1. Call to order

Mayor Spano called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Councilmembers present: Mayor Jake Spano, Tim Brausen, Rachel Harris, Larry Kraft, Anne Mavity, Nadia Mohamed, and Margaret Rog.

Councilmembers absent: None.

Staff present: City Manager (Mr. Harmening), City Attorney (Mr. Mattick), Deputy City Manager/Human Resources Director (Ms. Deno), Senior Engineering Project Manager (Mr. Sullivan), Transportation Engineer (Mr. Manibog), Planning and Zoning Supervisor (Mr. Walther), Communications Manager (Ms. Smith), Senior Management Analyst (Ms. Solano), and Recording Secretary (Ms. Pappas).

Guests: Residents of St Louis Park.

1a. Pledge of allegiance
1b. Roll call

2. Presentations

2a. 2020 Census

Mr. Walther presented the report. The U.S. census will take place on April 1, 2020, and invites will be sent to residents March 12-20, 2020. If no response is received, a U.S. census worker will follow up in person. Mr. Walther noted the non-response rate in St. Louis Park is predicted to be between 15.9 – 22 percent.

Three Complete Count Committee members Ellen Lipschultz, Lisa Greene and Abdihakim Ibrahim introduced themselves and spoke about being involved in the census process.

Councilmember Rog thanked them for their work and asked when the census will be completed. Mr. Walther stated all census results are to be delivered to the President by Dec. 31, 2020. In St. Louis Park it is likely wrapping up in August.

Councilmember Rog asked what can be done to help the response rate in St. Louis Park. Mr. Walther stated councilmembers have email lists of residents within the city and are encouraged to reach out to them. He added there will be information shared via city newsletters, the city website and posters, along with information on how to use the 2020census.gov website. Mr. Walther added there is also information social media, and he encouraged places of worship, neighborhood organizations and other groups to
share information through their publications and offered that staff is available to provide resources and presentations.

Mr. Walther added city staff is working with partner organizations that serve the city’s historically undercounted populations, as well as with landlords and property managers who can help connect with renters in the city. Additionally, staff is working with the school district to inform families about the census.

Councilmember Harris added she is available to present to community members, if needed, and asked about strategic efforts to reach apartment renters. Mr. Walther reiterated staff is working with landlords and building managers, as well as doing presentations to community groups, and intends to deploy mobile questionnaire centers with WiFi services. He added the Complete Count committee is still looking for more volunteers, and it’s not too late to apply to the U.S. Census Bureau as there are openings for census workers across Minnesota.

Councilmember Brausen agreed with his colleagues, thanked the volunteers, and noted he has concerns about under-reporting. He thanked Mr. Walther and staff for going above and beyond.

Councilmember Mohamed also thanked staff and volunteers and asked if there are additional languages available for folks to access information. Mr. Walther stated through the 2020census.gov website, there is support available for 59 languages. There are also promotional materials available in languages most commonly spoken in St. Louis Park.

Mayor Spano pointed out that census workers are entitled to enter apartment buildings to gather census information and residents do not have to be citizens to be counted in the census.

2b. Hennepin County sheriff’s office (HCSO) update

Hennepin County Sheriff Hutchinson provided an update to the city council on activities of the Hennepin County sheriff’s office from 2019 to the present. He also outlined priority areas. Sheriff Hutchinson thanked Police Chief Harcey and the department for their partnership, stating they are respected locally and nationally and Chief Harcey has been a helpful mentor to him during his first year as county sheriff. Sheriff Hutchinson stated the sheriff’s office continues to work on issues related to methamphetamine and the opioid crisis. He also noted work they are doing on medical assistance in jails, focusing on mental health, and well-being of staff.

Councilmember Mavity referenced the city’s work with race equity and asked about the bail bond reform issue. Sheriff Hutchinson stated his staff continues to work on this, adding they are waiting for the governor’s task force recommendations and whether there will be a statewide mandate on bail bond.
Councilmember Mavity noted the city has its own dispatchers, which helps the city continue with its community policing policies. She asked if there are any changes coming with relation to dispatch that the city should be aware of. Sheriff Hutchinson stated St. Louis Park’s dispatch is one of the best in the region but noted there will be some changes coming with technology and the next generation 911. He stated there is a pilot program currently in process on this and more information will be forthcoming to cities.

