

MINUTES

1. CONVENE CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION MEETING

Mayor Zerby called the meeting to order at 6:02 P.M.

A. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Zerby; Councilmembers Johnson, Labadie, Siakel, and Sundberg; City Administrator Lerud; Finance Director Rigdon; Planning Director Darling; Director of Public Works Brown; and, City Engineer Budde

Absent: None

B. Review Agenda

Sundberg moved, Siakel seconded, approving the agenda as presented. Motion passed 5/0.

2. Capital Improvement Plan

City Administrator Lerud stated that one of the first tasks assigned to City Engineer Budde was to take a look at the CIP. He stated that the goal was develop a realistic CIP for the City.

City Engineer Budde explained that they pulled together as much information as they could. He explained how they broke down the CIP to look at one street project per year. He reviewed how they looked at the projects as sort of “painting your way out of a room” so they were not turning around and creating problems elsewhere. He noted that through the Western Shorewood Drainage study there were a number of projects that rose to the forefront. He stated that they also broke down the costs into how the City can pay for them since the City does not do assessments. He noted that there are a few projects that the Council has not seen before including Lafayette Avenue and the signal system at Highway Seven and Old Market Road.

Councilmember Johnson stated that there was a SeeClickFix regarding Strawberry Lane that had a response by Public Works Director Brown. He stated that the response stated that Strawberry Lane was now going to be done in 2025 and he fielded many calls from people in the neighborhood contacting them. He stated that people moved into the neighborhood around 2013 and what they all heard around that time was that the next sidewalk that would be going in was going to be Strawberry Lane. He stated that he is frustrated that this has been pushed out as far as 2025 even though he understands some of the reasons for the delay. He stated that he would like to have a discussion about ways to finance and expedite some of these projects that have been delayed.

Councilmember Siakel stated that she can understand Councilmember Johnson’s frustration but she is in favor of putting together a plan that the City can implement. Councilmember Sundberg stated that it feels like there will need to be a reality check with the residents.

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Councilmember Siakel stated that she did not think the City was ignoring the streets or the infrastructure, it just seems like they are deteriorating faster. Councilmember Labadie stated that she shares Councilmember Johnson's concern and noted that she feels Strawberry Lane is unique because it was slated as the "next trail project" and has been out there for a long time. She stated that it has been pushed out for a long time, the City told the residents that this would happen and yet it continues to be bumped out. She noted that she feels it brings into question the credibility of the Council.

Councilmember Siakel stated that it looks as though the City may be able to borrow money pretty inexpensively because of the falling interest rates. She stated that she is not an expert in this area, but believes it may make sense for the City to take advantage and get some of these projects done.

Councilmember Johnson stated that he had just sent an e-mail with that same idea to City Administrator Lerud and wanted the Council to discuss the possibilities. He stated that he also thinks the Council needs to take a line by line look at the CIP and see which ones are truly the priorities. He stated that the Beverly Drive wetland issue is on the list but questioned whether this is the City stepping in to fix something that failed on a private property.

Public Works Director Brown stated that he has had this discussion with City Attorney Keane. He stated that this started when it was thought there was an obstruction in the public right-of-way. He explained that City Attorney Keane has always told him what is in the public right-of-way always belongs to the City. He stated that he was also told that then the City has the responsibility for maintaining it and once it is maintained the question becomes whether it is private or public.

Councilmember Siakel stated that she had a conversation with a resident about the flooding issue in this area and what it will cost to fix it.

Public Works Director Brown stated that as far as prioritizing projects, he thinks what is driving it is the desire from Council and residents is for a trail on Strawberry, but the hurdle becomes the stormwater aspect and the land acquisition. He stated that there will be a significant amount of right-of-way costs involved. Councilmember Johnson expressed frustration because the residents were told that the land acquisition would happen in 2019.

Councilmember Siakel asked why the City cannot ask the landowners to donate the land in order to put in the trail. Public Works Director Brown stated that the surveying is done and the encumbrances report has been started. He stated that the City can push those, but he isn't sure what would get bumped out.

Shannon Sweeney, David Drown and Associates, stated that they do not own crystal balls, but noted that the City could probably take advantage of lower interest rates right now and do a little bit more projects. He stated that he does not know how long these lower rates will last, but it is definitely cheaper right now.

Councilmember Johnson asked if the pond on Smithtown was the key lynch pin. City Engineer Budde stated that it would be that and some connecting storm sewer projects. Councilmember Johnson stated that he would like to see the City start there and then start branching out.

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Public Works Director Brown stated that the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District will require some sort of retention for the addition of the trail and the enlargement of the road footprint.

The Council discussed the issues with roads and drainage in the City and discussed ways to finance some of these projects.

