Community Technology Advisory Commission
Jan. 28, 2021
OFFICIAL MINUTES

1. Call to order – roll call
   Meeting started 6:01 p.m. by videoconference
   Present: Bruce Browning, Kelly Heitz, Cindy Hoffman, Abe Levine, Rolf Peterson, Mike Siegler
   Absent: Theo Pohlen
   Guests: Aaryn Anderson, Sandeep Sinha, Shawn Wood
   Staff: John McHugh, Clint Pires, Jacque Smith

2. Adoption of agenda - Agenda adopted as presented
   Browning moved, Siegler seconded, all voted in favor of adopting the agenda as presented.

3. Approval of minutes: Dec. 8, 2020
   Browning moved, Pohlen seconded. All voted in favor of approving the minutes as presented.

4. Smart cities initiative

   Jan. 25 city council study sessions results
   Smith said a report was submitted to the Jan. 25 city council study session. They are not discussed, just for review and questions by council. She said the only comment was from Council Member Kraft to focus on results, not just technology.

   Pires read Kraft’s comment to give context:

   “I’m excited to see the Smart Cities initiative. Full disclosure - before my career shift 7 or so years ago, the company I worked for sold into the Smart Cities market, so I have decent amount of background in the area.

   “My most significant perspective after reading the report is to guard against it becoming technology in search of a solution. The questions I will have as this comes before us is for any initiative to have a clearly defined problem being solved. For me, typically this would then include some kind of metric that we’d be trying to change or improve, that translates into benefits for residents. I saw some really interesting ideas in the report, but not yet clearly defined problems being solved. Some examples to illustrate my point:

   • I like the focus of the Environment committee. The Bike and pedestrian sensor system - the problem to be solved might be understanding how our sidewalks and bikeways are used so we can design new and modify existing systems to decrease automobile usage.

   • Connected community committee:
     o What is the problem being solved? I’m not sure "establish citywide modern networks..." is a problem statement.
“The rating process for all the potential initiatives feels somewhat arbitrary to me - probably because I'm not close to it. I do appreciate the approach of using the two dimensions of the chart. Again - clearer problems being solved/benefits might help, especially if Council will be expected to have a view on which of several initiatives to pursue.”

Pires said this is consistent with what we’re attempting to do. It’s fair to say that Council Member Kraft is likely to be the most interested and excited in this project. The template that’s being filled out with Aaryn should meet council expectations.

Levine asked for Kraft’s comments to be included in the meeting minutes.

Committee reports

• Environment
Levine showed a PowerPoint draft to be presented at the March 8 council meeting.

Levine asked Pires to explain plug load. Pires said there’s an effort to reduce energy usage, especially when devices aren’t in use. IT has virtualized the server environment, installed a power management system for monitors and computers to shut them down during non-business hours (except essential services) and telephones go into sleep mode. The flip side is the number of devices people have has increased over time – they don’t just have one computer, they may have a desktop and a laptop. He’s confident there are other places to reduce plug load and suggested a tour of city facilities for committee members. He asked if this might be more of a task or project for city staff, rather than a CTAC smart cities initiative. For example, electrified streets would benefit from research on the part of the commission and brainstorm, whereas the plug load application is fairly straightforward.

Levine responded and said plug load could become part of city building ordinance requirements. In that case you’d need a base line and application to measure progress, and we don’t know how to do that yet. If you take it to the next step, how do you make office buildings do that? Pires said the commission could have a lot of positive influence there and in working with staff on making this part of an ordinance.

Peterson said he thought plug load is the most fascinating part of the conversation. He asked if there was a way to measure after-hours energy load. If we’re successful, how do we know? Levine said we may need a meeting Xcel since they have the data or may already have the application. He agreed with Peterson that the plug load idea is interesting.

Siegler asked if there would be a benefit to having a campaign for households to turn off appliances when not in use. City hall may be buttoned up but others may not be. Pires said city facilities consume 1% of the power used in the city; businesses and industry are a minority as well for energy use. Biggest users are residential. He said that sustainability staff may have more information to share if it’s an ordinance, or education, or incentive. Pires said staff would know about how data has been collected at city hall. He agreed it will take the residential sector of the community to make the biggest difference. Siegler suggested a voluntary program, like organics recycling, to households. We
could take this focus and make an impact, without needing any big technology effort. He suggested there could be a website to put in numbers toward a goal and determine if you’re making an impact. Sinha asked if electricity is billed by hour of day; Siegler said no, by kilowatt hour. Sinha said his bill compares his electrical use to neighbors and by hours. Some members receive it, others do not.

Pires pointed out that some of this work has happened since the Jan. 25 council report was written, so if there are new ideas the committees should feel comfortable bringing those forward.

