

The meeting convened at 6:22 p.m.

Councilmembers present: Mayor Jake Spano, Tim Brausen, Rachel Harris, Anne Mavity, Thom Miller, and Margaret Rog.

Councilmembers absent: Steve Hallfin

Staff present: City Manager (Mr. Harmening), Engineering Director (Ms. Heiser), Sr. Engineering Project Manager (Mr. Sullivan), Chief Financial Officer (Mr. Simon), Sr. Management Analyst (Ms. Carrillo Perez), and Recording Secretary (Ms. Pappas).

Guests: Sharon Rodning Bash, consultant; Jamie Marshall, Exec Director Friends of the Arts

## **1. Arts and culture strategic framework development process**

The St. Louis Park Friends of the Arts (FOTA) was recently awarded a grant by the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council to complete a strategic framework outlining the future development of arts and culture in the community. The city is working with FOTA on this initiative and FOTA has hired Ms. Rodning Bash to facilitate this process. Ms. Rodning Bash introduced herself, stating she has worked in arts and culture for over 25 years. She noted she has worked in smaller communities and suburban areas, helping to build culture and perspective.

Jamie Marshall, Executive Director of FOTA, explained the initiative will seek to provide a cohesive roadmap for arts and culture to continue to grow and thrive in the community. The project will also identify key assets and opportunities within St. Louis Park that benefit the quality of life and seek realization of the city's five strategic priorities, using the arts. Mr. Marshall added the project also seeks to create opportunities for leaders in the community to work together to establish a common set of goals and vision for the future.

Councilmember Harris asked how FOTA is connecting with the community. Ms. Rodning Bash stated they welcome suggestions from the council on that, and if there are specific groups to reach out to, or concerns, to please send them their way.

Councilmember Harris stated she has contacts with groups of people with rich heritage and backgrounds, adding it would be valuable to hear from them.

Councilmember Miller thanked FOTA for their work and asked if the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council reached out to them. Mr. Marshall stated FOTA identified their grant program as an opportunity for organizational development. He added with St. Louis Park's focus on arts as part of community life and well-being, FOTA viewed this as a way to work with the city on a unified message.

Councilmember Rog stated she is curious if this project will be about gathering information from the community to provide back to the city, or if this will operate as more of a department within the city. Ms. Carrillo-Perez stated it might be both – either is a possibility.

Councilmember Brausen stated he is excited about this work and noted he is on the PLACES committee, which is working to integrating artwork into the Southwest LRT. He asked that FOTA please engage this group, as they are looking for ways to fund art that was defunded by the federal government.

Councilmember Mavity asked that they speak with the business community, who has some very creative folks in it. She stated it will be helpful to add artwork into work on the climate action plan, and other city infrastructure plans, in order to get more traction, and explore doing this with more creativity.

Mayor Spano added as an undergraduate who majored in art and sculpture, and also worked in this field for a while, he would like to embed creativity in various areas throughout the city, and not only incorporate murals on walls, but to go deeper. He is interested in seeing how this evolves and how FOTA will be able to learn and elevate the question of what creativity means to people, and what forms it takes.

A follow-up meeting with the city council and FOTA is scheduled for October 2019.

## **2. Connect the Park status update**

Mr. Sullivan gave an overview of the Connect the Park program and a status update. He noted the original 10-year plan was approved in 2013 and 2019 marks the halfway point of this initiative.

Mr. Sullivan pointed out the original estimated cost for implementing the entire 10-year plan was \$26,672,915. To date, \$15,275,164 has been spent on Connect the Park projects, including the segments approved for construction. He explained the funding source for these improvements is primarily general obligation bonds. Future projects are projected to cost \$36,000,000, with the potential future total of the program at \$51,581,491.

Mr. Sullivan also noted the following points:

- Extended anticipated completion timeline moves from 2023 to 2027
- Continued evolution of best practices and policy direction have led to better projects but have come at considerable higher costs
- Majority of cost escalation is related to bikeway construction

Mr. Harmening stated staff is asking council where they want to go with this project, in light of the future projected costs.

Councilmember Mavity stated she wants to continue with the policy, and noted originally, the proposal was much more extensive and has been narrowed down significantly. She asked about the cost escalation year over year, and what the differences are. Ms. Heiser stated costs have

increased based on inflation, and projects. She added the majority of the increased costs come from creating bike trails and widening roads to include parking.

Councilmember Mavity asked about bollards for protection of bikers, and if these can be included in city bike trails that are along a road. Ms. Heiser stated 30% of bollards would need to be replaced after every winter, and they also prevent drivers from getting to parking spaces. She stated plows are not able to clean streets with them, and they are better in areas with no driveways.

Councilmember Mavity stated she feels what has been completed to date is helping the community become more attractive, but costs do have to be managed. She added St. Louis Park is attractive to folks because of this and because of the light rail, and she hopes this will continue as more is to be done on this plan.

