

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NOVI  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2023 AT 7:00 P.M.**

**Mayor Gatt called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ROLL CALL:** Mayor Gatt, Mayor Pro Tem Staudt, Council Members Casey, Crawford, Fischer, Smith, Thomas

**ALSO PRESENT:** Victor Cardenas, City Manager  
Thomas Schultz, City Attorney

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Mayor Gatt added under Presentations a "Special Presentation" and under Mayor and Council Issues, he spoke for Member Crawford and himself, they both wanted to say some closing comments.

Mayor Pro Tem Staudt said before that he wanted to add under Mayor and Council Issues, "Public Safety and Fire Recruitment".

**CM 23-10-131            Moved by Fischer, seconded by Crawford; CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**To approve the Agenda as amended.**

<b>Roll call vote on CM 23-10-131</b>	<b>Yeas: Staudt, Casey, Crawford, Fischer, Smith, Thomas, Gatt</b>
	<b>Nays: None</b>

**PUBLIC HEARINGS: None**

**PRESENTATIONS:**

Mayor Gatt added a special presentation. He commented that in everyone's life, we all have special times, special days, holidays, anniversaries, but the most important day in anyone's life is their birthday, the day they were born. He said that day the whole world should stop and celebrate, say hello, congratulations and so on and so forth. He said there are certain people in this world who see duty over that recreation period. He said tonight we are celebrating the 82nd birthday of Mr. Hugh Crawford. He said he stayed up all night and baked a cake, had to go to Costco and buy a container for it. He wanted to say happy birthday to his dear friend, Hugh Crawford on his 82nd birthday. He gave the floor to Hugh. Member Crawford said he would talk like he normally talks and not say much of anything. Mayor Gatt wished him a happy birthday and thanked him for sharing his birthday with us at the Council table.

**MANAGER/STAFF REPORT: None**

**ATTORNEY REPORT: None**

**AUDIENCE COMMENTS:**

Venkat Thalla, 45006 Yorkshire Drive, Novi said he has lived in Novi for 25 years. He said today was a special day, like you mentioned, Mayor Gatt. He stated today is a festival day for a billion people in India and all over the globe. He said they are celebrating right now at the Novi Temple. He gave thanks for all the support that the city of Novi has given, we have a Temple here. Most importantly, he wanted to thank our beloved Mayor Bob Gatt. He read through an article and said 48 years was an amazing service record. He said he wished he could do at least four years of that quality. He thanked Mayor Gatt from the bottom of his heart. He said he has been here in Michigan for 33 plus years, 25 years in Novi. He also mentioned there was a young uprising leader in the audience. He said his family has been friends with his family for years. He mentioned the upcoming election and said it was not about Republicans or Democrats, it is about the progress of our city. He commented that he had some words he wanted to share in the next audience comments.

David Landry, 45471 Kimberly Court. He said he was there that evening as a 28-year resident of the city of Novi to say thank you to Councilmember Hugh Crawford and Mayor Bob Gatt. He said he moved to Novi in 1995, and Member Crawford was sitting right there on City Council. And other than a couple sojourns as a county commissioner and a state representative, which he thought everybody would agree is not as prestigious as being a Novi City Councilmember. You return to Novi; you don't ever stop giving to Novi.

He noted Mayor Gatt's achievements; 48 years, police officer, started the drug program in the school system, you started it. He said he was a detective solving crimes, sergeant, ZBA member, City Council Member, Mayor Pro Tem, and longest serving Mayor in the history of Novi, nobody will match your two records, nobody. He commented that very few people understand what it takes to be an elected official. He said few still understand the solemn pride you have when you look around the city, see the city and what it has become and know the role that you played in that. He stated you may not always get a pat on the back, but you know inside and at the end of the day, that is all that matters is that you know. He said he was there that evening because he did not want this occasion to pass without the official record of this body, reflecting that the city of Novi residents owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to both of you gentlemen. Thank you very much.