Councilmember Brausen stated he is pleased the county is taking great efforts to help with the mental health issues of officers and asked about race equity work that the sheriff’s office is doing. Sheriff Hutchinson stated his staff has completed a class on race equity but is also going to do more work in that area in order to learn more.

2c. **Proclamation-Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month – March 2020**

Mayor Spano read the proclamation and noted the bridge over Louisiana Avenue will be lit up on Monday, March 9, 2020 in blue, in honor of Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

3. **Approval of minutes – none.**

4. **Approval of agenda and items on consent calendar**


   4b. Approve second reading and adopt **Ordinance No. 2583-20**, setting its effective date on March 27, 2020.

   Adopt **Resolutions No. 20-031 thru 20-056** supporting and reflecting existing traffic controls related to the rescinded ordinance.

   4c. Designate JL Theis, Inc. the lowest responsible bidder, and authorize execution of a contract with the firm in the amount of $239,093.20 for concrete replacement – Project No. 4020-0003.

   4d. Designate ASTECH Corp. the lowest responsible bidder and authorize execution of a contract with the firm in the amount of $393,745.19 for street maintenance– Project No. 4020-1200.

   4e. Approve a temporary extension of the licensed premises for one-day events at Copperwing Distillery, located at 6409 Cambridge Street.

   4f. Approve the proposed updates to the city’s financial management policies.

   4g. Approve out-of-state travel of City of St. Louis Park Mayor Jake Spano and Councilmember Nadia Mohamed to attend the National League of Cities (NLC) Congressional City Conference in Washington, DC on March 8 - 11, 2020.

   4h. Approve for filing planning commission meeting minutes of Feb. 5, 2020.

   4i. Approve for filing fire civil service commission meeting minutes of Sept. 17, 2019.

*It was moved by Councilmember Mavity, seconded by Councilmember Kraft, to approve the agenda as presented and items listed on the consent calendar; and to waive reading of all resolutions and ordinances.*
The motion passed 7-0.

5. **Boards and commissions**

5a. **Reappointment of representatives to the Fire Civil Service Commission**

It was moved by Councilmember Mavity, seconded by Councilmember Harris, to reappoint Bob Tift to the Fire Civil Service Commission with a term to expire December 31, 2022.

6. **Public hearings – none.**

7. **Requests, petitions, and communications from the public – none.**

8. **Resolutions, ordinances, motions and discussion items**

8a. **Southeast area bikeway Resolution No. 20-057, Resolution No. 20-058**

Mr. Sullivan presented the staff report. He noted all of the information that was provided to the council as a part of the staff report for the meeting, including a petition from residents and correspondence received from the public since the last meeting on February 18. Mr. Sullivan provided an overview of the proposed plan and the recommended action. He noted if approved, construction would begin this summer.

Councilmember Mavity asked Mr. Sullivan to review each of the sections referenced as they are critical to the whole system in the area, noting that some sections, including Monterey Drive, are not up for consideration this evening because they have been considered separately. Mr. Sullivan clarified which segments were included in the proposed recommended action for council.

Councilmember Brausen noted the State of Minnesota recently gave cities the authority to set local speed limits. He clarified that the city will be studying speeds on Wooddale and looking to reduce the limit to 25 miles per hour in that area. He asked Mr. Sullivan to confirm that designating speed limits can be done later, after the construction of the project. Mr. Sullivan stated that is correct.

Councilmember Mavity thanked staff for their work on the project. She explained the council gives staff a vision, that has come through the community, that council is trying to translate into strategies, investments and infrastructure designs to meet what the community is saying they want. Staff has to take that vision and put plans into place that will achieve the vision laid out by council and the community. She noted the council has been working for almost 15 years on a vision for creating a connected community. She stated she is excited about adding 1.8 miles to a plan that will allow this side of the city to be connected and a more walkable and bikeable community overall, which will also help the city meet the goals of the Climate Action Plan.
Councilmember Mavity stated she would like the council to vote on the segments of the project proposed this evening, with the exception of Segment 7, and have that segment considered by the council as a stand-alone motion later in the meeting.

