

**City of West St. Paul  
Open Council Work Session Minutes  
February 8, 2021**

**1. Call to Order**

Mayor Napier called the meeting to order at 5:52 p.m.

**2. Roll Call**

Present: Mayor Dave Napier  
Councilmembers Wendy Berry, Julie Eastman, Lisa Eng-Sarne,  
Robyn Gulley, John Justen, and Dick Vitelli

Absent: None

Also Present: City Manager Ryan Schroeder  
City Attorney Kori Land  
Police Chief Brian Sturgeon  
Finance Director Char Stark  
Parks & Public Works Director/City Engineer Ross Beckwith  
Human Resources Director Debra Gieseke  
City Clerk Shirley Buecksler

Steve Schneider, General Manager – St. Paul Regional Water Service  
Will Menkhaus, Project Engineer – St. Paul Regional Water Service

**3. Review and Approve the OCWS Agenda**

Motion was made by Councilmember Eng-Sarne and seconded by Councilmember Gulley to approve the OCWS agenda, as amended.

Vote: 6 ayes / 0 nays. Motion carried.

**4. Review the Regular Meeting Consent Agenda**

Council reviewed and approved the Consent Agenda, as presented.

**5. Agenda Item(s)**

**A. Presentation from St. Paul Regional Water Service (SPRWS)**

City Manager Schroeder introduced Steve Schneider and Will Menkhaus of St. Paul Regional Water Service.

Mr. Schneider said they are located at McCarron's water treatment plant. This is an historic investment to their facility costing \$160M over four years. The average

monthly bill 2021-2024 will increase by approximately 25% for customers and was approved by the SPRWS Board.

Mr. Menkhaus said they are at the beginning of the project and are a long way for breaking ground, but they wanted to share this project with everyone. It will begin with a pilot testing for one year.

Mr. Schneider said the basic treatment process of the new facility will not be much different but will use new technologies.

Mayor Napier said this is another bill going up for our residents, but West St. Paul understands about aging infrastructure. It's a good thing but a 25% increase is a tough pill to swallow. We need to educate residents before the increase goes into effect and should include information with their bill.

Councilmember Eastman said she was lucky to go through their facility and, one thing they should brag about is, they have won awards for being one of the best facilities in the nation and one of the best in the world. Other countries come here to learn what you have done. Water is our new oil so, while we probably will have cost concerns about it, we need to get to where it looks like as actual dollars, which may be easier to understand. I appreciate everything you do and look forward to seeing your new facility when it's done.

Mr. Schneider appreciated Councilmember Eastman's comment. The way the facility was built originally, at the time it was built, is amazing.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said she is a huge fan of SPRWS and appreciates the essential service they provide.

Mayor Napier thanked Mr. Schneider and Mr. Menkhaus for their presentation and instructed Schroeder and Beckwith to push this information out to our community.

## **B. Discussion on Committee Appointment Process**

Schroeder said Staff is looking for input from Council on any changes to the appointment process, as well as any observations Council may have on appointments made recently.

Mayor Napier said he was prepared and knew who wanted to be reappointed. It's important that we respect their time, the impact they're having, and what they're doing. We were not prepared with who wanted to be reappointed, and we didn't clearly understand the process. He wants to move this forward.

Councilmember Gulley said we should have brought the applications seeking reappointment in and discussed this early. Should be a part of the discussion. She

requested that Staff prepare a spreadsheet of applicants' answers for easier comparison.

Councilmember Eastman suggested adding more members to each committee or adding an art council. This could be discussed at the Strategic Planning meeting.

Councilmember Justen said we need to fix what happened. Look at the Environmental Committee. Suggested we address the process specifically. Solution 1 is expansion of committees. We need to apologize and we need to fix it.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said she created her own color-coded list by ward. The person overlooked for reappointment to the Environmental Committee does not want to be appointed now. One person not reappointed to the Park & Recreation Commission is still interested.

Councilmember Berry said we failed for everyone who applied. Would consider adding those reappointments to continue.

Councilmember Vitelli said these are volunteer advisory committees. Adding more is not the best idea.

Councilmember Gulley said we are so lucky to have this many qualified people willing to serve. We could add subcommittees, special projects, or other committees and consider roles.

