

The meeting convened at 6:32 p.m.

Councilmembers present: Mayor Jeff Jacobs, C. Paul Carver, Loran Paprocki and Sue Sanger.

Councilmembers absent: John Basill, Phil Finkelstein and Paul Omodt.

Staff present: City Manager (Mr. Harmening), Senior Planner (Mr. Walther), Assistant Planner (Mr. Fulton), Planning/Zoning Supervisor (Ms. McMonigal), Community Development Director (Mr. Locke), Parks & Recreation Director (Ms. Walsh) and Recording Secretary (Ms. Hughes).

Guest: George Hagemann, Vice Chair, Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission.

1. Future Study Session Agenda Planning – May 26, 2009

Mr. Harmening presented the proposed study session agenda for May 26, 2009, and stated the City's consultant will discuss the detailed engineering study results and cost estimates with the City Council. He added the consultant has been going through all the City's facilities, looking at operations, and has made recommendations to improve energy efficiencies for the overall operations of the City. He added the legislative update will include budget and levy limit information.

2. Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission 2008 Year End Report and 2009 Work Plan

Mr. Hagemann presented the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission's 2008 Year End Report and 2009 Work Plan. He stated one additional item not shown in the report was the involvement by some members with the Active Community Planning Group and the Minnehaha Creek clean-up project. He added grant monies were obtained and used to acquire more supplies for the project. He stated in 2009 the Commission will be working to foster relationships with groups such as the athletic associations. He reported the Dakota Park dog user's group recently elected a spokesperson and the Commission has been working with him to actively engage the Commission. He stated these efforts have proven helpful in fostering the relationship with this and other groups. He stated the Commission has also been involved in meetings with the Police Advisory Commission, Lieutenant Harcey and Chief Luse to discuss bike safety activities, modification of the trails map, and safety issues.

Mr. Hagemann stated the Commission recently learned of a National Highway Traffic Safety training program that the Police Department will begin using for internal training; this program provides training to officers on ways to interact with non-motorized pedestrians and educating pedestrians on safety violations in a proactive manner, short of issuing citations.

The City Council discussed the possibility of a canoe ride this summer. Mr. Harmening stated the City Council may wish to consider a bike ride this year instead of a canoe ride.

It was the consensus of the City Council that a bike ride should be scheduled for the Council.

3. Minnetonka Boulevard and Park Place Boulevard Study Updates and Bicycles and Pedestrians Discussion

Mr. Fulton presented a detailed overview of the Minnetonka Boulevard Study and indicated aspects of this and the Park Place Boulevard Study will be included in the 2030 Comprehensive Plan update for sidewalks and trails. He stated the Minnetonka Boulevard study looked in detail at the overall roadway function for vehicles, transit, bicycles and pedestrians in the area between 494 in Minnetonka and Highway 100 in St. Louis Park, as well as how people get into Minneapolis and making sure there is good bike and pedestrian access. He indicated the study looked at how traffic is expected to change along Minnetonka Boulevard, the various speed limits, as well as how this corridor relates to the other streets that intersect with it. He stated that community meetings were attended by interested parties from neighborhoods abutting Minnetonka Boulevard.

Mr. Fulton stated the top four priorities for this area include pedestrian safety improvements, a continuous east/west bike lane, a multi-modal scenic corridor, and additional tree planting and landscaping. He noted one of the concepts that came out of the study was a “complete streets” concept that accommodates all users of the roadway and promotes safe and convenient transportation options with access for all people. He stated there was also significant discussion regarding the concept of a “Link to the Lakes,” a multi-modal corridor serving recreational, local and commute travelers from Lake Minnetonka to the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes.

Mr. Fulton stated another area of the study included Texas Avenue because this area represents a good example of a commercial node and could feed into a further study as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update. He added the consultants also looked at the Highway 100 bridge that will be built. Mn/DOT guidance regarding necessary width will be required with a goal of making this area more integrated into the City’s bicycle and pedestrian atmosphere.

