

The meeting convened at 7:45 p.m.

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

Councilmembers absent: none.

Staff present: City Manager (Mr. Harmening), Director of Operations & Recreation (Ms. Walsh), Building & Energy Director (Mr. Hoffman), Engineering Director (Ms. Heiser), Public Works Superintendent (Mr. Hanson), and Recording Secretary (Ms. Pappas).

1. Prioritizing transit options through investments, engineering and operations decisions

Councilmember Rog began the discussion and pointed out she would support a levy increase if it allowed for supporting year-round mobility for folks who use buses and public transportation. She stated she sees a direct connection to the comprehensive plan and the cities strategic priorities and prioritizing this would impact kids walking to school, year-round bikers and wheelchair users who need sidewalks cleared in order to move safely. Councilmember Rog stated she does not expect this to be accomplished in one year but added creating safe and user-friendly trails and sidewalks is a matter of operationalizing and prioritizing.

Councilmember Miller agreed he is very much in favor of talking more about this and making it happen, noting it is part of the city's strategic priorities and prioritizes pedestrians and those who use public transportation. He stated this is an equity issue and while the city takes pride in how they take care of the streets, there seems to be a big miss on not assisting those who rely on public transportation, and it seems worthwhile to investigate this.

Mayor Spano asked for clarification from the staff report on FTEs and costs. Mr. Hanson stated the report is dated back to the mid-2000's but noted \$150,000-200,000 would be the approximate costs of using part-time employment to cover snow costs.

Ms. Walsh noted this dollar figure was related to clearing snow from sidewalks but stated staff struggles to get seasonal staff, and while it could be a good option, the costs are noted.

Mr. Harmening also pointed out the labor contracts would need to be re-negotiated if seasonal part-time employees were hired.

Mr. Hanson noted if staff were to clear bus stops, they would first need to create hard surfaces at the bus stops that don't already have them in order to allow equipment to clear snow.

Councilmember Brausen asked if the costs include buying new equipment. Mr. Hanson stated it would be using existing and purchasing some new equipment.

Ms. Walsh added the costs also do not include the paving hard surfaces that Mr. Hanson noted.

Councilmember Rog stated she hopes staff does not look for reasons as to why this is not possible, noting this fits into the city's strategic plan.

Mr. Harmening stated staff will need to understand the outcome that council is looking for, noting this could take time. He stated staff needs to understand council's expectations before moving forward.

Councilmember Harris asked if there are any service agreements in place with the bus stops. Mr. Hoffman stated only within the special service districts.

Mr. Harmening stated last year with all the snow, the city did contact Metro Transit and they did some bus stop cleaning; however, they will not do that on a consistent basis.

Councilmember Harris asked if something similar to the "adopt a hydrant" program might work for bus stops. Mr. Harmening stated this would be difficult to have staffed and to ask residents to do volunteer work like this.

Councilmember Harris asked if neighborhood groups could be asked to purchase snow clearing services for bus stop areas. Mr. Harmening stated this goes back to what kind of outcome the council wants to see and reliability of these services.

Councilmember Mavity stated this is confusing and feels like many issues vs. only bus stops. She stated she does not want to review sidewalk shoveling again and does not support discussing this topic again. She asked if this could be discussed with the city's Met Council representative. Mr. Harmening stated depending on what the council wants for outcomes, perhaps this could be phased in and possibly clearing the highest ridership bus stop areas could be done.

Councilmember Rog stated this requires plow scheduling changes and reprioritizing. She stated this is an important aspiration and the expectation should be based on resident input, such as helping kids walk to school safely.

Ms. Walsh noted that snow removal from streets is also based on emergency services and plowing on both main and neighborhood streets is a priority so emergency services can access homes.

Councilmember Brausen stated in Ward 4 there are no alleys or sidewalks, but he does believe walking and biking should be prioritized over driving. He stated this will be a shared community cost, and if it is to be prioritized, the levy will be impacted and need to be increased.

Councilmember Hallfin stated he agrees in theory; however, not in practice. He stated the council can continue to discuss ways to improve and focus on pedestrians and bikers, but there is a problem with where to put the snow. He noted this will be adding about 1% to the levy, adding that Councilmember Rog stated she is willing to do this, and yet she is not willing to accept the levy currently in front of the council. He added he does not feel the city should clean all sidewalks, and people should be responsible for their own.

Councilmember Harris stated that residents should continue to clear their sidewalks, but she wants greater clarity on what community sidewalks are, adding it seems to be confusing to residents and also seems unfair. She stated this is a communication opportunity, and she is in favor of continuing this conversation on year-round maintenance but would like to table the conversation about sidewalks.

Councilmember Mavity added this is about accountability and stated even the owners of affordable properties are accountable for clearing their sidewalks. She stated the problem is enforcement, and the city should ticket and operationalize the policies already in place.

Mayor Spano stated he had frustrations last winter with the bus stop at Highway 7 and Texas Avenue, and is interested in having more conversation on this in order to figure out our responsibility. He agreed the council should discuss this with the new Met Council representative and look again at the dollars needed to do this and get a breakdown of costs.

Mayor Spano added nothing will happen this winter, but the council has an opportunity to ask folks that own properties if they will take care of snow plowing, although he is less interested in a sidewalk discussion.

Councilmember Brausen added he would like to see a public listening session around this topic as well as education.

Councilmember Mavity stated there are things that a homeowner needs to do to upkeep their home, and the idea of having an ordinance and then when people don't comply – the city does it for them, and folks get a pass, is not acceptable. She added the city does provide a safety net for folks who cannot take care of their own homes.

Mr. Harmening stated staff's next step will be to reach out to Metro Transit and the bench company and develop a plan for moving forward on this.

Mayor Spano asked staff to be sure the city's Met Council representative is aware of this conversation, so she is prepared to discuss in depth, when the council meets with her.

Communications/meeting check-in (verbal)

Mr. Harmening wanted the council to be aware of several recent drug overdoses within the city. He noted there is a problem with folks using fentanyl, but believing it is oxycontin, when they take it.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Melissa Kennedy, city clerk

Jake Spano, mayor