Mayor Connie Edwards called the Special City Council meeting to order at 5:30 p.m., stating the purpose of the meeting was to review an application to the County for a variance for feedlot expansion within ½ mile east of City boundary, and to discuss a proposal for whitetail deer exhibits and programs at the Nature Center. Present were: Kevin Knutson, Cheryl Sanden and Tony Schultz. Also present were: Chris Peterson, Audrey Hegland, Attorney Jed Hammell, Liz Gibson Gasset, Randy Thesing, Ellyn Baumann, Interim Chief Brent Hurley, Wayne Feldmeier, Dan Smith, Margaret Carlson, Sue Wiegreve, Sarah Wexler-Mann, Eric Johnson, Fred Huhn, Bill Hoskins, John Beckman, Marlene Schultz, Connie Verse, Roger Meyer, Pat McAndrews, Karla and Hein Bloem, Craig Stanislawski, Brian Lee, Sue Fletcher, Paul and Brenda Grupe and Audrey Alfson.

**Feedlot Expansion:** The County variance request is as follows: Variance of 2,280 feet to meet the required half-mile setback from an existing expanding feedlot to a corporate limit, variance of 2,280 feet to meet the required half-mile setback from an existing expanding feedlot to a platted subdivision, and a variance of 1,650 feet to meet the required half-mile setback from an existing expanding feedlot to a public park. The existing feedlot is registered for 50.3 animal units with proposed expansion to 200 animal units.

The Board of Adjustment will consider the feedlot variance request at a hearing on September 29, at 6:45 p.m.

Peterson stated that we live in a farming community and support our farmers but must watch out for the City also. Mayor Edwards asked what State Statute or County ordinances exist regarding setbacks to city limits. Peterson responded that feedlots are governed by the MN PCA and the County’s Feedlot Officer, and that they should be consulted first. She reiterated that the County ordinance states that a feedlot must be half a mile from the City limits and park, as well as one-fourth mile from any residences. If the City chooses to oppose the variance, they will draft a document and present it to the County.

Schultz commented that the feedlot could affect the new lots in Prairie Meadows, and that it could be a hindrance to the development of this City property. Sanden agreed. Knutson stated that the City needs to request enforcement of the regulations and protect what it already has. The City will draft a statement in opposition of this variance. Question was raised as to whether the owner is approved for 50 cattle and whether the permit has lapsed. Another concern expressed is that the area may be in the flood plain as per FEMA, but the proposal at this time is for just the barn and concrete, which is most likely out of the flood plain.

The County Zoning Administrator is recommending a management plan and a high fence. The owner has stated he will not be spreading manure on this property, but has said it will be hauled it away to be disposed of. Even though the property may be sold at a later time, the variance will be in perpetuity, and will go along with the sale to all new owners for years to come. Therefore, considering this fact, the City must protect itself. Attorney Hammell encouraged any neighbors or people who would be affected to come forth to speak to this issue, especially if they are in opposition to it. **MOTION MADE BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY EDWARDS THAT BASED ON THE DISCUSSION, TO AUTHORIZE PETERSON AND ATTORNEY HAMMELL TO PREPARE A FORMAL STATEMENT OF OPPOSITION TO THE FEEDLOT VARIANCE REQUEST; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**Proposal for Whitetail Deer exhibits and programs at the Nature Center:** Discussion focused on a whitetail deer exhibit for the Nature Center. Minutes from a previous meeting were presented. Attending were Craig Stanislawski, Travis Peterson, Sue Wiegreve and Chris Peterson, who met to discuss the whitetail deer promotion idea that would highlight trophy bucks and the story of the whitetail deer and also promote Houston as the National Whitetail Center. Ideas put forth included having whitetail deer mounts in the Nature Center, offer related programming and education, fundraising events, merchandise sales, mobile displays, and guided hunting experiences. The whitetail group has filed for MN non-profit designation, contacted potential funding sources, secured two whitetail–related website domains, and secured limited rights to print Mike Sieve’s artwork in large format.
Options discussed at the previous meeting for the display in the Nature Center were the meeting room and the middle room. Stanislawski said the display would include a large Sieve print or mural and 10 replica deer head mounts. There were some mixed thoughts on who would purchase and own the display. Stanislawski envisioned the entire Nature Center ultimately having a whitetail-related central theme and changes/updates to existing exhibits.

