



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
Public Safety Bldg—Training Room, 825 41st Ave NE
Monday, April 05, 2021
7:00 PM

Mayor
Amada Márquez Simula
Councilmembers
John Murzyn, Jr.
Connie Buesgens
Nick Novitsky
Kt Jacobs
City Manager
Kelli Bourgeois

MINUTES

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, this hybrid meeting was held both virtually and in-person.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Mayor Márquez Simula called the work session to order at 7:00 pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula, Councilmembers Buesgens, Jacobs, Murzyn, Jr., and Novitsky

Also Present: Lenny Austin, Police Chief; Kelli Bourgeois, City Manager; Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director/City Engineer; Joe Kloiber, Finance Director; Dan O'Brien, Assistant Fire Chief; Ben Sandell, Communications Coordinator; Charlie Thompson, Fire Chief; Nicole Tingley, City Clerk; Tony Wotzka, MnDOT

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. Vaccination Clinics

Fire Chief Thompson stated that Public Safety has been working with Anoka County Department of Health to have a COVID-19 vaccination clinic in Columbia Heights. The timeline for the first clinic is the week of April 19th. An exact date is not known. He added that City public safety staff will help administer vaccines. He also noted that ideally participants would sign-up to receive a vaccine, but they will not turn anyone away as long as they have a supply. Thompson noted that the City Council would be helpful in getting the word out and added that he wanted to make sure they understood the details and were on board.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated it would be a great resource for the community.

Councilmember Buesgens shared that State Representative Sandra Feist sent her information regarding a vaccine clinic for the Muslim Community at the Islamic Center of Minnesota in Columbia Heights on April 12th.

Councilmember Jacobs asked if the city clinic would be a double dose vaccine or the single shot vaccine. Thompson responded that they have been provided direction from Anoka County to ask the community about preferences, but they will take any vaccine type they can get. Jacobs commented that in her experience with talking with residents, many would prefer the Johnson and Johnson shot as it is only one plus one shot would be easier to administer. Thompson agreed that a one shot clinic would be easier.

Councilmember Murzyn Jr. thanked the Fire and Police Departments for their work and the great news.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that they would be reaching out to the Multicultural Advisory Committee and the Latino and Somali communities regarding date and vaccine preferences. She asked Buesgens to send her the information regarding the vaccine opportunity for the Muslim community.

City staff will update the City Council and the public as more details are determined.

2. MnDOT PEL Study

Public Works Director Hansen introduced Tony Wotzka from MnDOT. Wotzka is the Co-Project Manager for the University and Central Avenue Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study.

Wotzka provided an overview of the study including the study area, public involvement, and the focus areas. He stated that currently phase one of the study is wrapping up. To finish phase one there will be additional community outreach, study documentation published, and purpose and evaluation criteria established.

Phase two of the study will last approximately 18 months from Fall 2021 to Summer 2023. This part of the study will focus on alternatives development.

An additional upcoming part of the study will be demonstration projects. These are pilot projects to test out long terms solutions. One primary project would include median extensions or bump-outs. For Columbia Heights areas proposed for demonstration projects are 37th, Gould, 42nd, 44th, 45th, 47th, and 50th.

Wotzka stated that a Leading Pedestrian Interval (LPI) is being considered for 40th and Central and explained that and LPI provides a 3 second head start for pedestrians to start crossing there is a green light for cars.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if the study and its outcomes would have any effect on the City's ability to apply for future grants to fix 43rd through 47th. Wotzka stated that he did not think so.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired if MnDOT is considering all-red clearance interval intersections. Wotzka responded that MnDOT is considering them for trials noting that they would start with a shorter amount of the day and then expand. He stated that he did not know if the locations of the trial intersections had been determined.

Finance Director Kloiber inquired how to access businesses if left turns are eliminated. Wotzka noted drivers would have to go up to the next light and take a U-turn and then turn right or having 3 quarter intersections may be a possibility.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she is excited about the demonstration projects and what can be learned from them without spending a lot of money.

Wotzka stated that he would provide concepts of the demonstration projects in the next couple of weeks.

3. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Lines

Hansen provided a history of the Metro Transit's study and implementation of Bus Rapid Transit Lines. Hansen noted that Central Avenue was not original route included in their studies, but has now become a sustainable route and has been approved by Metropolitan Council.

Hansen stated the Bus Rapid Transit line F would replace bus route 10 north of 53rd and the rest would be modified. Hansen explained how a Bus Rapid Transit Line works noting that riders prepay, the stops have more amenities, and the buses are interlined with traffic signals.