Kathy Crawford, 46275 W. 11 Mile Road, Novi said she has been a resident of Novi for 82 years. She guessed the theme for the evening was "Thank You". She wanted to thank all of you because she was on the City Council and she knew when you are making decisions, and you are on City Council it is one of the toughest things because you are making decisions for your next-door neighbor. She said they may not like the decisions you make. She thanked them all for their courage and their willingness to serve. It is a tough job. She thought that the city council and the school board are two of the toughest things of any community service. She said all of you are to be commended. She said November 13 is going to be the next council meeting and we will have some new faces up here. She said she was going to join along with the other comments that are made to

thank you for your service. She commented that most of your working life Mayor Gatt has been working in the civil service of Novi, so thank you. She mentioned that a lot of you do not know that Hugh was one of the first jobs you ever had was in the Parks and Recreation Department at the City and one of the first chairpersons with Parks and Recreation over 50 years ago, so it is a long time. She commented that she was going to get all choked up. She said she was not going to say anymore but thank you for your service. All of you.

**CONSENT AGENDA REMOVALS AND APPROVALS:**

**CM 23-10-132          Moved by Casey, seconded by Smith; CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**To approve the Consent Agenda as presented.**

- A.    Approve Minutes of:  
      October 9, 2023 - Regular Meeting
- B.    Approval of a resolution to revise the voting precinct boundaries to align with Congressional Districts established by the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission.
- C.    Approval of claims and warrants – Warrant 1142

**Roll call vote on CM 23-10-132                  Yeas: Casey, Crawford, Fischer, Smith, Thomas, Gatt, Staudt**  
**Nays: None**

**MATTERS FOR COUNCIL ACTION:**

- 1.    Consideration of approval of resolution to authorize Budget Amendment #2024-2.

**CM 23-10-133          Moved by Casey, seconded by Fischer; CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**Approval of resolution to authorize Budget Amendment #2024-2.**

**Roll call vote on CM 23-10-133                  Yeas: Crawford, Fischer, Smith, Thomas, Gatt, Staudt, Casey**  
**Nays: None**

**CONSENT AGENDA REMOVALS FOR COUNCIL ACTION: None**

**AUDIENCE COMMENT:**

Venkat Thalla, 45006 Yorkshire Drive, Novi said he lived across the street in Jamestown Subdivision in the same house for the last 25 years and has been very happy. He wanted to continue with his comments. He mentioned earlier that he wanted to give about 25

words; sale, support, protect you, direct, expand, transform, conform, excel, merge, produce, improve, continue, know, aware, desire, and no doubt. He said during our journey together while participating in the decision-making process, at least one light should work at, one light should shine, and one light should grow and grow. That is what it is all about and why we are here. He said he got up to the know, aware, and no doubt and he realized it is not that easy to realize we need to realize self and we need to realize system, enlighten, and establish then sir, then discover part at is of service, what is that we discovered? Then create, then sustain, then recycle and then finally absorb. Absorb everything that is there, it will always be there. He said that is mother universe victorious day today. That is what is being celebrated at the Novi Temple, 26 levels of solution increments should be there for us. Our beloved Bob Gatt is leaving after 48 years. Thank you.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS: None**

**MAYOR AND COUNCIL ISSUES:**

1. Public Safety and Fire Recruitment

Mayor Pro Tem Staudt asked Chief Zinser to come to the podium a few questions. He wanted to discuss Public Safety and Fire recruitment. He stated there have been several public postcards, social media, claiming that the shortages that are occurring with our part-time firefighters are cause for future tragedy in Novi and that we have done little to address it. He said this is the last meeting perhaps for some of us. He said he would like to get from our Director of Public Safety a couple of responses, and he questioned whether our residents of Novi are safe tonight.