Concerns brought forward to Council about the proposal include: the Nature Center is small with limited room to expand, and that perhaps a round table discussion should be held with representatives from the Nature Center and Whitetail Deer Center participating. In addition, a suggestion was made that the Council and Park and Rec consider this matter to determine what would be best for the City.

Peterson provided an overview of the Nature Center since the creation of the International Owl Center, saying it currently hosts a variety of programming and has many visitors, and now there’s the whitetail deer proposal to consider. Stanislawski stated he would like to have at least one whitetail deer displayed in the Nature Center at this time, and that a whitetail deer theme would be easily marketed and have great potential for the City. Peterson stated more decisions have to be made, including the future direction of the Nature Center.

Karla Bloem presented a list of reservations she has regarding incorporating the whitetail deer proposal into the Nature Center. Among them was that the Nature Center’s meeting room is heavily used for educational programs and community meetings, and the floor space must remain open for these purposes. She did support a temporary trophy whitetail deer exhibit that uses similar space as do other displays in the Nature Center.

Other Friends of the Nature Center were present at the meeting and spoke about their concerns with the possible merger, including that attendance at the Nature Center has continually increased each year in its current state, and that it is a very valuable asset to the community as is; and is known as the best trailhead in the state. Audrey Alfson stated that the Friends recently spent $3,000 in rebranding the Nature Center, complete with new logo, and that the new managers are doing a fine job as well. While the Friends would welcome whitetail deer exhibits as part of the Nature Center, it is also important to remain committed that there is so much more to the Center. Alfson commented that if the whitetail deer exhibits would become part of the Nature Center, there should be an advocate or spokesperson present who is knowledgeable and can respond to public inquiries.

Manager Sue Wiegrefe addressed the Council, saying that while she would welcome a whitetail deer exhibit, she had several reservations: Size of the building (space is so limited); Style (If Nature Center is to serve as an incubator for the whitetail deer proposal, it may not blend with the more gentle, nature-oriented Center); Staffing (Currently have bare-bones staffing – would need to have a person at the Center to promote the project and answer questions).

Mayor Edwards asked that if the whitetail deer exhibits are not in the Nature Center, where else could they be. Stanislawski said that one of the three people interested in the project has withdrawn from the Nature Center concept due to the opposition encountered, and that without the backing of the Friends, the exhibit needs a home. He feels strongly that a whitetail deer theme center would be economically sustainable and of great benefit to the City and a larger area would be better to display the mounts and the Michael Sieve artwork. He stated he was not opposed to a temporary display at the Nature Center that could promote a Whitetail Deer Center.

Peterson stated that she has been working with Stanislawski for over a year on this proposal, and it had been agreed that one wall in the middle room or meeting room of the Nature Center could be dedicated for the whitetail deer project – that it would serve as an incubator for a larger center, to be housed elsewhere. No one is opposed to the concept but everyone needs to agree before it can move forward. Paul Grupe asked if the project is put in the Nature Center, what money would they contribute.

Schultz commented that the project could be successful, especially from October through February when hunters are here as they would enjoy seeing the display.
Peterson stated the Council needs to know what specifically Stanislawski is asking for; what his ultimate goal is.
Members of the Friends again stated they are supportive of the effort to have a Whitetail Deer Center; perhaps the size could begin small with the one display in the Nature Center, using it as a springboard for possibly a larger Center in a separate facility.

Question was raised by Pat McAndrews as to who would be responsible for insuring the display.

Mayor Edwards asked that Stanislawski work with Sue Weigrefe to put up a whitetail deer display and assess the interest from the public. Peterson recommended that an agreement be drawn up with the following:
- How long (timeframe)
- Size of display
- Ownership

The Nature Center staff is willing to help promote the display.

Mayor Edwards asked Stanislawski to provide the Council with a drawing of the display and how this effort will be promoted, and how it will educate the general public; suggested they could have written information available in addition to the displayed mounts, and bring in professionals to present programming. Once the specific mock-up is in hand, the Council can make a decision at that time. She stated that the Nature Center is not self-supporting, so it is important to promote the City in many ways and that this dual opportunity may well serve the Nature Center and also the Whitetail Deer project.

MOTION BY SCHULTZ, SECONDED BY EDWARDS TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 7:35 P.M; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.