

Hokah parking lot law changes despite outcry

Greg Kirscher for Houston County News.

April 12th. 2017

Proposed changes to Hokah's parking lot ordinance sparked an outcry Tuesday at the April city council meeting before squeaking by on a split vote.

After receiving a letter from the city informing them of the upcoming changes, around 30 residents jammed the normally-deserted council meeting room, many of them protesting that the measure was too restrictive. Even though the meeting was not a public hearing, Mayor Mike Walsh allowed everyone to voice their opinion.

"My phone's been ringing off the hook for the last three or four days," said Walsh. "I've talked to 25-30 people easy."

The council initially sought to make it unlawful to park a vehicle in municipal lots for more than 48 hours. What drew the ire of many residents, however, was the additional stipulation that vehicles would have to park within the confines of the assigned spaces. This last change eliminated oversize vehicles or trailers.

"I'm still objecting to not allowing larger vehicles in the parking lot," said Councilman Don Bissen, leading off the discussion.

It doesn't make any sense to have a truck and trailer taking up 3 or 4 spots on the street, he added. Bissen went on to say that after having checked the lots on numerous occasions, he never observed more than 10 vehicles parked there at a time.

Matthew Dejarlais, a business owner on Main Street, agreed, saying that it would be a big inconvenience for farmers. He told the council that without a parking space for his truck and trailer, he would keep going to La Crescent to shop.

Shouts of "leave it alone" erupted at one point, and Walsh had to bring the meeting to order. "Hold it, everybody settle down, one at a time," said Walsh.

Fearing that the measure would flounder and leave the city without an ordinance, Hokah Police Chief Robert Schuldt explained to the crowd why the law was necessary.

"I had complaints last year about a vehicle used as a dumpster. We had no ordinance, that's why this started coming into play," he said.

Schuldt didn't agree with doing nothing, he added.

After nearly an hour of discussion, Walsh called for a motion. Bissen moved that the ordinance should specify a 48-hour parking limit in city lots, "but leave the rest alone," he said.

Bisson's motion never received a second, so Walsh asked for another motion. Matt Vetsch moved that the ordinance should appear as drafted by the city attorney which included the parking space restriction. The motion was seconded and the measure became law by a 3-2 vote of the council.

After the meeting, Dejarlais said the law was, "a lot of crap. It's a parking lot. You should be able to park everything you own in it."

Tom Sauer also approached the council, asking for an ordinance that would prohibit his neighbor from operating a motorcycle in the neighbor's yard. Schuldt informed the council that although there had been five complaints since 2015, he hadn't found any violations. City Attorney Skip Wieser told the council that they couldn't decide private

issues between neighbors. Walsh instructed Wieser and Schuldt to review the existing ordinances to ensure that no laws were being violated.

In her library report, Shari Carlson stated that library attendance increased 35% while program offerings jumped 89% in the past three years, thus doubling the number of participants in library programs. She also said that the popular after school program has been extended through the end of the school year. The program meets Thursdays from 3:30-4:30 pm.

In Recreation Board news, a softball camp will replace the daytime softball league this summer. The pool will open June 3, but the board is still looking for more lifeguards. Applicants must be at least 15 years of age and have their certification.