Chief Zinser acknowledged the Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, the members of City Council and the City Manager. He said it was always a pleasure to be here to be able to have some one-on-one time, so to speak. He said he would open all of that up by saying he did not have time, nor he was going to make time to frankly chase his tail with social media comments. He said he did not have the luxury of sharing thoughts about his employer on social media nor would he ever do so. He said nor will he entertain the idea of responding on social media and getting into a tit for tat with anybody on social media. He said it is unprofessional. It is disrespectful to my employer; it is disrespectful to the citizens of this community. He said I will not do that. Now, to answer your question. He stated Novi is absolutely the safest community you will come across in this country period. He said he has been doing nothing but trying to address the shortage of our part-time firefighter staffing. He noted at the end of 2021 we started to see an exodus of our part time firefighters for whatever reason. He said some do not want to be in public safety anymore. He said some took part-time to earn some full-time jobs elsewhere. He said some left because it was interfering with family life with the extra job. He said the same time we started seeing some exodus of our full-time staff and leaving to go to fire departments that offer 24 hour shifts to find benefit. Whatever reasons they wanted to leave. He said now, when those folks leave, we have our pool of part-time employees. He stated we have invested a lot of money in those folks, train them, send them to the

Fire Academy, train them, get them EMT certified. He said they also get extra points in the hiring process, because he already worked for us, of course, we are going to hire from that. He asked does that hurt us? Yes, it hurts us. I cannot take an individual and bring them on board, put them in front of a computer and say, this is your job, go ahead and do it and they are off and running in three or four days or maybe a week. He explained that is not the way it is in public service, especially public safety. He stated it takes a long time to get them trained, to get them through a part-time Fire Academy, get them through or what we call our mentoring program, it takes well over a year. He stated that since he was promoted in February 2022, he has hired 21 paid-on-call or auxiliary firefighting part-time staff. He said we have hired five or six to replace our full-time staff, we have had some just leave for whatever reason, but it is an ongoing challenge, there is no doubt about it it has been difficult right now for our fire department and staffing, but it is around the clock effort to hire more staffing. He mentioned we just offered a conditional offer to one the other day, he said he got four more in the background phase. He stated we interviewed three other ones just this past week. He said getting them through the entire hiring process is a challenge. Interviews, pre-employment, physical agility test, background investigations, because not everybody who applies has a clean background. He said he is the Director of Public Safety, and he is sending these folks into our residence homes. He said he was going to do a very thorough background check on them.

Mayor Pro Tem Staudt asked if there is anything in addition to what we have done financially, motivation-wise, anything that the Council could have done to change any of this. Chief Zinser replied we have offered signing bonuses. He mentioned that we have increased their pay for the part-time folks, we give them our current part-time firefighters an extra bonus based on the number of shifts that they are working. He said it is a much bigger problem than just there in Novi, it is a problem that people are not generally interested in public safety jobs anymore. He said that is a challenge to get applicants, we spent nearly \$40,000 to \$45,000 dollars last year on flyers sending them around to all our other communities looking for talent. He said we advertise in Engage Magazine and social media. He said it's nothing that we are doing, if anybody says differently, they are wrong.

Mayor Pro Tem Staudt thanked Chief Zinser for clearing that up. He said part of the reason he wanted him to come up is because perhaps it is his last meeting also. He said it has been a great honor to serve folks like you, David Malloy, the City Managers, it has been a great honor.

Mayor Gatt said before he sat down, he wanted to ask a question or to achieve in the last 12 months, 18 months, have you seen a significant change in response times from our first responders. Chief Zinser replied that Oakland County Medical Patrol sets our response times for six minutes for priority one calls. In 2022 year to date, our average response time is five minutes, 54 seconds, year to date in 2023, we are five minutes and 58 seconds. He stated yes, does having a station not staff because of lack of staffing, does that affect response times, yes of course it is going to, but that is not the only factor. He said there has been a lot of road construction, our fire department drives big trucks,

and yes, they can turn the lights and sirens on, but they still must navigate those road construction areas, they must navigate all the detours. He stated this summer was a difficult challenge for the response times. He said we are still meeting our average response times below the Oakland County Medical Patrol six-minute mark.

