; planters, etc. She also proposed that the City adopt an "Urban Revitalization Tax Exemption Program" that she drafted offering a 10-year tax abatement for both new and existing businesses to attract new businesses and stay competitive with other cities. The Clerk briefed the Council on the State's new tax plan and how it negatively impacts local government revenues as the future is yet unknown. Mayor Schutte referred to a letter from Ms. Donna Porter stating that she felt there was an identity crisis as she feels the Council and citizens seem to focus on different goals on how to make the town grow expressing the need for affordable housing to bring in younger families that have children that would attend the Blue Grass Elementary School urging the Council to work with the Davenport Community School District. Smith said that she, along with several other residents, are not in favor of moving City Hall to the PSB as the PSB was built to house emergency services only and that City Hall should remain in the downtown location. Fire Chief Brian Seamer added that he has been in Blue Grass his entire life and he felt there were more important issues such as trying to find ways for the City to grow, the City needs commercial development to increase the City's tax base. Resident and past Mayor Paul Barnes reminded everyone that was not correlated with the City at the time, but the PSB was built for the future to house the Fire, Police and Medic Departments and not for City Hall. Hermann commented that since this was the City's first goal setting meeting, the question is where does the City want to be in 5 or 10 years as everyone agrees the City needs to grow; however, the question is how do we get there. Resident and business owner Matt Sampson said that the first and foremost important priority should be to keep the Blue Grass Elementary school open as the Davenport Community School system continuously talks about school closings so he felt that the City should focus on residential development to attract young families where their kids will attend the elementary school.

Blue Grass Bank President and resident Wayne Beck added that he felt strategic planning should be a priority as the City should be setting goals and do research to find the City's strengths and weaknesses. Discussion was held on the need for multi-family affordable housing and/or low-to-moderate housing to encourage young families to move to Blue Grass; however, pinpointing the location would be difficult. The Clerk reiterated past rezoning requests for multi-family housing development in the last 20 years; whereas, residents were not in favor whatsoever. Council agreed multi-family housing was needed; however, the site would have to be favorable to include a buffer zone from other residential areas. Resident and business owner Chris Jepsen asked that everyone stay focused and positive on moving forward as the City needs to set goals and priorities as both commercial development and residential housing are needed in order to succeed. Mayor Schutte replied that he, too has been in Blue Grass his entire life and considers Blue Grass his home adding that he has served on the City Council and now, as Mayor for the past 28 years and is currently the Assistant Fire Chief serving the Fire Department for 20 years; therefore, he, too would like to see Blue Grass grow but he does not want the City to lose sight on the importance of retaining the existing businesses. He thanked everyone for attending as it was apparent that there was a lot of passion for Blue Grass' future and felt that this meeting was a great start suggesting that a citizen's committee be formed to include staff to continue discussing Blue Grass' future as the City needs to focus on economic development both long- and short-term goals.

Mayor Schutte asked for further comments and/or discussion, since there were no other comments, the Mayor adjourned the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Attest: Ann M. Schmidt, CMC, City Clerk/Financial Officer