*It was moved by Councilmember Mavity, seconded by Councilmember Kraft, to adopt Resolution No. 20-057, accepting the project report, establishing Improvement Project No. 4018-2000, and approving the layout for the Southeast Area bikeway segments with the exception of Segment 7.*

Councilmember Mavity stated 38th Street is a very high traffic area and the proposed advisory guide lane is absolutely needed and will help support the existing traffic control measures for pedestrians. She added that she also appreciates staff’s plan to address input from the Excelsior and Grand area regarding potential conflicts between bikers and pedestrians. She noted she feels the city will need to evaluate the segment specifically near Fresh Thyme to ensure that it is safe for users once the proposed segment improvements are completed. She asked that signage be added to the parking at Fresh Thyme that would notify drivers to look out for bikers and pedestrians as they back out from their parking spaces.

*The motion passed 7-0.*

Councilmember Mavity stated the council has talked a lot about the Connect the Park process and more broadly about how community engagement should be conducted in St. Louis Park and how to make sure that communication efforts and strategies are having the intended results of strengthening the community and coming together in a unified vision. She noted last year the council decided to take a pause on the 10-year Connect the Park plan in order to look back at the last 5 years and reflect on what has been done. When that decision was made, staff was directed to continue to work on three Connect the Park projects that were already in process, including this project.

Councilmember Mavity stated the council sets policy and then staff uses those policies to guide their work. The council establishes strategic priorities such as sustainability and climate action and staff works to achieve goals set by the council. Over time the council has established policies that prioritize the safety of pedestrians, bikes, mass transit, and then cars. Staff has worked on plans and projects to achieve those goals and help the city rebalance and provide other modes of transit around and through the community. She added all of these initiatives, projects, and policies have been informed over time through various major community processes, and staff is doing what council has directed them to do in order to achieve the vision of the community.

Councilmember Mavity stated this latest project has become antagonistic, even though it is reflective of the input and vision of the broader community. Rather than bringing people together in a shared vision it has at times resulted in pitting neighbors against neighbors. She noted what is needed now is balance between the community vision and bringing people together to find the best way to achieve that vision. She stated the staff proposal on Segment 7 reflects direction the council has given staff, adding there are no significant differences between this proposal and other bikeways within the community.
It was moved by Councilmember Mavity, seconded by Councilmember Brausen, to adopt Resolution No. 20-058, approving the layout for the Southeast Area bikeway Segment 7 as proposed by staff.

Councilmember Kraft thanked staff for their work on the project. He thanked Councilmember Mavity for her work and her continued focus on what is best for the community as a whole. He also thanked the residents for their engagement, adding that most of the interactions he has had related to this project have been thoughtful and respectful. He noted there were a few interactions with residents that crossed the line and he encouraged those folks to really try to understand and recognize that the council is really trying to do what is best for the community and when that line is crossed it is much less effective with him.

Councilmember Kraft stated he will vote against the proposal for Segment 7 along Wooddale. He explained the he does not believe what is proposed will address the vast majority of interested but concerned cyclists, he does not see this as an easily reversible solution if it does not work in that it adds concrete and takes out some trees. He noted while this is not a lot of money compared to what the city spends overall on roads, he believes it is a lot of money to invest in a small stretch of road. He stated he is not thrilled with the alternatives, but he would prefer an alternative that costs less and is more easily reversible, such as mostly paint and signs. He stated he does sympathize with the concerns he heard related to parking, although that is not the reason why he is opposed to the project. He stated the project is related to use of public right-of-way and he believes one of the reasons the council is elected is to make decisions on such things based on what is best for the entire community, and sometimes that is not going to be on-street parking. He added this is a difficult decision for him because he is very supportive of the vision behind Connect the Park and he was thrilled to see that Segments 1-6 were approved. He thanked this and previous councils for the vision on Connect the Park and stated he thinks the city needs renew their commitment to the initiative and think even more broadly about how to reduce the usage of cars and make it easier for large numbers of people to not use fossil fuel vehicles.