Mayor Gatt mentioned out of everybody in this room this evening, besides yourself, he thought he had more experience in public safety than anybody else. He said he has stayed out of the election; he has endorsed the people he has endorsed, but he hasn't been outspoken too much, but he is going to say this to anybody who is listening. He believed those postcards are doing in his opinion, is despicable. Whoever is publishing these postcards, for whatever group they are representing, they are trying to put fear into the people's minds who live here and people like yourself and the brave men and women who work for you. He said they drive around trying to prove that you should not be fearful, that Novi is one of the safest communities ever, anywhere. He said we have the finest police and fire department anywhere, they are the finest trained, the finest anywhere. He said you must question as a police officer for his whole life, the motives, what is your motive for sending a postcard out telling people be careful, you are going to die in a fire because our stations are not manned. It is a selfish motive. He said some of the people sending those cards out do not even live in Novi, he would say most of them. He said that is what he has been told, prove him wrong, they do not live here. He said you mentioned earlier in your talk with the Mayor Pro Tem, some people leave for defined benefit, which is a pension, some people leave for 24 hour shifts now, A 24-hour shift does not exist in the police world. He said they only exist in the fire department world, and he thought those postcards are emanating from the fire department world. He said a 24-hour shift is a great job, if you get it, you go to work, you bring your pillow and blanket with you, and he is not making that up. He said he was married to someone whose brother was a full-time firefighter. He said if they get calls, they are heroes, he was not knocking it, they do something he would never do, go into a burning building. He said that only happens a couple of times a year, maybe a couple of times ever in their career. He said they work five or six days a month, and that is a great job. He said the citizens of Novi would have to pay about \$10 to \$12 million dollars more to switch over to a system like that, and that would be two or three mills on your taxes for a system that is inefficient, maybe it was efficient 50 years ago in the bigger cities, that is where this started, and it worked great. He said in today's world, when we have all these building materials that do not catch on fire and sprinkler systems that put a fire out. That kind of system is passe. He stated it is up to the City Council, whoever sits up here, whoever sits in this chair, your job is going to be to do what is best for the citizens of Novi, not what is best for a specific group of individuals, most of whom do not even live here. He wanted to caution, and say to the 66,000 people that live here, you are safe. Like the Chief said earlier, there is trouble all over the world trying to recruit people into public safety, and we are no different. It is troublesome here too. He said this City Council went to bat and we engaged an ambulance company that has four or five ambulances driving around the city in Novi 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for free. He stated the people who stood at this table now have done their job. Anyone who says different, they are misleading you. He thought they were mistreating you, because they are trying to make you scared when there's no reason to be afraid. He was sure our Chief and City Manager were going to continue

their diligent efforts to recruit more people and if it takes more money, he was sure the City Council is going to approve it. He thanked Chief Zinser for setting the record straight, the city is safe. The postcards that claim that it is not safe are false.

Member Thomas wondered if Chief Zinser could give her an idea of how many open positions we currently have. Chief Zinser said we are always ongoing hiring part-timers. We are currently fully staffed on our full-time side. He said now we are looking at a promotion to assistant chief, which will create a ripple effect from that to somebody who is going to probably go to captain, and some will go to lieutenant, so we will have to fill that one spot at the end. Right now, the full-time fire department is fully staffed. Member Thomas said she knew he was asked if there was anything that we could do, it was not a clear yes or no, you said that we have done things. Are there any other ideas out there to assist in that staffing or ideas that we haven't addressed or any other way that we could potentially help you in the future gain that staffing. He commented that the big part of what we need from the Council is your support, if it is more money for the part-time staff then that is what we need to do. Is it more money for different recruiting ideas, that is what we need to do. He reiterated that we spent \$40,000 to \$45,000 dollars in the flyers, and we are going to send another round out here, hopefully, by the end of the week, if everything lines up. He said when we need the money for those kinds of things, we need your support. He said the Council has always been very supportive of public safety and we are very grateful for that, we need continued support.