Councilmember Harris thanked staff for this overview. She asked how the living streets policy impacted construction costs. Ms. Heiser stated parking was the issue, so parking bays were created. She noted that everything must meet state guidelines as well as the standards of the comprehensive plan.

Councilmember Harris asked about protected bikeways and how these can be created to empower kids to ride bikes to school, and for the comfort of families. She also noted that much time and effort has been spent on best practices for cars, and now it's time to focus on bikes, cargo bikes, and scooters, and how they are accommodated on city roads, and for all ages.

Councilmember Rog asked if staff feels like they are in a challenging position, in operating off priorities from council that have not been committed to. Ms. Heiser stated from staff's perspective, direction is provided from the council and they base their recommendations on policy, while looking at standards and best practices. She added staff wants to bring forward the best project, and always will want to check in with council on all projects. Ms. Heiser added at the end of the day, the council is the policy maker, and staff follows their direction.

Councilmember Rog stated she would like to see more alternative and flexible plans from staff before making decisions, as council is discussing projects.

Councilmember Miller stated he liked the policy questions, pointing out this must fit within the city's strategic priorities. He stated the city needs to continue with Connect the Park, and should also consider costs, trees, and mobility impacts each time a project comes up. He added the policy should move forward.

Councilmember Brausen stated he agrees with the plan, adding it is community driven, and how can it be done most effectively. He stated staff has done a good job laying out alternatives for the council, adding they need to balance resident's concerns with cost impacts. While he doesn't want to see costs expand, he does want to see the program continue to make steady progress and is supportive of the direction it is going.

Councilmember Mavity added the council has to give clear direction to staff, and make sure to be committed to the policies and principals we've adopted. She stated she worries about making too many decisions, without enough feedback from neighbors.

Mayor Spano noted Councilmember Hallfin's comments, stating he would like to continue with Connect the Park, be as transparent as possible, and work more on the public process. He stated projects can be adjusted as needed, but it would be a mistake to put Connect the Park on hold.

Mayor Spano stated he is impressed with this community, which has maintained its momentum during this process, and noted he would like to see more transit and pedestrian projects. He did, however, have concerns with the goals, money, and processes in place with Connect the Park, and advocates pausing to revisit the goals and how they have changed since the project began. He added the council needs to check in with residents and look at the budget and costs again.

Mayor Spano added he would like to have Springboard help with this and bring some creativity into the process in order to look at things differently. He stated using a different paradigm for discussing this with the community would be helpful and a different approach, allowing for more discussion with the community on costs.

Ms. Heiser stated there are no new projects in the queue for 2020, and there will be more time to revisit Connect the Park.

It was the consensus of the council to continue this discussion with staff and discuss more policy questions, while re-visiting the plan again at a future date.

### **3. Future study session agenda planning**

Ms. Carrillo Perez presented the results of the survey conducted with council on priority topics for future study session agendas. The following projects will be discussed in this order as per council recommendation:

1. Discuss public process expectations and outcomes
2. Prioritize walking/biking/mass transit/motor vehicles
3. Easy access to nature
4. Westwood Hills Nature Center Access Fund
5. Election holiday
6. SEEDS
7. Community and Neighborhood sidewalk designation
8. Revisit housing setback, FRA
9. Quarterly public forums at city council meetings

Ms. Carrillo Perez asked the council when they would like to discuss the topic of crisis communication. The council stated whenever staff is prepared to discuss it, but before the end of 2019.

Mr. Harmening stated at this time, there are no topics for the September 9, 2019 Study Session agenda, so the meeting is cancelled, unless anything changes.

Councilmember Brausen noted a concept idea for the area around a marsh, of which councilmembers are aware. Mr. Harmening stated staff will update the council on this project with a written report.

Councilmember Rog asked about the written report from the ESC and how to call attention to various aspects of the report. Mayor Spano stated bringing this up at the end of the study session is an appropriate time to discuss items.

Councilmember Rog stated there are some logical points to point out from the ESC report, including reorganizing and hiring additional staff. She asked if additional staff was necessarily the best way to approach work on the Climate Action Plan. She also pointed out the ESC's call to elevate a climate emergency declaration, and wanted to be sure this was also noted. She asked that this discussion be elevated to a study session.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Written Reports provided and documented for recording purposes only:

- 4. July 2019 monthly financial report**
- 5. Connect the Park – 28<sup>th</sup> Street pedestrian improvements update**
- 6. Food security and access study update**
- 7. Overhead utility undergrounding discussion**
- 8. Needs assessment for cable television franchise renewal**
- 9. Update – PLACE Via Sol and Via Luna projects**
- 10. Telecommunication advisory commission transition update**
- 11. Environment and Sustainability Commission (ESC) Quarterly Report**

---

Melissa Kennedy, city clerk

---

Jake Spano, mayor