

**City of West St. Paul
Open Council Work Session Minutes
March 25, 2019**

1. Roll Call

Mayor Napier called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

Present: Mayor Dave Napier
Councilmembers Wendy Berry, Lisa Eng-Sarne, Anthony Fernandez,
John Justen, and Bob Pace

Absent: Dick Vitelli (excused absence)

Also Present: City Manager Ryan Schroeder
City Attorney Kori Land
Police Chief Manila Shaver
Fire Chief Mark Juelfs
Asst. City Manager/HR Director Sherrie Le
Finance Director Char Stark
Community Development Director Jim Hartshorn
Asst. Park & Recreation Director Dave Schletty
City Clerk Shirley Buecksler

Michael Orange, West St. Paul Resident and Retiree Environmental
Technical Assistance Program (RETAP) Consultant, Minnesota Pollution
Control Agency

2. Review and Approve the OCWS Agenda

Council added a brief discussion of gas and electric franchise agreements and approved the OCWS agenda, as amended.

3. Review the Regular Meeting Consent Agenda

- Council moved Consent Item 9H, Joint Powers Agreement with Dakota County for Median and Crosswalk on Wentworth Avenue City Project 19-7, to New Business as Item 11B.
- Council also moved Consent Item 9I, Accept 2018 Shared Volunteer Program Annual Report, to New Business as Item 11C.

Council approved the Regular Meeting Consent Agenda, as amended.

4. Agenda Item(s)

A. Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Carbon Credits

In 2015, the City Council approved an Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Action Plan. This plan has three major components:

- Removal of low quality trees;
- Treatment of quality trees; and
- Replacement of removed trees

The Council committed to following this plan for at least ten years and evaluating it towards to end. The current budget commitment is about \$30k annually for injection treatment of one third of the City's boulevard ash trees. Additionally, the City budgets \$20k for removal of dead or poor quality public trees (all species), stump removals, and new tree plantings.

The City was recently approached by Michael Orange, a West St. Paul resident and representative for a number of State agencies, with an opportunity to participate in a new program geared toward ash tree preservation. The program is called the Minnesota Urban Forest Credit Program. The program uses ash trees to formalize a process to monetize their carbon sequestration benefits in the form of carbon credits. The credits could then be sold to potential buyers to offset carbon emissions. This is a pilot program for up to six cities in Minnesota. West St. Paul is a prime candidate because of the high number of inventoried ash trees and because of the already adopted EAB action plan to preserve the quality ash trees.

In order to become a pilot city for this program, the City would need to commit to ash tree preservation for up to an additional ten years (20 years total). This would mean budgeting for ash trees beyond the initial ten-year plan.

The annual treatment budget of \$30k could be reduced by training City Staff to perform the injections. Additionally, it is believed that after the initial wave of EAB passes in about five to eight years, tree injections could be extended from once every two to three years to once every three to five years, thus reducing the annual cost. The Council should also consider keeping the \$30k annual budget and using excess funds for annual tree replacements. Currently, funding for tree replacements has been limited by an excessive number of tree removals.

Mayor Napier said the EAB Action Plan has a lot of good things in it and we just need to extend it by ten years. He asked if it could open the door for funding replacement trees. Assistant Park & Recreation Director Schletty answered yes.

Mayor Napier introduced Michael Orange, West St. Paul resident and RETAP Consultant with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

Mr. Orange said the request is for a commitment to participate with five other cities. He said ten percent of possible credits go into a fund if trees are damaged in a storm. The average cost of replacement is \$153 per tree. He said this program could potentially get the City through \$180,000 in replacement costs. Mr. Orange said part of the plan is for the price of removal and replacement. He said a healthy tree can be treated and kept for 20 years.

Councilmember Justen thanked Mr. Orange for bringing this to our attention and said he is excited to move forward with this plan. He said he would like to see this promoted because citizens will see it as visionary and be proud of their City. Councilmember Justen suggested putting it in the newsletter and sharing on social media.

Mr. Orange said that the greater percentage of trees inoculated the greater effect on non-inoculated trees, which will suppress and slow down the infestation on private trees. He said the City will need to sell these credits down the road to local companies who want to build their carbon footprint, so it will need to be marketed at that time.