Member Thomas thanked him for his clarification. She pointed out that she found it a little bit troubling that we are talking about political mailers at a Council meeting, it feels inappropriate. She knew there were a lot of mailers going out about a lot of different topics, some saying that some people don't want you to vote, some people are saying you are not safe. She hoped that in the future that political mailings are not discussed at this table, or at least that would be her hope. Thank you.

Mayor Gatt mentioned what he said was not political, he was talking about the safety of our residents. He said he was talking about the obvious attempt to make people feel unsafe, and that is not political. He felt that is our job here, to make sure that people are safe, and that they feel safe, and that we provide the tools necessary to make that happen.

Member Thomas said she knew that what we are saying is not political, but if there are mailing going out, it is probably election related, we do know that we are safe, and we know we are doing our jobs. It did not seem to her that we should be addressing social media posts and postcards in this meeting. She stated that you might say it is not political, but these are mailings, or at least the mailings, she has seen that had anything to do with police and fire have been election related. She said she may be missing something, maybe there is a postcard she did not see or that did not come to her home. That is just my point of view.

Mayor Pro Tem Staudt said he had one more question for Chief Zinser. He mentioned there has been some discussion about adding full-time firefighters to the fire department,

how does that resolve the issues in the evening and on weekends. He wondered if those full-time firefighters filling those slots today, or is it being promised down the road. Chief Zinser replied, with the collective bargaining constraints, adding full-time firefighters under our current model would not help relieve the staffing struggles we are having with part-time firefighters. Mayor Pro Tem Staudt said it would just add the number of full-time firefighters. Chief Zinser replied, yes.

## 2. Special presentation

Mayor Gatt asked if there was any further discussion. Thank you Chief. He said next is Member Crawford said he did not have a prepared speech. He commented that it has been quite an honor to serve before, and then go on to the county commissioners, state representative, and then back to the City Council. He said the best of those three agencies is the City Council, because you are closest to the people, and you can do the most for people. He appreciated having the opportunity to do that and he looked forward to not doing it anymore. He said it is the first time in 40 years that he has not been giving speeches and putting up campaign signs. He said he will be watching you guys, so you better say on the ball. Thank you.

Mayor Gatt said he did have something prepared he did not want to forget anything. He said as he entered into the final minutes of his final meeting as a Novi councilmember, as your mayor, he wanted to stop for just a moment, slow things down and reflect on a remarkable part of his life that he has been privileged to lead dedicated to a single city, a single purpose. When I started working for the city of Novi and the citizens of Novi 48 years ago, Novi was a much different place than it is today. Other than the Mile Roads, Novi Road, and Grand River, all the roads were dirt roads. We had about 14,000 people living here, there were 16 police officers. He said we had a full-time Fire Chief, Dwayne Bell, and the rest of the staff were all volunteers. He said the police chief was the legendary Lamont Carrol Begole. Chief Begole gave him his start and allowed him to fulfill his dream of being a police officer. He stated that 27 years later, he was ready to leave the police department and he began his career with the Oakland County government. He said he has been with that organization now for over 21 years.

He said his political career really started at the police department, he ran for and was elected each time to be the union steward and Tia can smile on that one. He said he always wanted what was best for Novi then, now, and always will well into the future. He wanted to say thank-you starting with the present, working backwards first, his colleagues on City Council right now. He said he has been friends with Hugh Crawford the longest, he knew him when he did have hair. He would sit with him and Kathy in the Parks and Recreation office after hours with our friend Carla. He commented that Hugh told him stories about Council, and even then, however, he never dreamed of being a part of it. He said Dave Staudt and he became friends when he first ran for office, and we never looked back. There's a reason why he chose Dave to be the mayor pro tem each of the six times that he ran for and was elected as mayor. He is smart. He is thorough and he is always filled with new ideas and the city and citizens of Novi owe Dave Staudt a lot. He referred to Justin Fischer, he was his first opponent to this position, and the toughest one



