

...West of 98

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She thought more about it and realized that, in a world that can feel ever-more uncertain, she was lucky enough to have a place with strong roots, where she could rekindle her connection to a place. She loaded up her belongings, drove cross-country, and moved back to her grandmother's hometown of Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

In Fergus Falls, Anderson felt rebellious against the conventional wisdom that young people need to live in the city and that creatives should move to the coastal cities. When she arrived, she was soon engrossed in a new nonprofit job focusing on arts and community development. She was quickly engaged to assist with a historic preservation project. But not everything was positive back home. Fergus Falls (population: 13,000, located an hour from the nearest metro area of any size) had lost some major retailers. It had a history of cronyism in local politics that excluded anyone not part of the town's "old guard." It has flaws to overcome. And yet, her fierce loyalty to her place has only grown.

Annoyed by the American media obsession with rural America after the 2016 election, Anderson wrote that she was ready for new attention to rural America, "directed somewhere between bleak landscapes of ignorance and bigotry, and Pollyanna illusions of the pastoral life. This is where most rural Americans actually live and where some of the most important work is being done."

Anderson writes that the homecomers can help drive that new attention. As she observes, a November Gallup poll found that more Americans, given the choice, would choose a rural area (27%) than any other location. When you combine rural areas and towns, fully 40% of surveyed Americans would prefer to live outside of the city or its suburbs. Preference for rural living also rises with age. The age 18-29 demographic leans towards a city or a big-city suburb, but each successive demographic favors smaller, more rural areas with higher frequency. The polling bears out what many of us experience in our own lives—youthfulness in the city has its perks, but as we begin to establish our own families, we focus on the merits of rural areas and small towns.

Another interesting piece of data in the Gallup poll is the disparity between where Americans actually live and where they want to live. Only 12% of Americans live in rural areas, but 27% aspire to. That disparity between reality and aspiration is the largest on the survey. More people live in the city than actually aspire to do so. Meanwhile, if aspirations became reality, the rural population would almost

double.

So how do we make that happen? As Michele Anderson experience, "home" is not a perfect place, but it's one worth fighting for. You'll see more from Michele Anderson's op-ed and Wendell Berry's writings pop up in future essays. This opens the beginning of a new series that's on my mind—Americans aspire for a rural lifestyle, so how can we bring those homecomers home?

James Decker is a lawyer, farmer, and mayor in Stamford, Texas, and the creator of the forthcoming "West of 98" podcast and website. He may be contacted through Facebook at facebook.com/james.decker.

...Bronte City Council minutes

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It was considered to approve a resolution authorizing the submission of a 2019-2020 Texas Community Development Block Grant (TxCDBG) application. Stormy Vaughn made a motion to approve the submission and was seconded by Steve Hines. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Discussion was held to consider approval of the Engineering Contract for 2019-2020 TxCDBG Application Project. The City Secretary opened the sealed package and distributed the bid packet to the council members. Stormy Vaughn made a motion to approve the Jacob & Martin bid and was seconded by David Bedford. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

It was considered to remove Pat Martindale and Susan Graves from the signature cards of the Bronte Cemetery Association banking accounts. Santiago Rodriguez made a motion for removal and was seconded by David Bedford. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Lee Wommack made a motion to remove Crystal Blevins from the signature cards of all City of Bronte banking accounts and was seconded by David Bedford. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Consideration was held approving Coke County Appraisal District's excess Bronte funds of \$134.92 from the 2018 budget to be placed in the "Future Assets" fund for Coke Central Appraisal District. David Bedford made a motion to approve the Bronte funds to stay with Coke Central Appraisal District and was

seconded by Santiago Rodriguez. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Stormy Vaughn made a motion to approve the intergovernmental contract with Coke County and City of Bronte and was seconded by Lee Wommack. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Discussion was held regarding the City of Robert Lee revised rate and terms of the first amendment of the water supply contract with Robert Lee. The council discussed City of Robert Lee's proposal. After a lengthy discussion, there are two options: 1) go with the amendment and rate Bronte has presented) or 2) accept the proposal from Robert Lee's negotiation with a lower overage rate and wait until October as the effective date. The original contract states Robert Lee cannot go over 200k gallons of water a day. Bronte's proposal was to charge an overage rate, only on any excess water over the 200k of water a day, calculated on a monthly basis. Stormy Vaughn made a motion to deny City of Robert's revised rate and terms and keep with our amendment. She was seconded by David Bedford. The motion passed with a vote of 4 - 1 (Lee Wommack abstained).