Mayor Napier thanked Mr. Orange for coming. Council consensus is to move forward with this.

B. 2019 City Council Initiatives Discussion

City Manager Schroeder gave credit to Marketing & Communication Manager Dan Nowicki for his creative skills and work on this document.

Strategic Initiatives and a revision to the Vision Statement had been adopted by the then City Council in May 2017 with the intent that these initiatives become priorities through 2018. With changes on the Council in 2019, Mayor Napier had recommended that the 2017 Initiatives be reviewed.

On February 21, 26, and 27, the City hosted neighborhood listening sessions during which interactive survey input was received. The City also provided an opportunity for online responses to this same survey. In total, we have received 388 responses to these surveys either online or at the neighborhood meetings. Data from surveys that existed as of March 2, 2019 (330) was made available to the City Council for the Council/Department Director Strategic Planning meeting. A deliverable from the March 2 meeting was a list of Council Initiatives for 2019-20.

On March 5, Department Directors met to provide clarifying editing of Council Initiatives. These revisions were brought to the March 11, 2019 OCWS; however, time did not permit handling of the matter by Council. Staff has utilized the interim period to construct objectives necessary to accomplish the Initiatives, as amended.

Schroeder said short-term initiatives are those expected to be completed within a year while long-term initiatives may be longer than the next two years.

Note: Numbering of Council Initiatives in the minutes does not indicate order of Council Initiative priority.

KEY: Cost: \$=Low, \$\$=Medium, \$\$\$=High; Type: M=Metric, O=Operational

1. Council Initiative: Invest in Infrastructure and Public Facilities

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$\$\$ M

- Amend Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)/Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) to complete high priority projects on a cash basis to the extent possible

Discussion on Individual Objective:

Schroeder said we are talking about doing this in the next couple of months.

- Continue to allocate resources toward sanitary lift station/force main projects as highest priority followed by City Hall maintenance and roadway surface projects

Discussion on Individual Objective:

Schroeder said we would like to do an inventory of buildings and the needs of those. He also said we would like to make leveraged projects higher projects.

Intermediate Term: \$ M

- Conduct assessment of current facility conditions including investment projections to achieve a responsible standard
- Develop plan to address gaps from approved standard

Long Term and Ongoing Efforts \$ M

- Continue Legislative and similar efforts to gain funding for priority projects
- Develop partnership opportunities to leverage third party investments
- Provide regular reporting to Policy Board and the community on fiscal progress and infrastructure schedules

2. Council Initiative: Branding and Identity

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$ O

- Identify, through research and analysis, any potential gaps between Council Vision and external/internal perception of West St. Paul's identity
- Engage internal stakeholders (staff, policy board) for identification of initiatives and ideas
- Develop feedback and community input opportunities
- Reach out to faith based, non-profit and governmental partners in search of collaboratives
- Affirm Council support of interim implementation strategies and revisions through engagement loop

Intermediate Term: \$\$ M

- Explore recognition of historic persons, places and events
- Seek out opportunities for collaboratives such as West St. Paul Days
- Strengthen leveraging of NDC4 capabilities with spotlights of persons/businesses and Council Updates
- Strengthen “close to it all/middle of it all” through base mapping and other means including area amenities and programming as West St. Paul amenities and programming (events, regional facilities, etc.)

Discussion on Individual Objective:

Schroeder said we should consider everything within the area between the rivers and freeways as a local amenity that should be marketed as ours, not just amenities within West St. Paul city limits.

- Build on existing social media and general communications strengths
- Leverage positive policy board external impacts
- Explore West St. Paul branded merchandise for sale to the public

Long Term and Ongoing Efforts \$ O

- Develop annual Strategic Communication Plan outlining yearly objectives, strategy and resources consistent with Council Vision and Initiatives, as well as long term missions
- Seek out and capitalize on changing technology and communication resources

Discussion on Initiative:

Schroeder said we are missing discussions and celebrations on the history of West St. Paul and said we should look at this closer. He also said we should market and reinforce that our boards are working positively together.

Councilmember Fernandez said he is interested in knowing how expensive it would be to replace the City’s logo. He said that he feels it is very dated and does not suit the city.

Mayor Napier said he helped with the creation of a new logo the last time, what was looked at, and the cost. He said several years ago that the cost would have been unbelievable. He said it may be a long process but he is open to it.