There was a Consensus that the City should try to take advantage of the low interest rates and get some of these projects done.

City Engineer Budde stated that he thinks the earliest the City could deliver this project would probably be 2022 because there is still a lot of background process that needs to happen first. Councilmember Sundberg stated that at least steps are being taken, so that should help communicate to the residents that this is moving forward.

Councilmember Labadie stated that unless aggressive or quick steps are taken, she is not sure that it will be successfully communicated that the City is really moving forward because she feels the City has lost its credibility. Councilmember Siakel stated that she does not feel that way because she thinks the Council is just doing their job. She stated that things that have come up that have been unpredictable and does not feel the Council has acted inappropriately or without credibility.

City Administrator Lerud noted that another difference is that five years ago the Council did not understand the stormwater situation like it does now. He stated that the plans to put in a sidewalk on Strawberry Lane had also hinged on the school participating who then ultimately decided that they did not want to be involved.

Councilmember Johnson stated that everyone sitting at this table understands all the reasons that the project has been pushed out, however, the problem is that perception is reality. He stated that the sooner the public sees a design of a stormwater pond with a trail through it the better because it will be something the public can see and digest.

Councilmember Siakel asked what the next step will be.

City Administrator Lerud stated that staff understands staff direction regarding front loading this work. He noted that some of the pond work projects will have to be a separate bond because they are not eligible for the street reconstruction bond programs. He stated that he thinks City Engineer Budde's timeline guess was probably pretty accurate.

City Engineer Budde stated that it is possible that construction could start in late 2021 and noted that the first thing they would have to do is get rid of fifty thousand yards of soil.

Mayor Zerby asked what the City will do for the rest of the roads, such as Manor Road, and asked if it was just going to be Band-aids. City Administrator Lerud stated that what was not included in tonight's information was a list of the other streets. He explained that the finance plan is for every other year to have a five-hundred-thousand-dollar project planned from now through 2030 that will take care of the non-reconstruction roads that can get by with an overlay so the City stays on top of them. He stated that the other roads have not been abandoned, they just have not identified yet.

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Mayor Zerby asked when that information would be able to be presented so people know. City Administrator Lerud stated that he would think it could be presented in a few months. He stated that they were concentrating on these costs because they are the driver of everything.

Councilmember Siakel asked what was going on with Manor Road and Knight's Bridge. She asked if the road just deteriorated faster than expected. She stated that the e-mails got a bit long and confusing.

Public Works Director Brown stated that he needs to look into it further. He stated that he did some cold patching in the area, but he would like to take a detailed look because that road has been overlaid at least once. He stated that there are a few areas that are particularly rough in that area and noted that he is a bit puzzled by it.

Mayor Zerby suggested reaching out to Deephaven to see where this area falls within their CIP. Councilmember Johnson noted that he had reached out to one of their Councilmembers and asked about their plans. Public Works Director Brown stated that he believes the City can probably do a thicker overlay in this area to buy more time.

City Engineer Budde asked if the Council had any other ideas of projects that would be a lower priority. Councilmember Johnson stated that he has another project that he believes should be a higher priority, which is the Freeman Park outlet. He stated that he feels that would be a quick project that would give the City lots of bang for its buck.

City Engineer Budde explained that if the City did that project before it did the Smithtown Pond, it would send more water to the pond before it was built, so staff changed the order so the Smithtown Pond would be built first. He stated that the projects will basically happen at the same time, but he felt it was important to get the downstream stuff taken care of first.

Public Works Director Brown asked if the Council was getting feedback regarding other roads that are not on the list. Councilmember Siakel stated that she has received positive comments regarding the resurfacing of Birch Bluff.

Public Works Director Brown asked the Council if there were projects on the list that they would have trouble justifying or would want to see bumped later. Councilmember Johnson stated that he almost feels as though the Badger Park tennis courts should be taken off of this list because it comes from a completely separate budget. City Administrator Lerud stated that it does have a completely separate budget and noted that it was included here just so there was a record of all the projects. Councilmember Johnson expressed concern about the optics of making it look like the tennis courts are sixth in line on the list of projects even though there are a lot of major issues with the roads in the City.

Councilmember Siakel stated that the common theme is water in most of these projects and feels that has changed dramatically over the last ten years.

Mayor Zerby asked about the 2024 mill and overlay and striping because it does not have a road attached to it. City Engineer Budde explained that this was the five-hundred thousand dollars that will occur every two years in order for the City to do some mill and overlay projects throughout the City. He noted that it will show up on the list every two years beginning in 2022.

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Councilmember Siakel asked if the Council would make a decision each year as to how much the City will bond. City Administrator Lerud stated that until now, there has not been a really solid plan for the CIP for financing behind it. He agreed that the Council will look at bonding and noted that there will be a few projects that will be eligible for outside financing.