Mr. Fulton stated next steps include the City Council accepting the study as complete, preparing design standards the City can use when private redevelopment occurs, and future road reconstruction projects along Minnetonka Boulevard.

Mr. Harmening stated staff has been in contact with the County regarding road repairs on Minnetonka Boulevard between Xenwood and Raleigh. He indicated the County initially indicated they would not be doing mill and overlay until 2010, but has now stated they will be doing that work this summer.

Mr. Fulton then presented an overview of the Park Place Boulevard Corridor Study, designed to enhance the bicycle and walking environments within the Xenia Avenue/Park Place Boulevard corridor between the City and Golden Valley. He indicated the major priorities of the study included improvements to the walking environment around the I-394 and Park Place Boulevard intersection, improved access to regional trails and parks, and increasing accessibility to key destinations.

Mr. Fulton stated the study focused on the connectivity between St. Louis Park and Minneapolis and looked at land use, different barriers (roadway and train), and connections. He stated the consultant performed a walkability analysis around the Duke project, as well as looking at the bridge over 394 for retrofits to improve accessibility and safety. He stated one of their suggestions involves placing a trellis structure over the bridge and creating a small concrete wall to give some isolation to pedestrians trying to traverse the bridge. Again, Mn/DOT guidance will be required. He presented a graphic depiction of the trellis structure, noting that the lanes for vehicles would be narrowed to provide the space needed for the wall and separate area for pedestrians and bicycles.

Mayor Jacobs stated the speed limit in this area is 35 mph; as a result, the narrower, 11' lanes for vehicles are sufficient. He stated it may be worthwhile to show the Planning Commission the tape prepared from the workshop by Mark Fenton.

Ms. McMonigal stated the City would seek grant monies for this project.

Mr. Fulton stated one of the more challenging aspects of this study involved ways to get across the railroad tracks in an effort to eliminate illegal crossings.

Mr. Fulton indicated one of the most helpful aspects of the study was the creation of a "toolbox" to use for funding, designing, implementing and maintaining the bikeways and walkways, as well as implementation priorities. He stated the consultant outlined several things the City could do in the near term to improve safety.

Councilmember Sanger stated one of the priorities includes a recommendation for a pedestrian bridge over Hwy 100 and asked if the consultant is dovetailing on the City Council's earlier recommendation.

Mr. Fulton replied in the affirmative, and added this access is critical.

Mr. Walther presented the Bicycles and Pedestrians section of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan update and stated this section summarizes the findings, goals, and policies from the Active Living-Sidewalks and Trails Plan, the Minnetonka Boulevard Study, and Park Place Boulevard Study. He stated the goals include improving the safety of the bicycle and pedestrian networks, establishing a city-wide grid system of sidewalks every ¼ mile, establishing a city-wide grid system of bikeways every ½ mile, closing gaps in the neighborhood sidewalks network, improving transportation and recreation choices, and providing accessible, convenient, attractive and easily understood bicycle and pedestrian systems.

Ms. McMonigal stated staff has also been working on an implementation plan for the study that will be presented at a future City Council study session.

The City Council discussed the City's policy with respect to plowing sidewalks and the associated costs, particularly in light of the budget.

Councilmember Carver stated Goal #4 includes a progress measure of "number of gaps closed" and asked whether this would be an appropriate progress measure to add to Goal #1 and Goal #3.

Mr. Walther replied in the affirmative.

Councilmember Sanger stated Policy 1-B under Goal #1 with respect to safety only addresses users who feel safe enough to go on a particular route. She suggested obtaining further resident input on this policy. She stated Goal #4 with respect to closing gaps in neighborhood sidewalks should include a policy that stops granting variances to developers because it appears the City is undermining its own policies. She also suggested the goal establishing sidewalks every ¼ mile be amended to add "or as traffic conditions warrant," because where there are bigger safety issues, it may not be prudent to have sidewalks every ¼ mile.