Councilmember Justen said the logo wouldn’t have to be instantaneous. He asked if any part of the logo looks back at West St. Paul’s history.

Mayor Napier asked Council if they are interested in investigating a new logo. Everyone said yes in agreement.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said that positioning and messaging needs to be first and finding out what that looks like to our citizens. She said phase one is interviewing everyone, which that process can be about \$100k.

Councilmember Justen said discussing any ideas for the logo with Staff and revisiting previous ideas could cut costs.

Councilmember Fernandez asked how often Cities change their logo. Schroeder said that in 35 years he has only seen a City create a new logo twice but commented that he has seen a lot of Cities update their logo.

Mayor Napier said we should hold onto the idea of replacing the City's logo.

Mayor Napier said that he has wanted to remodel the lobby and front entrance area of City Hall. He said it doesn't identify who we are as a City. He said it may not cost a lot of money to accomplish the image we want.

Councilmember Fernandez commented on the West St. Paul sign behind the Council dais and the items stored at the back of the Council Chambers.

Schroeder said Building Official Schilling is looking into enclosing that space as a storeroom.

Council agreed that branding and creating an image and identity as a warm and welcoming City is important.

Councilmember Pace agreed that walking into City Hall it should look nice and up to date and that it can be done with little money.

Councilmember Fernandez said we're asking developers to invest million dollar plans in this city and that we should be in a Council Chambers that looks good.

Mayor Napier said he never wanted to see our facilities get to where they are and that they will only get worse if we don't make improvements to City Hall, Police and Fire. He said we need to step up our game with the first impression our visitors see.

Councilmember Justen said this is also the first point of contact for citizens and that the entry and Council Chambers are unwelcoming. He said citizens and businesses are two vitally important groups, so we need to warm it up and make it more inviting.

3. Council Initiative: Provide Recreational Opportunities for All Ages and Abilities

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$ M

- Provide analysis and reporting on financial operations of Recreational Athletic Center (RAC), Arena, Pool and Recreation programming, including quarterly reports

Long Term and Ongoing Efforts \$ M

- Assess opportunities for collaboration with neighboring communities, YMCA, Tri-District and/or other recreation providers
- Review Parks and Recreation programs and facilities within the market; identifying overlaps, gaps and deficiencies

Discussion on Initiative:

Mayor Napier said based on the newsletter with multiple pages of activities, West St. Paul is doing well right now and complimented Staff for their work on putting these activities together. He said he would like to see a report on participation in each of these programs and activities so Council can help Staff to accomplish more than their goals, as well as to spread the news about how well we are doing.

Councilmember Berry said that most of these activities are not accessible for parents who work during the day. Mayor Napier asked what could be done to solve this issue.

Councilmember Pace said he had no idea that West St. Paul had so many things going on and asked if individual activities are breaking even or if they are an expense to the City.

Schroeder said the goal is to meet or exceed the direct cost and to cover any overhead beyond that.

Councilmember Pace said it looks great and thanked Assistant Parks & Recreation Director Schletty for his hard work.

4. Council Initiative: Increase Maintenance of Parks and Plan for Improvements

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$\$ M

- Provide analysis of ongoing minor maintenance needs within the park system
- Provide analysis of staffing/resource gaps limiting ability to provide for maintenance needs including analysis of peaks and valleys in resources needs
- Prioritize opportunities for volunteerism within the park system
- Identify any community livability issues generated within park facilities with neighborhood impacts to propose mitigation of identified issues (multi-departmental solutions)

Long Term and Ongoing Efforts \$ M

- Leverage opportunities provided by Thompson County Park, River to River and Thompson wetland mitigation projects
- Continue Master Planning of each of the parks within the local system
- Amend CIP to defer 2020-2022 major investments in the park system outside of highly leveraged third party projects

Discussion on Initiative:

Schroeder said we need to look at any parks that may have negative livability issues. He also said the highest priority is pipes and streets.

Mayor Napier said we need to protect our investment and believes that is our top priority. He said we need to adequately maintain our parks and cannot let them degrade to the level they once were. Mayor Napier said we want our young families to be able to use our parks. He said the first priority should be to maintain our parks, followed by improving parks. He said we need to push for vegetation restoration at Marthaler Park.

