

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
September 8, 2020
City Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Stiehm. Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS APPEARING
ELECTRONICALLY: Council Members Steve King, Paul Fischer, Rebecca Waller,
Laura Helle, Jason Baskin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Joyce Poshusta

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Director of Administrative
Services Tom Dankert, Police Chief David McKichan, Park and
Rec Director Kevin Nelson, Library Director Julie Clinefelter and
City Clerk Ann Kasel

STAFF APPEARING
ELECTRONICALLY: Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, Fire Chief Jim
McCoy, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann, Public
Works Director Steven Lang

OTHERS APPEARING
ELECTRONICALLY: Austin Daily Herald, Mary Anne Duren, Steve Kime, Mike
Merten, Michael Postma, Mike Merten, Jill Rollie

Mayor Stiehm opened the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

Item No. 1 – 28th Street NE Bridge Replacement

Public Works Director Steven Lang provided an update on the 2021 MnDot bridge replacement projects. He stated that the 14th Street NW bridge has been pushed back to 2022 but the 28th Street NE Bridge is moving forward as scheduled for 2021 construction. He added that the City has been working with the Hormel Foundation for the aesthetic upgrades to the bridge. The project is expected to take about 5 months.

For Council Information only, no additional action needed.

Item No. 2 – Nature Ridge Pedestrian Access Plan

Public Works Director Steven Lang provided an update for the pedestrian access plan in the Nature Ridge subdivision. He stated phase 1 of the development began in 2007 and phase 2 began in 2019. In between those developments, the City passed a complete streets policy which requires sidewalks for connectivity in neighborhoods. The developer is going to install sidewalk in phase 2 of the development and the City is planning on installing sidewalk in 2022 along

phase 1 of the project. Mr. Lang stated the development agreement provided for sidewalk as part of Phase 2 of the development.

Mr. Lang noted that some residents in this area have installed landscaping in the public right of way where they do not own. He stated that the City doesn't have an obligation to move or replace the items.

Mr. Lang stated the purpose of the Complete Streets policy is to provide a City-wide plan to apply ordinances and rules to all homeowners for a walkable city. It is to provide for the future infrastructure for the City.

Mike Merten, 2001 19th Street NE, stated he is a resident of the area and one of the members of the development group. He is in opposition to the sidewalk in the area due to the impact of more expensive lots.

Jill Rollie, 2012 13th Avenue NE, stated she is opposed to the installation of sidewalk across her property. She added that there is little traffic in the neighborhood and there are other areas in the community in greater need of sidewalk.

Steve Kime stated he is not a resident of the Nature's Ridge area but is a long-term advocate of the vision of walking and biking safely in the City of Austin. He spoke in support of the proposed sidewalk and need to plan for the future.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace added that when the plat was approved by the Planning Commission and the Council, the sidewalk was included for Phase 2 of the development.

Council Member Fischer spoke against the sidewalk stating it is not necessary. He stated it makes no sense to add sidewalk with the limited traffic.

Council Member Baskin stated he was against not putting in the sidewalk due to the increased lot cost.

Council Member Helle spoke in support of the sidewalk installation because of the community benefit as the area is developed.

Council Member Waller spoke in support of the complete streets policy.

Council Member King stated he has been an opponent in the past to the addition of sidewalks and trails. He stated he is sympathetic to the property owners and is undecided on the issue.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated he is in support of the sidewalk in the development in a different area to allow for future development.

Council Member King asked the cost of the proposed sidewalk.

Mr. Lang stated the cost would be approximately \$15,000 - \$20,000 and would be placed in the Capital Improvement Plan as a future project.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, to not complete the proposed sidewalk connection through Phase 1 of Nature's Ridge. Carried 4-2 with Council Members Helle and Waller voting nay.

Item will be placed on the September 21, 2020 Council agenda.

Item No. 3 – 2021 Budget Discussion

Director of Administrative Services Tom Dankert stated he has made a few changes to the proposed 2021 budget including an additional \$22,000 of tax abatements by reducing the contingency budget and adding Parks and Recreation software in the amount of \$25,000 by reducing park equipment. He stated the levy increase will remain at 4%.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated he would like to keep the tree crew on staff and leave the two vacant positions in the Parks and Recreation maintenance area. He added that he was under the impression that they two tree crew staff didn't want to be on that duty anymore, however that is not the case.

Council Member Baskin stated he would like to leave the budget as drafted now and would like more information about bidding the tree removal service. He noted that private enterprise might be able to get the job done faster.

Council Member Helle stated she was told those would be good positions to eliminate due to the high employee burnout and the unsafe working conditions. She noted that Park and Recreation does not appear to have adequate resources to take care of the public assets.

Council Member Baskin stated the Council owes it to the taxpayers to get a quote for the service.

Mr. Dankert stated the tax levy is set in September but the budget isn't finalized until December.

Council Member King stated he was told the two tree trimmers weren't interested in keeping that type of job.

After additional discussion, the Council will leave the levy at 4% and will have additional discussion on the tree trimmers in the future.

Item No. 4 - Administrative Report

No Report.

Item No. 5 – Open Discussion

None.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member King, adjourning the meeting at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann M. Kasel
City Clerk