Councilmember Mohamed thanked staff for their work on this project and residents for sharing their concerns and recommendations. She stated after much thought, she will also vote against Segment 7 on Wooddale. She clarified her opposition was not related to the reduction in on-street parking or the removal of trees. She explained after reviewing the recommendation she does not believe the biking facilities proposed will truly address the interested but concerned cyclists and is not worth the cost. She noted a at the public hearing two weeks ago a resident commented, “this is our home and we should decide what happens to it” after hearing the residents of Oak Park Village use a similar explanation during a public hearing related to a different project. She clarified that the residents of Oak Park Village were concerned about losing their housing due to unaffordable rental rates, not losing their trees or their parking. She noted it seemed a bit insensitive and unfair to compare the two situations. She stated she recognized and enjoyed see the resources and time the residents along Wooddale put into this project and she hopes they will continue to participate in all city matters in a similar manner going forward and advocate for those who do not have similar time or resources.
Councilmember Harris stated she appreciated the Wooddale residents’ warmth and welcome when she visited the neighborhood but was at times disheartened by some of the signs and comments made during meetings that were held about the project. She added she has strong feelings about public discourse in the community and treating one another with respect. She stated she is hopeful that going forward they can continue to have respectful and relevant public discourse, noting that remarks hold more significance when they are respectful.

Councilmember Harris explained she has weighed several options regarding the proposal for Segment 7 of this project and has compared what is being proposed to what has been approved and implemented for other similar projects in the last 2 years. She stated she is using equality as a measure. Given that the council recently agreed to a similar design for the Dakota bikeway, she believes it is also appropriate for this segment along Wooddale. She noted she is sensitive to the residents’ concerns related to the loss of trees and on street parking. She asked staff if there might be an opportunity in the future to compensate for the loss of trees by planting twice as many trees as were removed. She stated she will support the proposal for Segment 7 because the design is in line with what council has directed in terms of strategic priorities, the design matches what has been used for other segments in the city, and it meets the goal of creating safer neighborhoods by prioritizing biking and walking over the use of cars.

Councilmember Rog agreed with the comments previously made by Councilmembers Kraft and Mohamed. She stated she appreciates staff’s work on the design of the entire project and their efforts to follow council direction, balancing all of the concerns related to cost, safety, parking, and tree removal. She also appreciates the work of Councilmember Mavity and understands her decision to support the staff recommendation for the segment along Wooddale. She noted everyone is doing the best they can to make good decisions for the entire community. She stated approval for the Southeast bikeway comes at a time when the council is preparing to revisit the Connect the Park initiative as a whole to refresh the vision and ensure alignment with the city’s budget and strategic priorities. Given the concerns about the Wooddale segment, she feels it is reasonable to wait on this portion to see if they can come up with something that works better for more people. She noted that the interested but concerned cyclists represent a different demographic than the members of the biking community who supported the project. She stated she will vote against the proposal for Segment 7, noting that a share-the-road facility and lower speeds on Wooddale are a safer choice. She believes riders can use the sidewalk if they are not comfortable riding on a share-the-road street and proposed signage that communicates that option.

Councilmember Brausen thanked residents for sharing their opinions related to this project. He stated this is a difficult decision for the council as they try to balance competing interests in making changes that will direct and grow the community and the use of its resources against the desires and wants of the most directly impacted residents. He added the decision is not easy and is not made without a public input or a tremendous amount of thought. Unfortunately, the council’s decisions will at times make some happy while upsetting others. He apologized for that and asked residents for their understanding on the decision that is ultimately made by the council. He noted
from his point of view the public input on this project has been occurring for years through the city’s visioning and comp plan processes, adoption of the Connect the Park program, and he values each part the process. He stated he will support the proposed design for Segment 7 along Wooddale because he does believe this is the wish of the larger community, to create a larger public transportation system that prioritizes bike and pedestrian travel along with public safety. The community visioning projects identified that the residents want a mobility system that provides for pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicle traffic in a safe manner and that the systems should be built in an environmentally sound way, facilitating environmental sustainability and the climate action plan, while creating recreational opportunities for the community. He believes that putting bike lanes on this segment of Wooddale Avenue will be consistent with the goals the community has set. In developing the current design, parking was consistently raised as a neighborhood concern and a requirement. He believes the public right-of-way belongs to the public, not the individual landowners adjoining it, and its uses should be directed to facilitate the safe transportation of people in the city by foot, bike, and motor vehicles. If parking can be provided as an additional use, he is not opposed to that, but he views that benefit as incidental. He believes it would be best to declare no parking along this segment of Wooddale, which would make it unnecessary to create parking bays and would save trees. He trusts that staff has reviewed the options available and that this is the best option to create the bicycling network the city wants in a safe and responsible manner. He acknowledged that the plan is not perfect but does not believe that the desired bicycling network can be built without the use of public right-of-way. He stated he also wants the city to consider increased safety measures related to the traffic along Wooddale. He views this plan as a step toward a safer bicycling system and it represents an incremental improvement to the city’s overall system. He shared comments he received from a resident in support of the project.