Discussion was held to consider amending container information on Sanitation Ordinance #18-05 to Section I. Convenience Center with a Gate Fee at Convenient Center. Steve Hines made a motion to the new gate fee for citizens at the Convenient Center, effective in 30 days, and was seconded by David Bedford. Ricky Royall asked if there could be an exception for nursing homes, schools, and churches. David Bedford recommends having them contact city hall to get a voucher to turn in at the gate. David Bedford amended the motion to add the exception and get the voucher at city hall and was seconded by Santiago Rodriguez. Ricky Royall also asked if fees could start when signs are posted and city hall does advertising. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Possible dates for curb side service were discussed and included April 8, 15, 22, or 29, 2019. David Bedford made a motion to have curb side service on April 15, 2019, and was seconded by Lee Wommack. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Stormy Vaughn made a motion to approve the estimated cost of curb side rate (\$175/hr, estimated at 6 hours) and was seconded by David Bedford. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Quotes were accepted from Jake Dodds Construction and Matt Moore for the Bronte street drainage project. Stormy Vaughn made a motion to accept Jake Dodds Construction bid option A and was seconded by David Bedford. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Consideration was taken regarding water service credit ordinance/agreement with Bronte Volunteer Fire Department/EMS staff. The city created a draft of guidelines for water service credit. Lee Wommack and council added verbiage to guidelines and made changes to the document. Teresa Ballard will email changes for review and they will be discussed at the next council meeting. No further action was taken.

Mayor Gohman, Stormy Vaughn, and Ricky Royall met with Mr. Howard Baker regarding his proposal with a mentioned portion of cemetery property. The meeting went well and Mr. Baker will pursue his options to try to obtain the property.

Mayor Gohman wants to get a committee to look at all of the things that need to be addressed at the cemetery. A packet will be brought to council and then the issues will be prioritized. Mayor Gohman asked if a citizen would be willing to be on the committee. Brenda Hines will volunteer to be on the committee and will recruit a few more citizens. Ms. Hines wants the council to be aware that the grass burrs need to be addressed. Ricky Royall will call and get a weed control quote. Stormy Vaughn made a motion to accept Brenda Hines to lead the Cemetery Maintenance Committee and was seconded by David Bedford. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Discussion was held to consider amending/archiving Dangerous Building Ordinance #368 and adopting the new Dangerous Building Ordinance #19-02. This item was tabled.

Discussion was held on

amending Peddler Permit Ordinance #310. The council will review the Peddler Permit Application and send changes to the City Secretary. Stormy Vaughn stated that the City Attorney should be involved with this ordinance. Lee Wommack made a motion to table Ordinance #310 and was seconded by Stormy Vaughn. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Stormy Vaughn made a motion to delete (i) Locations from Section 3 Licenses from RV/RV Park Ordinance 18-09 effective immediately and was seconded by Santiago Rodriguez. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Mayor Gohman discussed zoning with the council and need to get our objectives. Mayor Gohman will set up working meetings with Steve Hines and Stormy Vaughn in the next few weeks to work on the scope of work. Stormy Vaughn has zoning templates in Word and the can be adopted according to our needs. No further action was taken.

Mayor Gohman distributed a spreadsheet for the council to review regarding adopting policy controlling approval process for purchases of \$100. Anything non-routine will be indicated, when it is an emergency, it will be noted on the spreadsheet. This is a working draft for review. No further action was taken.

There were minor types in the minutes for January 17, 2019, and Teresa Ballard will correct the errors and send back to council for review. Lee Wommack made a motion to approve the minutes with minor corrections and was seconded by David Bedford. The motion passed with a vote of 5 - 0.

Lee Wommack made a motion to approve January Bills Paid, October - January State of Revenue and Expenditures, October - January Balance Sheet, and Bank Reconciliations Report (Teresa Ballard stated that all accounts are reconciled but we are waiting on the auditors) with clarifications. The motion, seconded by Santiago Rodriguez, passed with a vote of 3 - 2 (Steve Hines and Stormy Vaughn voted no).

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