



**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**Public Safety Building—Training Room, 825 41st Ave NE**  
**Monday, March 01, 2021**  
**7:00 PM**

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

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**MINUTES**

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

**CALL TO ORDER**

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

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

Also Present: Kelli Bourgeois, City Manager; Joe Kloiber, Finance Director; Will Rotter, Communications & Events Specialist; Ben Sandell, Communications Coordinator; Nicole Tingley, City Clerk.

**WORK SESSION ITEMS**

**1. For the Love of Cities and AARP Grant Discussion**  
**~~Update on Liquor Store 3 Improvement Project~~**

Councilmember Buesgens provided an overview of the book *For the Love of Cities* by Peter Kageyama. She explained concepts from the book including having an emotion connection to a city and continuum of engagement. She added that esthetics are important and cities should have “little surprises” citing an example of a painted basketball court.

City Manager Bourgeois stated that she emailed the author and found out that he offers an online 90 minute presentation about his book for \$1,500. She asked the City Council if they would be interested in this presentation and including city staff and board and commission members. She also asked if they would like a copy of his book.

All of the City Council was in favor of the presentation and including staff and board and commission members. Mayor Marquez Simula and Councilmembers Novitsky, Jacobs, and Murzyn, Jr. requested a copy of the book.

Next, Communications & Events Specialist Rottler informed the City Council about the AARP Community Challenge Grant. He stated that applications are due April 14<sup>th</sup> and that it is a quick-action grant program in which projects must be completed by the end of the year. He added that AARP states that “no project is too big.”

Rottler provided examples of past projects including pedestrian signals that blink fast in Burnsville and benches in the downtown district in New Ulm. He also mentioned other ideas including wayfinding signage, bike paths, wireless internet for library, solar panels, community garden, and walkability or beautification along Central or University Avenue.

Bourgeois shared that in the book *For the Love of Cities*, it mentions the City of Greenville, South Carolina has small bronze mice hidden throughout the city with a map. An idea for Columbia Heights could be to have small bronze boots throughout the City to represent the City's history.

Buesgens shared the idea of a large mural on the side of a building.

Novitsky asked Buesgens what she had in mind for a project. Buesgens stated that she would like permanent art that brings people into the community. Novitsky commented that he agreed with art and that there are lots of opportunities at the parks.

Communications Coordinator Sandell stated that from a communications perspective it would be beneficial for the project to be something causes people to talk about the City and something they go out of their way to see.

Novitsky asked Sandell if a mural or having bronze boots throughout the City would accomplish that better. Sandell responded that the game aspect of the bronze boots and map would intrigue people.

Jacobs stated that the bronze pieces could all be different instead of all boots. She also shared an idea of applying for a peace park in the City that would be a place to sit and contemplate and would include benches, flowers, sculptures, and memorials.

Murzyn, Jr. stated that he liked both the bronze pieces and mural ideas.

Marquez Simula commented that she liked the idea of the pedestrian crossing lights with the fast lights and that she would be interested in more information on them.

Buesgens commented that she would also like to add painted crosswalks with the crossing lights. Novitsky and Murzyn, Jr. expressed concern with murals in the street due to snowplows and street treatments.

Novitsky suggested having a map mural for the bronze pieces and the pieces themselves as a grant project. He noted Sullivan Park would be a good location as the entrance to the City.

Marquez Simula suggested making improvements at Wargo Park. It was noted that part of the park is in trust of the Wargo Family so their permission would be needed.

Novitsky commented that Google maps is more often used than wayfinding signs. Marquez Simula stated that wayfinding signage can be for people who do not know something exists and then use google maps to actually find it.

Buesgens stated that she would be willing to have extra City Council meetings if needed to discuss or approve the grant project.

Rottler stated he would find out more information on bronze pieces and other projects. He added that he would continue to ask the Centennial Celebration Committee for ideas and input.

**2. Update on Liquor Store 3 Improvement Project  
~~For the Love of Cities and AARP Grant Discussion~~**

Finance Director Kloiber provided background information on the Liquor Store 3 Improvement Project. He explained that the roofing contract was awarded in December 2020 and he anticipates a general contract for the interior and small amount of exterior work will be brought to the March 22<sup>nd</sup> City Council meeting.

Kloiber provided an overview of all of the improvements. He showed the City Council renderings for the roof, interior, and exterior highlighting the improvements. These included the bathroom, one longer sales counter instead of two, flooring, dropped ceiling with lights, new roof, and no windows in the front.

He stated that the project estimate is \$140,000 and provided an overall project timeline. Kloiber stated that the roof would be completed the last week of March and that the general contractor could start as soon as the roof is completed. He stated that the store would have to be closed while the interior work is complete and is estimated to be around 6 weeks. To reduce the time of closure, the City may offer a performance incentive.

Councilmember Jacobs asked if the project could be staged so that the store would not have to be closed. Kloiber responded that it would not be feasible.

