

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
March 20, 2023
City Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Laura Helle, Michael Postma, Jason Baskin, Joyce Poshusta and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert and Police Chief David McKichan
Public Works Director Steven Lang, Assistant City Engineer Mitch Wenum, Fire Chief Jim McCoy, Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, Park and Rec Director Dave Merrill, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann and City Clerk Ann Kasel

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald, KAUS Radio, Adam and Kristin Ansorge, Alex Baumgartner

APPEARING VIA ZOOM: Terri Stough

Mayor King opened the meeting at 6:48 p.m.

Item No. 1 – Noise Barrier Presentation

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the City applied for and received a grant from the State of Minnesota for a noise barrier along Interstate 90. The grant would provide for 90% of the cost of construction with a 10% local match. Mr. Lang estimated the local cost match to be approximately \$93,241. He stated the initial MnDot cost estimate was low and accommodated for that.

Mr. Lang reviewed the map and various decibel reduction for each property. He noted that 3-5 decibels is a noticeable change to the human ear.

He stated the next step for Council is to determine how to fund the local cost share of the project. He detailed different options including assessments to the adjoining property owners based on benefits received, equally dividing the costs between the adjoining properties, funding via the tax levy or some combination of tax levy and assessments.

Council Member Baker stated this is a great project with a 90% state covered cost. He stated the approach of allocating the costs to neighbors by decibel reduction is interesting.

Council Member Helle stated she would have a problem having tax levy dollars go into a handful of homes. She stated she would prefer the costs to go to the benefitted properties.

Council Member-at-Large also stated he is torn on tax levy dollars going into the neighborhood. He stated he would consider putting some tax levy dollars towards it.

Council Member Baskin stated he likes the idea of assessing the properties based on benefit of the decibel reduction.

Council Member Helle noted she would like to assess the property based on option 3 which assesses properties that receive over 5 decibel reduction based on benefit.

Kristin Ansorge, 300 15th Street NW, asked about the existing decibel noise for all the properties. She stated she is against the noise wall.

Adam Ansorge stated it will probably benefit the neighborhood and wondered how other neighborhoods have benefited from the project.

Mr. Lang noted a decision should be made in the next couple of months.

The Council stated they would like to elicit feedback from all the property owners on the property owners from options 1 and 3.

Gary Hendrickson, 1412 2nd Street NW, he stated the wall doesn't provide a benefit with the land dipping down toward the river.

The item will be reviewed by Council at a future date.

Item No. 2 – Welcome Sign

Public Works Director Steven Lang reported on the Community welcome sign proposals located along interstate 90 between 4th Street and 14th Street NW. The project was identified in 2018 as part of MnDot's visual quality manual for the community. He stated there are two types of signs proposed – a double sided sign and a v-shaped sign. Mr. Lang provided examples of both signs. He stated the double sided has an estimate cost of \$137,000 and the v-shaped has an estimated cost of \$218,000. The Hormel Foundation has committed \$60,000 of support for the project. He noted that level of support may increase.

He stated the area where the sign would be placed is a large area and it would be an advantage to have a large sign in the area.

Council Member Helle questioned what the purpose of the sign and why it would be placed in the middle of the city.

Mr. Lang noted the City needs access to the sign and a good place to put it.

Council Member Baker stated the project is a waste of money.

Council Member Baskin stated if there is outside funding for the project then he is supportive of the project.

The Council tabled the matter until the Hormel Foundation's interest in the sign is determined.

Item No. 3 – Electric Vehicle Charging Station at the Library

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated Austin Utilities has inquired about installing an electrical vehicle charging station at the Austin Public Library. They have requested the use of three parking stalls in the SE corner of the Library parking lot for the installation of 2 charging stations. The stalls were chosen due to the close proximity of the electrical transformer. Mr. Lang stated the Library lot is a good location for this so electric vehicle users can utilize the Library or YMCA while their vehicle charges.

Council Member Baskin asked why the use of tax or utility dollars for recharging.

Alex Baumgartner stated the electric vehicle market is sales and it's a goal to build out the charging infrastructure.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Baker, recommending denial of an electrical vehicle charging station at the Library. Carried.

Item No. 4 – Rules of Procedure and Code of Conduct

Tabled until April 3, 2023.

Item No. 5 – Discussion of 24-month Council Plan

Tabled until April 3, 2023.

Item No. 6 -Administrative Report

None.

Item No. 7 – Open Discussion

None.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Helle, adjourning the meeting at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann M. Kasel, City Clerk