Hansen stated that the City needs to consider if the stops make senses especially considering redevelopment. He added that construction is anticipated to start in 2025.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she is excited about this development.

Councilmembers Buesgens and Jacobs stated that they heard that the bus depot at 41st would be removed. Hansen responded that he did not hear that, but the stop would not be in the transit stop, but rather out in the street. Buesgens stated that she thought that the stop in the street would hold up traffic.

4. 37th Avenue Proposed Layout - 30% Design

Public Works Director Hansen provided an overview of the feedback and questions from the public at the open house for 37th Avenue reconstruction project. He stated that the main question was how the project is being funded. In regards to feedback, there was stronger support to have the trail on the north side and not a lot of feedback on the removal of parking.

Hansen showed a map of the project. He provided more details regarding the proposed design for the intersection of 37th Avenue and 37th Place. He explained that they are determining if the trail or sidewalk should have stop arms where it intersects with the railroad.

Hansen showed provided a summary of the presentation given at the virtual open house. He showed the before and after layout of the street noting that the road would shift south four feet. It would be two lanes with a trail on the north side and a sidewalk on the south side.

Hansen shared the next steps for the project. They are finishing the 30% design, a RFP for final design, and another public open house in late April or early May.

Hansen noted that the City has utility work to complete in the project area. Staff would like to have this completed in 2022 so the road project can be completed in 2023 when the funding is available.

5. Sewer Capacity Study

Public Works Director Hansen stated that two separate sewer capacity studies need to be completed. The first is the site behind the public safety where Reuter Walton has proposed apartments and SACA would like to relocate. The second would be a larger study for collection district one for redevelopment of the old Rainbow site.

Hansen explained that there have been repeatedly occurring sewage backups on the trunk line along 43rd Avenue. Furthermore, new capacity needs to be studied due to development.

Hansen stated the studies would be brought to the second City Council meeting in April for consideration.

6. Purchase of Finance and HR Software (ERP system)

Finance Director Kloiber stated that City Staff completed a detailed review of alternate ERP systems and that BS&A has been selected for recommendation. He explained one reason BS&A was selected over Tyler Munis is that the City has decided to use Laserfiche for content management and that Tyler has its own content management system. Using the Tyler system would cause duplication of cost and effort in regards to content management.

Kloiber explained that BS&A does not have a robust system with timesheets, but the recommended third party solution is already used by the Police Department. He added that the cost of BS&A is reasonable enough to allow for third party tools.

Kloiber informed the Council that often large software implementations do not go smoothly, but companies are accustomed to transitioning users from our current program. Additionally, the BS&A has a fair amount of flexibility in regards to time and hours for completion.

There was a discussion regarding the experience of other cities with the program and implementation. Kloiber noted that there were not any complaints about BS&A. He stated that he has had a lot of communication with the City of New Brighton. Kloiber added that the target go live date is October 1, 2021.

Councilmember Buesgens shared her support for a new ERP system.

7. Booster Wagon at Liquor Store

Councilmember Novitsky stated that he wanted to make sure that the City Council is on the same page in regards to having the Booster Wagon (food truck) located in the Top Value parking lot. He noted that he is just looking for consensus and that discussion on the finer details will occur with the Boosters, the Finance Director, and the Liquor Store Manager.

Finance Director Kloiber stated that Liquor Store Manager Jason Schulz is receptive to having the wagon return. Kloiber stated that if the liquor store did not have the booster wagon, it would consider having another food truck.

All of the City Council agreed that they would like to continue the relationship of having the Booster Wagon at Top Value.

8. Fireworks Budget

City Manager Bourgeois stated that due to the annual fireworks show being cancelled last year, at that time the City Council requested for the 2021 fireworks show to be larger by using the \$6,000 budgeted last year. She stated that the dollar amount would be approximately \$8,000-\$10,000, as after \$10,000 is the point of diminishing return. She explained that if a budget amendment is needed it would be completed later in the year. She asked the City Council if there was still consensus for a larger show.

Councilmembers stated that having a larger show made sense because of the Centennial.

Mayor Márquez Simula requested for there to be publicity regarding the larger fireworks display and how the extra funds not being put towards the show are helping the recreation department.

9. Properties with Junk Vehicles and Chronic Trash and Outside Storage Issues

City Manager Bourgeois stated that Councilmember Buesgens requested to have a general discussion on how to better manage enforcement of junk vehicles and chronic violators of outside storage and trash.

