STUDY SESSION

The study session commenced at 6:00 p.m.

1. Parking approach for the Historic Walker Lake District

Lance Bernard, Consultant, HKGi, presented information on the proposed parking section for the Historic Walker Lake District. He noted the goals of the parking section are to: maximize the existing parking supply, while reducing the demand to build additional spaces, establish parking minimum and maximum requirements, and use existing city parking processes and best practices.

Jennifer Monson, Planner, stated most of the land uses have already been determined and those that do not fit into the plan for the area or are not allowed have been removed.

Commissioner Johnston-Madison asked for clarification on which parking areas are municipal and which are private.

Mr. Bernard pointed both out to the commissioners.

Commissioner Robertson stated he is curious how maximums were chosen.

Mr. Bernard stated the maximums came from recommendations from the Historic Walker Lake small area plan consultant and a review by HKGi of best practices nationally.
Commissioner Robertson stated the city has seasonal variations related to parking.

Mr. Bernard stated when looking at Minneapolis parking maximums, the St. Louis Park maximums are very similar to those numbers.

Sean Walther, Planning and Zoning Supervisor, stated there is a lot of available parking in this district, that is very underutilized, both public and private. He added there are opportunities for more intense uses over time before running into any significant issues. He stated this is also being reviewed and explored with a business association that has been formed in the Historic Walker Lake area as well.

Commissioner Beneke asked if these parking minimums and maximums can be utilized throughout the city.

Mr. Walther stated yes, that is a possibility. Staff will look at whether this can be applied to other areas or throughout the city.

Commissioner Johnston-Madison asked if stacked parking and parking ramps might be another option here.

Mr. Walther stated this was discussed in the planning process, but this is a great expense to the city to both build and maintain, and this is a situation the city is trying to avoid.

Mr. Bernard stated low-cost parking options which involve more pedestrian areas are being looked at as best solutions, along with already existing parking that can be put to better use.

Commissioner Robertson asked if the city will require electrical charging stations to be added to any of the parking lots.

Mr. Walther stated if the municipal parking lots will be completely reconstructed, then charging stations will be installed. If maintenance work allows, then conduit is installed for electrical charging stations. He noted city policy is to assess the costs of municipal parking lots to benefiting properties.

Commissioner Dumalag asked if businesses will be given incentives for maintaining their existing parking requirements.

Mr. Walther stated there is a pathway for businesses to request this and when city would consider this.
Chair Eckholm asked if a business expands, where would they need to include additional parking.

Ms. Monson stated it would need to be added on the business’ principal property. She added the goal is to allow more flexible uses for parking.

Commissioner Robertson asked if there is any way to increase the size of parking spaces allowed, such as compact spaces vs. regular spaces.

Mr. Walther stated parking ordinances are frequently amended within the city and reviewed every 2-3 years. It is always a significant part of the development review and the costs of development.

Commissioner Robertson asked if this will be instituted by the end of this year.

Mr. Walther stated, yes, by the end of the year would be ideal.

Chair Eckholm asked if there would be any parking time restrictions or meters used for parking.

Mr. Walther stated the city, in consultation with the business association and with city council approval, removed all parking signs limiting the time in public parking areas by the commercial properties, and staff is watching to see how this goes. Time restrictions may be reinstated, and hopefully only to resolve current, observed and verified issues. The plan also floated the idea of metered parking someday, but not at this time.

Commissioner Robertson asked about bike and motorcycle parking requirements.

Mr. Walther stated bike parking is required in the city code.

Chair Eckholm stated with the biking, setting up the correct infrastructure will be important in this district in order to encourage folks to bike there.

Ms. Monson added that bike racks that include branding for the Historic Walker Lake district will also be installed in the public right of way and funded with grants from Hennepin County Community Works.

Mr. Walther stated staff will continue to review the parking approach for the Walker Lake District and will report back to the commission.

2. Ground floor street-facing transparency requirements
Ms. Monson presented the amended ordinance to the commissioners.

Ms. Monson noted for all new buildings, the transparency was reduced to 50% and the area of the windows that signs could cover was not reduced since the commission last discussed the issue. She added the Walker Lake District will be included, and most of the West End already meets these requirements.

Ms. Monson also displayed images and examples to illustrate the various glass tints to the commission.

Commissioner Robertson agreed with the 50% minimum, adding it puts new developments on notice.

Ms. Monson added there also were no changes to the section of the code allowing for some administrative decisions, in order to reduce the number of variance applications that may be generated from the ordinance. Additionally, she noted that appeals to staff decisions would be to the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Commissioner Robertson stated he has objections about the screening requirements of the transformers. He stated this doesn’t make sense, is not needed, and would be hard to enforce. He suggested that they be removed from the ordinance.

Mr. Walther noted this is not a new provision that is being proposed. It is a long-standing regulation and no change to this code requirement is being proposed at this time. However, he agreed with Commissioner Robertson that it is difficult to control and does not always result in a better outcome functionally or aesthetically.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.