- **GIS-enabled use cases**

  Heitz presented a document showing committee progress. They have been exploring pros and cons of a number of potential applications that can be built out using integrated data. She said they had received lots of feedback from Nick Myers, ESRI account manager for the city, and from Dan C. on city staff. They talked about expanding trail snow removal to other applications. They discussed public dashboards that would show impervious surface layers identification. It used to be a manual process, and many cities have different fee levels depending on how the property is used. She wasn’t sure if St. Louis Park had that or not so the committee is working to get that information. The ESRI product does have algorithms built in that can work with GIS to give a more accurate picture of property. Others look for tree cover or tracking green spaces and percentages, then building that into incentives or fees. This is a way to monitor metrics for capital improvement planning, which ties to equity for the city. Analytics look at specific areas to see how city services are used and what the revenues for that area look like, then building into capital improvement plan to ensure investments impact housing stock. There’s a product that can model zoning changes and how it will affect the area in the future. ArcGIS Urban can model scenarios related to policy decisions, such as parking requirements or building heights. They are also looking at mapping applications for tracking traffic, facilities and city assets and resources.

  Sinha said mapping applications are a good opportunity to look at macro level rather than micro and discussed some of the experiences with mapping crime statistics. Heitz said a dashboard can convey a narrative rather than just stats, she used the current crime statistics provided by the city as an example where narrative could help. Pires said this is a work in progress. Heitz and Hoffman are discussions strengths and opportunities, while he and staff are working on identifying risks and limitations. Levine said prioritizing multicommittee collaboration is important when identifying initiatives.

- **Connected community/citizen awareness**

  Siegler discussed the connected community working document. Siegler said the city should be responsible for holding partners accountable for maintaining good connections and infrastructure and access to allow for remote learning. Remote learning, healthcare, work from home and home services delivery and community awareness are main use cases. This really does talk about digital infrastructure to enable the digital world. Browning said we assume everyone has internet access but that isn’t necessarily true. Many residents aren’t aware of their options for providers. Browning said we make assumptions the companies will let people know what’s happening, but they don’t always do that. People have to have the gateway before we can do anything else. Levine asked if the city should do a citywide survey to learn more.
Siegler moved to discussion of needing more information and community feedback and to gather more data. Browning asked about how the city gathers information as he sees mailers from the city – has that been a good method? Smith discussed methods of surveys that were used for the city web redesign and the cable study. These were successful, but not scientific as respondents self-selected to participate. Pires confirmed a scientific study is very expensive and difficult. He said the methods Smith discussed will work, and that providing multiple channels for people to respond is successful. Pires agrees a public process is needed for these projects. Anderson agreed that three ways to engage is good, like online, in person and paper.

McHugh reported that senior program staff have said it’s very difficult to stay in touch with members, many of whom can’t be contacted except by mail, during the pandemic. They are offering virtual classes but many members can’t participate since they have no access. McHugh said they are unconnected and digitally marginalized. Browning asked if it was an economic issue or technological; McHugh said it can be a mix.

Smith asked if the school district had done any type of survey of families regarding access related to remote learning. Browning responded they are meeting with the school district and will find that out.

Pires said these are good questions and mentioned work with the race equity team to try and help families with access. Browning asked if the issue of access is about affording equipment and connect, or about needing those things. Siegler said when visiting the library before the pandemic he noticed all computers were in use and the need is real.

Levine asked what the plan is for the next few quarters. Pires said it’s important to think about what CTAC is presenting March 8 to council, and what is or isn’t being asked of council members. The work presented by the three committees, we should think about normalization and putting this into the template. Anderson asked that the committees keep them involved as they continue to meet. He also said it’s important not to bring too many ideas. He also suggested metrics are important to know how success is measured. Prioritize what has the most impact to the city. It might help to group items together, then narrow them down and define by benefits related to policies.

Pires said council needs to stay “big bowl” at the policy level. CTAC should bring options based on work that’s taken place – here’s what we’re suggesting and the benefits. The work Anderson is doing, included in this meeting packet, will answer questions. Siegler said the group should focus on initiatives that are ready to go, even if it’s only one.

**Application of use case template**

Anderson showed presentation model for connected community. Siegler said he wants to merge his information. Anderson said the role of Insight is to normalize/standardize information.

**Microsoft Teams**

Smith and Anderson encouraged everyone to use Teams to share files and information.
5. **2021 meetings**
   Everyone agreed to meet the third Thursdays of the month, at 6 p.m. Next meeting is Feb. 18, 6 p.m., by videoconference.

6. **Adjourn**
   Browning moved, Siegler seconded to adjourn, all voted in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.