Councilmember Mavity referenced the resident petition that was previously submitted at the public hearing. It was stated that 13 mature trees would be removed but that is not what the city is proposing. The city proposes removing 10 trees, 6 of which are smaller, less mature trees. She added the petition also suggests that approval of the segment as proposed would increase traffic speeds and volumes along Wooddale, however nothing that is being approved will send more cars or trucks to Wooddale at higher speeds. Additionally, the cost noted on the petition is not reflective of the cost for Segment 7 which is two blocks along Wooddale Avenue.

Councilmember Mavity stated in the last two years the city has approved bike lanes on Texas Avenue, Walker-Lake, Minnetonka Boulevard and Dakota Avenue. She asked Councilmember Rog why she supported the bike lanes in those areas but was not willing to support the proposal for this segment and wondered how this particular segment was different from the others.

Councilmember Rog responded in the last two years she has become a full-time bike commuter and gained a lot of experience biking on the city’s roads. She has observed usage of the bike lanes, particularly along Minnetonka Boulevard. She stated the conventional bike lanes she rides in feel very unsafe and she typically sees predominantly white males riding in those lanes. She stated based on her experiences she cannot continue to support conventional bike lanes that place bikers in narrow lanes
alongside fast traffic. She added if the city is truly going to prioritize biking, putting bikers off to the side and allowing cars to continue at their normal speed is not the best way to achieve that goal. She noted her experience on share-the-road facilities has felt much safer.

Mayor Spano thanked his colleagues for their thoughts and the residents of the neighborhood for being very clear in expressing their concerns. He stated he also has supported a number of similar projects in the past and he has gone back and forth on this particular segment for a number of reasons. He noted he feels it is important that the council remain consistent with their logic and rationale when making these decisions to maintain fairness. He stated he is also looking forward to the council discussing the philosophy and the process by which they consider these types of projects in the future because he feels the process overall is a bit flawed because it puts staff in a very difficult position of at times having to answer for council policy directives in the midst of designing projects that balance many competing interests. Going this has been a long and interesting process as well as more contentious. He stated he is eager to look at how the council does this going forward, adding it is not only about cost and meeting goals, but also about the public process and how neighbors can work together on issues.

Mayor Spano stated the issues and concerns that this neighborhood has are not that different than what has been expressed from residents in other neighborhoods that have had similar projects in the past. He noted just as in other projects, the council will be considering other measures that can be done to improve safety in the area. He added he does have concerns related to parking, especially for seniors, and the city and the neighborhood will have to work to find ways to address that issue. He explained applying the same methodology and being consistent in the philosophy and approach to these projects is important to him. He will support Segment 7 along Wooddale as proposed. He stated the council understands that change is hard, but it is their job to try to balance being responsive to the desires of the immediate neighborhood and responsible to the community as a whole who have expressed that they want this larger system. He noted this decision was not easy, but it also is not irrevocable or unchangeable and he is trying to think more broadly and globally about the community as a whole.

The motion passed 4-3 (Councilmembers Kraft, Rog, and Mohamed opposed).

9. Communications

Councilmember Kraft noted the Shamrock Bowling event at the Rec Center on March 14, from 12–9 p.m., stated there are still open slots available at 4 p.m.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

________________________________________  __________________________________
Melissa Kennedy, city clerk                Jake Spano, mayor