he faced. He said they became the best of friends. He is as smart as anyone he has ever known, and has served the city so well already, but he knew that the best is yet to come to him and his family. He wished him the very best. He said to his other three colleagues, he did not know them as well, but he did know this, everyone owes you three a debt of gratitude for all that you do. All that you put yourselves and your families through running for office. He mentioned Kathy Crawford touched on it in her remarks. She said it really is a family matter when you run for office. She said the names you are called, the accusations that are levied against you. He said maybe we are all tough, but our wives or husbands, girlfriends or boyfriends or your children, they all are part of that receiving end of that put down, that complaint, that allegation. He said it is tough running for City office for any public office. So, he thanked them. He mentioned Sheryl Walsh-Malloy who was sitting out there in the audience. She is his speech writer, his partner in crime, but more importantly, she is his friend, she made him look good and that is not always easy to do. He said he will never be able to pay her back for all that she has done for him. He mentioned her husband, well, it is no secret that he was and is, and always will be, his very best friend. He said that did not always sit well with the three city managers that he served as mayor. He said it was just that way, that it was Dave Malloy who put Novi on the map in the public safety world, and no one will ever question that. He said Tom Schultz, he has told him over and over, he is the best attorney that he has ever seen and if he ever got in trouble, got arrested, sued, or found himself in harm's way, he would want Tom there next to him. He said he has seen a lot of attorneys as a police officer and his job with the county he deals with attorneys all the time. He said Tom is the best of the best. He said he has had the pleasure working with his mentor Jerry Fisher for a short while, but Tom is the best of the best. He said we are all lucky to have him. He mentioned Cortney Hanson and thanked her for being his right-hand person when he needed something regarding their Charter or meeting or anything to do with the City Council. He said he will miss all our conversations.

He said to the rest of the city staff, some he knew well, some not as much as others, but he did know this, you are all valuable, and you are all valued. Thank you for all that you do. He said to our former city managers that he had the privilege and pleasure of working with Rick Helwig, if those of you who know Rick, or knew Rick, he was a sight to behold, he set the bar so high, and he was always in awe of Rick. He said he was a police officer when Rick came in, so he worked for Rick so when he got elected to City Council it was difficult for him to transition from staff member who looked up to Rick and called him sir, to being one of his seven bosses. He said it was difficult and he never wanted him to do this, but he failed because he always looked up to him as his boss. He said Clay Pearson picked up right where Rick left off and under his leadership, the city grew to great heights. He weathered a near depression and came out on the other side stronger. He mentioned Pete Auger, he was a man brought in for a specific job, which he did brilliantly. Pete knew how to talk the economic development talk, and many great companies decided to locate in Novi because of Pete. He said now we have Victor Cardenas who sat patiently watching and observing both Clay and Pete. He said Victor wasn't just watching and observing, he was learning. He told Victor was now his turn to shine, and he knew he would. He said he is smarter than a whip and ready to move Novi into the stratosphere. He said he will be watching. He said a guy who was here earlier, Dave Landry, he has

said it before, he has said it 1000 times, and he will say it one last time. He thought Dave Landry was the best mayor, the greatest Mayor we've ever had, the man who was articulate, the man was thorough, the man spoke, thought, and acted like a lawyer. He was one of his heroes. He noted that any time he had a decision that was tough, before he made that decision, he would ask himself, what would David Landry do, and he acted on that.

So, it is time to say goodbye and thank you to everyone. He thanked his supporters, and he thanked the people who did not support him. You made me better. If he ever hurt anybody while he was Mayor sitting in this seat, he apologized, he would never intentionally hurt anyone in his life. So please forgive him if he hurt you. He said he is off to a new world, a world where his evenings will be his own. He said please, he asked you to keep him in your thoughts and prayers, as he will keep all of you in mine. He loved them all and may God continue to bless you, your families, and the entire City of Novi. So, thank you very much.

**ADJOURNMENT** – There being no further business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned at 7:42 P.M.

  
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Cortney Hanson, City Clerk

  
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Justin Fischer, Mayor

  
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Transcribed by Deborah S. Aubry

Date approved: November 20, 2023