Councilmember Johnson stated that he would like to see the City contact the school district again about possibly participating in the project and knows that one suggestion was to assess them if they did not want to participate. Councilmember Labadie stated that the last time they reached out to the school district, it was just a meeting with Principal Dennis Peterson. She suggested that perhaps the City should cast a wider net and include members of the school board.

Councilmember Johnson stated that student safety is now one of their goals, so starting the meeting with that goal may create a different outcome. He stated that he would be happy to attend that meeting. Mayor Zerby stated that he thinks the City needs to have a good story to tell because he does not feel they really understood what the benefit would be to the school district during the last discussions.

Councilmember Labadie stated that there is also the new development in Chanhassen that was not there the first time this was discussed which is full of young kids, which will make a difference. She stated that perhaps the City also includes Chanhassen in this discussion because of that development. City Engineer Budde explained that the Safe Routes to School requires there to be a larger, almost community-wide consensus on the projects in order to be approved. City Administrator Lerud stated that it may be a good idea to reach out to these entities and see what happens.

Mayor Zerby stated that there are eight projects listed for 2020 and asked if that was a realistic goal since it is already March. City Engineer Budde gave an overview of the planned projects and how easy they will be to complete. Mayor Zerby asked that City Engineer Budde put together a more detailed look at where the City is and the different stages of these projects so it is easier to understand.

Councilmember Sundberg asked if there should be a City-wide communication to help educate the residents. City Engineer Budde stated that he believes that should be part of the process.

Councilmember Sundberg stated that she did not necessarily mean project specific education but something that would help the more general sense of ignorance about what goes on with road projects and what has to happen for them to move forward.

Councilmember Johnson stated that the open houses that were done with Glenn Road seemed to be the most effective way of communicating with residents. He stated that he would be in favor of holding an open house and discuss the overall ten-year plan to discuss with residents.

City Administrator Lerud stated that this has been discussed but the fear is that if the City invites all 1,200 residents and even just half of them show up, there is not a facility that can handle that volume of people. He stated that it would have to be done as a series of meetings and the City broken up on partitions in order to accommodate the people.

Mayor Zerby stated that he thinks it has been very confusing for residents because they were given a 25-year plan for the roads and told when their street would be done and then things changed.

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Public Works Director Brown stated that having Bolton and Menk go through the CIP has been good and noted that this is the best staff has ever felt about the CIP. He stated that the Council discussed the CIP at the retreat and there is also buy in from staff to have the stability within the CIP so the City can also look at the finance plan and communicate this information to the residents. He stated that if the street ratings and the finance plans can be shared with residents it will help explain to them why their road is or is not included in the priority plans.

Councilmember Sundberg asked why Public Works Director Brown stated that he feels better about this CIP as compared to past years. Public Works Director Brown stated that in the past, it seems as though the City was operating in a reactive mode. He explained that this year it was more comprehensive and all the pieces have been put together up front, including finances. He stated that this will allow the City to do some preventive work rather than reactive work. He stated that having a CIP that both staff and Council agree on and feel strongly about will help and also make the communication process easier.

Councilmember Sundberg stated that she is not sure she believes that this CIP is really something different than the City has had in years past. Public Works Director Brown asked what her reservations were with this CIP. Councilmember Sundberg stated that she is basing her opinion on this history and the track record with past CIPs.

Councilmember Siakel stated that she does not think anyone on the Council would have thought that stormwater was going to have as large of an effect on the City as it has over the last ten years. She stated that she thinks the City has now finally taken a bigger picture look and a more comprehensive idea of what needs to be done and is breaking it down into steps.

Public Works Director Brown stated that the plans will need to be adjusted, as needed, but reiterated that he feels good that there is a realistic plan.

Councilmember Johnson asked if the Council should identify which projects they will should be inflexible about and that they believe have to happen. Public Works Director Brown stated that would be a good idea.

Councilmember Siakel stated that he thinks that Finance Director Rigdon has done a great job because he has come and looked at the big picture. She stated that she thinks staff, overall, has sharpened their pencil and done a better job.

City Administrator Lerud stated that he thinks staff has gotten a good read on which projects the Council wants to take priority. He stated that one of the next things will be to hold a public hearing on the reconstructive bond and the street program which will happen at the end of April.

Mayor Zerby asked that the CIP be posted on the website and clearly marked as a draft in order for people to see what is being talked about. He asked that the acronyms be clearly spelled out to avoid confusion for residents.

3. ADJOURN

Johnson moved, Labadie seconded, Adjourning the City Council Work Session Meeting of March 9, 2019, at 7:02 P.M. Motion passed 5/0.

ATTEST:

Scott Zerby, Mayor

Sandie Thone, City Clerk