Councilmember Gulley apologized and said this was her first time going through the process. Mayor Napier said tonight's discussion is not directed at anyone.

Councilmember Eastman suggested following the same process as the Charter Commission. Meet applicants face-to-face, then see applications.

Councilmember Vitelli said, in the past, Councilmembers for each ward brought candidates forward. Two members from that ward brought names to Council. Mayor Napier said this is a great idea.

Motion was made by Councilmember Gulley and seconded by Councilmember Eastman to recess the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Vote: 6 ayes / 0 nays. Motion carried.

The Open Council Work Session resumed at 7:19 p.m. with continued discussion on the Committee Appointment Process:

Councilmember Justen said Councilmembers choosing applicants may be a problem. We need to let people come to us who want to serve. He likes ward balance but cannot support Councilmembers choosing.

Councilmember Berry agreed and said that residents do not know the process. Would not be on board.

Mayor Napier asked Staff to put this on a future OCWS for discussion with ideas based on tonight's discussion.

Attorney Land said we will need to look at ordinances and resolutions, as there are set numbers for those committees. Park & Recreation and Planning are set by ordinance. Others are set by resolution.

Mayor Napier said we don't like losing these members, but is also excited to have new members joining.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said if you value this person serving on the Environmental Committee, information is in their application.

Councilmember Justen said part of the reason for expanding committees is to be fair and doesn't see the downside to adding positions.

Councilmember Gulley said resolutions are non-binding.

Councilmember Justen wants to reach out to them if we have news to give. He has reached out to all committee chairs.

Council consensus is to add one position to the Environmental Committee and two to Park & Recreation. Staff should suggest next process to make it happen.

### **C. Non-Commercial Sign Ordinance Discussion**

Community Development Director Hartshorn said Staff was requested to review possible changes to the residential sign Code that would allow for flexibility, while still maintaining a clear, concise, and enforceable ordinance, in response to the Council discussion during the January 11, 2021 OCWS.

Staff believes it is in the best interest of the City's image to continue limiting the number of residential signs (that do not require a permit) to one non-commercial sign per lot, rather than expanding to allow multiple signs. Allowing one sign limits the potential for visual clutter as residents and visitors travel throughout the city.

A potential change to accommodate residents interested in displaying multiple signs would be to amend the Code to allow an increased sign size of up to 12 square feet, as opposed to the current allowable 6 square feet. This additional square footage would allow the residents more flexibility to display multiple messages on one consolidated base, which limits the amount of visual clutter, as well as limits any necessary additional enforcement measures by City Staff (i.e., getting out with a tape measurer to calculate the size of each sign).

Staff still agrees with the sentiment that was mentioned during the Open Council Work Session in January, that it is better that the Code does not wade into the waters of defining art vs. murals vs. signage, etc.

Councilmember Vitelli suggested that no changes be made.

Councilmember Justen asked for clarification that six small signs could be combined to create one large sign. Increasing size of signs, someone will just make their sign larger. 12 feet is too much. He does not support increasing sign size.

Councilmember Berry agrees on not increasing the size and doesn't feel it is being enforced across the city.

Mayor Napier said we could stay the way we are, we just need to enforce it.

Councilmember Justen asked if the letter sent by Code Enforcement informs the owner that they could affix signs together to make one? Letting people know that they have an option to connect them and making it clear will tell them "how" they can comply.

Mayor Napier asked if we have a total of six square feet? The community has to respect the ordinance and be respectful of others.

Mayor Napier said the ordinance should remain as is and it should be enforced. Councilmember Vitelli agreed.

Councilmember Justen said to add language in the compliance letters. Mayor Napier agreed. Staff was directed to bring forward to the next meeting.

#### **D. Renaissance Plan Discussion**

During the January 8, 2021 meeting, Hartshorn said Council requested to hold a discussion around the Renaissance Plan Update that was accepted back in 2017.

The original Robert Street Renaissance Plan was adopted in 2001, which provided a design framework for redevelopment of Robert Street and the immediately adjacent properties.