Mayor Marquez Simula asked if there was specific damage to the roof. Kloiber stated the coating put on the roof 6 years ago is worn out and the decking needs to be replaced. He added that the roof would be reconstructed to prevent water from running down the walls between the two buildings. It was clarified that the City owns the Liquor Store 3 building.

Kloiber noted that they would like to hold some type of Grand Opening in May.

Mayor Marquez Simula inquired about a credit card outage at the stores the previous Saturday. Kloiber stated that he did not know the details of that specific outage, but noted they do have cellular internet as a back-up option. He stated he would find out more and update the City Council.

**3. Youth Commission**

Communications Coordinator Sandell stated that Mayor Marquez Simula brought up the idea of having youth members on boards and commissions and after further discussion the idea of a youth commission was suggested. The youth commission would provide youth perspective on city policies and plans. Sandell noted concerns of it being too boring or isolating for youth to serve on regular boards and commissions.

Sandell shared general characteristics of existing youth commissions in Minnesota cities including number of members, terms, membership qualifications, and meeting schedules.

Councilmember Novitsky commented that having a youth commission sounded like a good idea and that he would like it to include Columbia Heights residents that attending any high school not just the public schools.

Councilmember Jacobs asked about the attrition rate of youth commissions. She commented that it sounded like great opportunity for students, but students have a lot going on and it may not be worth the effort that it takes. She also noted concern about liability of safety of students.

Sandell stated that for the reason of attrition he would recommend 1 year terms and meeting at the most once every other month. He added that it would involve a lot of marketing and working together with schools.

Mayor Marquez Simula stated that she brought up the idea of youth on commissions to the superintendent and she liked the idea. Additionally, the superintendent received positive feedback on it at a staff meeting. Furthermore, she mentioned the idea to students in the Columbia Heights Key Club and they seemed excited.

Councilmember Murzyn Jr. inquired if the youth commission would be held to the same standards as other commissions in areas such as attendance.

Councilmember Buesgens inquired about a liaison, meeting place, and if meetings would occur during the summer. She also asked if the City Council would be open to funding small projects. City Manager Bourgeois stated that there would have to be a staff liaison, but who that may be has not been discussed.

Novitsky asked about a student council. It was determined there is a webpage for the student council, but it has not been updated in the last couple of years. Marquez Simula added that the superintendent did not mention a student council when she brought up the idea of student members on the city boards and commissions.

It was clarified that City staff would like to know if the City Council is interested in further exploring the topic.

The City Council provided direction to return to a future work session with a proposal on the specifics of a youth commission. Sandell stated that he would ask current cities that currently have youth commissions what are their challenges and drawbacks.

Novitsky commented that it would be important to find a way to reach youth that are not students are the city public schools.

#### **4. The Just Deeds Project**

Councilmember Jacobs provided an explanation of the Just Deeds Project and how its mission is to help owners find discriminatory covenants and discharge them from their property titles.

Jacobs stated that she reached out to Anoka County Commissioner Mandy Meisner regarding what Anoka County can do in helping identify and remove racial language from covenants.

Jacobs clarified that anyone can have racial language removed from their covenants and that the language has been deemed illegal and has no impact. She added that the City could market this to real estate agents and individuals as property transfer is a good time to remove it.

City Manager Bourgeois explained that Mapping Prejudice, a group through the University of Minnesota, identified and mapped all of the racial covenants in Hennepin County, but this work has not occurred in Anoka County.

Bourgeois clarified that the City could still be a member of the Just Deeds project. As a member the City would be acknowledging that systemic racism in housing occurs had been done blatantly in the past and would be committing ourselves to changing current policies and procedures if negative impacts found. She added that if the City were a member volunteer attorneys that would help property owners remove racial covenants from their titles would be provided.

Mayor Marquez Simula stated that she believe the community would be interested in this. She provided the idea of kicking off this project with a *Jim Crow of the North* movie showing and discussion at the library.

Councilmember Novitsky stated he liked the idea of promoting the idea of checking your property for this language and having it removed to individual property owners.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that the City should become a Just Deeds Project member and that if Columbia Heights signs up maybe other Anoka County cities will too and can advocate to Anoka County for a mapping project.

The City Council provided direction to join as a member of the Just Deed Projects.

## **5. Board and Commission Interviews**

City Clerk Tingley provided an overview of the statistics for the applications submitted for the board and commission vacancies. She noted there were 27 applicants and 24 interviews would be required as interviews would not be needed for the three individuals who only applied for Charter Commission.

Tingley asked the City Council for feedback regarding holding the interviews on Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup> from 3:30-6:30 pm and Monday, March 15<sup>th</sup> from 3:30-6:30 pm. All of the City

Council was in favor of those days and times. The City Council provided an alternative interview date of Thursday, March 11<sup>th</sup>.

**ADJOURNMENT**

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

Respectfully submitted,



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Nicole Tingley, City Clerk/Council Secretary