Police Chief Austin provided background information on junk vehicle enforcement in Columbia Heights and explained how it works. It was noted that it used to be only complaint driven, but now they are more proactive. He added that most junk vehicles are rectified within 96 hours, therefore towing is not required.

Austin shared the statistics for 2019, 2020, and 2021 on the number of junk vehicle enforcements. In 2019 it was 323, in 2020 it was 388, and in 2021 there have been 43.

Next, Austin provided the statistics on landscape parking violations. In 2019 there were 51 issues, in 2020 there were 119, and in 2021 there have been 6. He stated that similar to junk vehicles when they post, the owner has 96 hours to come into compliance.

The City Council had a discussion regarding the current ordinances for junk vehicles and landscape parking.

Councilmember Buesgens commented that she did not think that violators should have 96 hours to come into compliance. Instead they should receive a warning and then a citation. Austin replied that it would likely require an ordinance change.

Councilmember Jacobs agreed with Buesgens. Jacobs stated that it needs to be the City's responsibility for identifying violations noting tensions between neighbors.

Jacobs stated that she would like property maintenance ordinances to be a part of the rental license agreements. She specified that she would like there to be information that states what property maintenance ordinances affect the property and there to be a form that the tenants sign stating they understand them. It was clarified that compliance is ultimately the responsibility of the landlord.

The City Council agreed that a car parked on landscape should be moved right away, but a junk vehicle due to tabs can have 4 days (96 hours) to get them.

Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien shared statistics regarding outside storage inspections. He stated that in 2020 there were 997 outside storage inspections of which 148 were complaint based, 619 were single family homes, and 378 were rentals. To date in 2021, there have been 191 inspections.

O'Brien stated that outside storage is one of the most common complaints. He added that one challenge in regards to trash is that the hauler is taking a month to pick-up bulk items.

O'Brien clarified that property maintenance is currently not tied to rental licensing, but it could be. He noted that it has not been in the past as it can be addressed through charging the property owners for city contractors to take care of the violations.

Jacobs asked if there were any downsides to tying property maintenance to rental licensing. O'Brien responded that there would be a lot more properties up for rental license revocation and it would take more staff time.

O'Brien stated that the department has considered restructuring the rental licenses fees so that it is more incentive based in that there are discounts for doing certain things. He stated another possibility is a three strike rule for outside storage.

Bourgeois added that it is important to enforce property maintenance ordinances in a manner that gives reasonable opportunity for correction. Additionally, there needs to be a pattern of enforcement that is consistent.

Jacobs stated that it would be helpful to those that share property maintenance concerns if the inspector does not say that "a neighbor complained." Furthermore, when a property maintenance violation is being enforced, staff should also enforce the same issue on other

properties in the area for consistency. Bourgeois responded that City staff can implement standard language.

Jacobs asked if the City has addressed Waste Management regarding not picking up bulk items in a reasonable amount of time. Hansen replied there is an escalated surcharge and penalty for the hauler in the Solid Waste Operation Policy. This reduces the amount the monthly amount the City pays to the hauler.

Buesgens discussed a chronic property maintenance violator by her. She commented that she would like to see fines for violations and fines doubled on the second violation. She added that there needs to be more teeth with the ordinances.

Councilmember Murzyn Jr. mentioned the issue of apartment buildings not having enough space in their trash bins or dumpsters. Hansen responded that the ordinance states that property owners need to have a sufficient sized trash container, but does not state a specific size requirement. He stated that the City cannot mandate increased a specific bin size or frequency of pick-up.

Mayor Márquez Simula agreed that there needs to be more teeth with the property maintenance ordinances. Additionally, there should be ways to commend landlords that are doing a good job.

City staff noted that they would meet and discuss possible changes based on the discussion and return with options.

10. AARP Grant

City Manager Bourgeois stated that there were so many ideas for the AARP grant including murals, bronze statues, and wayfinding signs. She stated that Communications and Events Will Rottler explored these ideas and after discussion with her, they would like to postpone application until next year. The purpose of the delay is to have a cohesive well-planned project to submit.

11. Charter Commission Appointments

City Clerk Tingley stated that the Chief Judge appointed Cliff Johnson and Ben Harris to fill the two vacancies on the Charter Commission. She added that she would notify those who were not selected.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Márquez Simula adjourned the work session at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Nicole Tingley, City Clerk/Council Secretary