After the completion of the Robert Street reconstruction, a Renaissance Plan Update was drafted to continue the improvements of key project areas adjacent to Robert Street, such as the northern section of South Robert Street (The Gateway), Signal Hills mall, and the creation of a town-center-district. While some of these concepts and ideas were implemented, as well as some zoning changes, the plan update for not formally adopted by the City Council.

On June 26, 2017, City Council approved a resolution that accepted the plan, but intentionally did not adopt the plan. As stated specifically in the acceptance

resolution, by accepting the plan and not adopting it, the City would not be legally bound to implement the recommendations in the plan. The plan would simply act as a resource as the City developed the Comprehensive Plan Update for future redevelopment projects and policy decisions.

While the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance take precedence over the Renaissance Plan when reviewing development plans, multiple components still overlap. With multiple documents and long term plans (2040 Comprehensive Plan, current zoning ordinances, and the updated renaissance plan), conflicting interpretations and priorities can develop. Therefore, Staff is requesting further direction and discussion around the concepts and recommendations of the Renaissance Plan Update. More specifically, if any Code changes and/or amendments need to be made to align with any recommendations.

Councilmember Justen requested some background on why it was accepted but not adopted and some historical reasoning. What was it that held it back from being adopted?

Mayor Napier said we want a vision of what Robert Street could look like and into the future. Being restricted to this plan was to restraining. It gives us flexibility but it is a nice road map.

Attorney Land said the first Renaissance Plan was a design guide, and we implemented those changes through the Zoning Ordinance. When it was updated, these were the ideas and trends that were thinking out there on private properties we do not own. Cities have been sued of designing and guiding private properties. Owners didn't want to see those changes and spoke at Council against it. It was a cautious approach to accept the plan and use the vision to see what happens. At the time, it was too much to incorporate into the Comp Plan.

Mayor Napier said it was a valuable tool for creating Robert Street in a marketable and effective way for our community. This forethought of the previous Council was really smart and valuable. Watching the north end develop from what it was before, a lot of longtime business owners left, but it all worked out for them, as well. It's good to understand but okay to review it and dig in deeper as a good exercise for us.

Councilmember Justen said some things are no longer valid so it would be hard to adopt it, as is. We want the framework to have more force. Look at things that could move into the Zoning Ordinance.

Mayor Napier said this is a great tool to keep this progressive and agreed with Councilmember Justen's comments.

Councilmember Eastman appreciated the background. She would like to see a joint meeting of the Planning Commission and City Council, along with the Chair and Vice

Chair of the Environmental Committee. She added that she would like more understanding of some things within it.

Mayor Napier said this is a good suggestion and we may need a facilitator, which could be Staff, in order to get to an outcome. Schroeder said we can figure out a way to approach it.

Councilmember Vitelli asked if we can get something in writing about the specific difficulties that people are having with the plan? Mayor Napier said there are no difficulties, just discussion. This will get Council to believe in the vision we have.

Hartshorn said it was written by Cunningham. Councilmember Vitelli asked if he could look at the plan and redo it? It's a guide.

Councilmember Justen said the Planning Commission has items in front of them that don't fit the Renaissance Plan, but there is no enforcement. If it's not in the ordinance, they cannot do anything with it.

Councilmember Gulley would like physical copies to look at of zoning and other ordinances that would be effected by the plan.

Mayor Napier said copies are available to Council. We can look at the Renaissance Plan and see if that is the way Council wants to go. After that, we can look at the ordinances.

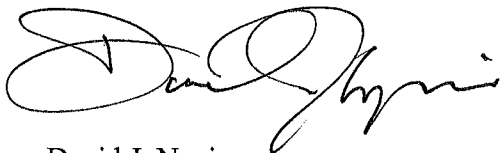
Schroeder said he is hearing most that Council wants a spreadsheet listing out the gaps for the top ten things between the Renaissance Plan, Zoning Ordinance wording, and the difference between them. Schroeder said Staff can do this.

Councilmember Justen asked for a compilation of what we've accomplished in the Renaissance Plan so we don't have to think about them, and others that are in the Plan that are goals, so we can choose whether we want to do those or not.

## 6. Adjourn

Motion was made by Councilmember Gulley and seconded by Councilmember Justen to adjourn the meeting at 8:01 p.m.

All members present voted aye. Motion carried.



David J. Napier  
Mayor  
City of West St. Paul