Mr. Locke stated the ¼ mile spacing is what the City would like to achieve, but there may be areas where you do not need it; these are guidelines only and are not intended as a replacement for thinking through what is appropriate in any given area.

Councilmember Paprocki stated he would like to see priorities set for the power users, i.e., the commuters who would use the bicycle and pedestrian networks year round, towards an overall goal of having people drive less.

4. Comprehensive Plan – Land Use

Ms. McMonigal presented the proposed changes to the land use section of the Comprehensive Plan Update. This included a new category of "Business Park" that designates areas for light industrial and/or office uses, changes to some land use map designations, combining "Civic Mixed Use" with "Commercial Mixed Use" for a category that is simply called "Mixed Use," and a discussion of additional areas for study, e.g., looking at commercial corridors and nodes. She discussed the future of land use studies in the City, including commercial corridors and nodes for commercial land uses and light rail station areas and specific street corridors. She explained that staff worked closely with the Parks and Recreation Commission and Planning Commission to complete the parks and recreation plan; the plan focuses on upgrading and improving the existing park system. She stated the section on natural resources has been moved into this section of the plan and addresses tree resources and wildlife, etc. She stated this section of the plan also includes a section on environmental stewardship and public health. She added that the environmental stewardship section will include items such as storm water, clean water, eliminating pollution, wind and solar power.

Ms. McMonigal stated the overall land use section will focus on strong healthy neighborhoods, vibrant commercial areas, highly accessible light rail station areas, mixed use areas, revitalized industrial/business areas, and well maintained and diverse housing stock.

Ms. McMonigal reported on the neighborhood meetings with citizens and the St. Louis Park Business Council. She stated these meetings were very well attended and people were engaged in the process. Staff is creating a "Plan by Neighborhood" section, and prioritizing areas for future planning work and studies.

Councilmember Sanger asked if the new “Business Park” category could be applied to all areas and not just along the light rail line. She stated this category will have higher design standards and those same standards should be applied to all redevelopment in the City. Ms. McMonigal noted it was addressing light industrial areas versus existing manufacturing areas, and will be applied as areas redevelop.

The City Council discussed future land use planning in the City.

Ms. McMonigal discussed next steps with the Council and stated the plan will be sent to surrounding cities and agencies for review. She stated these cities and agencies will each have six months to review the plan and during that time, staff will be meeting with various land owners in the City to discuss the proposed land use changes, the consultant will be preparing a report based on the neighborhood input process, and further review and revisions will be made to the plan. She stated a public hearing will then be held in late 2009.

Mr. Locke stated the Comprehensive Plan Update is on the Council’s agenda for May 18 approval to send the plan to adjacent communities and the Met Council; the six-month period for review begins at that time.

Councilmember Paprocki stated there are currently some properties in the City needing re-guiding sooner rather than later. He asked when those properties can be done.

Mr. Locke stated that staff will discuss this with the Met Council; ideally, the Met Council would like to see land use changes made as a result of the update process and these changes would not be in effect until after the Met Council officially acts on the City’s Comprehensive Plan Update. He added the Met Council would likely allow the City to accelerate this process.

5. Communications (verbal)

Mr. Harmening stated the League of Minnesota Cities is looking for board members and asked if any councilmember is interested, they should let him know. He stated there is also a vacancy on the Transportation Advisory Board due to Wendy Wulff’s resignation. He indicated the Board is looking for nominations or expressions of interest. He suggested Mayor Jacobs be nominated for the position, but noted Jim Hovland from Edina currently serves on this Board and having two members from adjoining cities may not be approved by the Met Council.

The meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Written Reports provided and documented for recording purposes only:

- 6. Project Update – W. 36th Street Streetscape – Project 2008-2600**
- 7. Quarterly Investment Report (January-March, 2009)**

Nancy Stroth, City Clerk

Jeff Jacobs, Mayor