Schroeder noted that the first two bullets under Immediate and Short Term Efforts include maintenance.

Mayor Napier said he thinks park maintenance should be one of the highest priorities in our city. He said this is not the same city and would like to see basketball hoops put back.

Councilmember Pace agreed with Mayor Napier and said Staff should continue looking for any available grants for park improvements.

Councilmember Justen said he is in favor of delaying park improvements because Thompson Park and other areas will be complete and it may be a good idea to hold off on any other improvements for a year or two. He added that when River to River goes through the area will look improved and not look like it's been neglected.

Councilmember Justen said he went to the Park and Recreation Committee meeting and they moved the installation of basketball hoops to another meeting. He said they didn't seem to understand that they were instructed to implement but instead they seemed to think they were discussing whether or not they should be implemented. He added that there was a lot of pushback from citizens.

Councilmember Fernandez said he thought reinstalling the basketball hoops was an administrative decision.

Schroeder said it was a confrontational decision at the time and that's why it was sent back.

Councilmember Fernandez asked when the last time was that park equipment was paid for by a private source.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said development partnership opportunities from the infrastructure goal could also be placed here.

Mayor Napier asked if we should have donor bids for playground equipment.

Schroeder said it should be thought through before making park improvements to be sure money spent will attract visitors.

5. Council Initiative: Improve Housing Stock Through New Housing Plan

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$\$ M

- Prioritize rental and code programming; provide opportunities for volunteers/inter, community participation
- Seek third-party funding enhancements for private/public rehab programming
- Provide analysis of market livability metrics and methods to enhance movement toward those metrics
- Develop analysis of parcel based residential Estimated Market Value (EMV) trends with proposals to positively impact trends

Long Term and Ongoing Efforts \$\$ M

- Create partnership opportunities with single family owners, developer/builders, funders to support enhancement of properties trending below expected standards
- Identify funding opportunities to leverage private, Community Development Agency (CDA), non-profit housing rehab efforts
- Maintain contact with St. Paul Area Association of Realtors (SPAAR) and similar groups in order to communicate programming opportunities impacting real estate market
- Strengthen neighborhood identities
- Work with condo/townhouse communities on potential Housing Improvement Area (HIA) programming
- Propose initiatives to strengthen multi-family market and rehab/renovation opportunities

Discussion on Initiative:

Schroeder said this is a big deal and we need to pump up the effort.

Councilmember Fernandez said it is important to receive data collection and that this is the biggest key. He said there are two paths – gentrification (or rejuvenation), and intervention, which is the path he would prefer to use to help property owners by providing funds to improve their homes. He said we need to develop more of a relationship with the CDA.

Mayor Napier said we currently have and are doing intervention programs. He said the key is to take what we have, what we have learned from it, and what we can do to improve it.

Schroeder said the data piece is a big part of it. He said the CDA provides grant dollars to the City but that's done as opportunity appears.

Councilmember Justen asked if we have a new housing plan. Hartshorn said the City Council will see it at their April 22, 2019 City Council meeting and it will include establishing a new housing plan within the first half of the year.

Councilmember Justen said he would love to see something about affordable housing included. He said we just need language that we are looking into it as we are looking at the plan.

Schroeder said naming individual neighborhoods, similar to St. Paul, may be worth considering for West St. Paul. He said residents in St. Paul have pride in where they live and we could borrow from that.

Councilmember Justen suggested making newer signs so people notice them.

6. Council Initiative: Identify Opportunities to Bolster Diversity and Inclusion Outreach

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$\$ O

- Propose Inclusive policy addressing all abilities and populations; coordination/ compendium of existing (such as Alzheimer's effort)

Discussion on Individual Objective:

Councilmember Justen suggested changing the word 'propose' to 'create.'

- Comprise Census Complete County/outreach effort/task force
- Develop and implement plan incorporating community ideas and input to build relationships, strengthen trust, learn effective outreach and inclusion strategies

Councilmember Justen said he would like to see this section expanded with language about engagement. He said 'inclusion' and 'outreach' are outward-looking but 'engagement' is pulling inward.

Schroeder said he saw this as something to do now and not in the long-term.

Councilmember Fernandez said the quickest way is to start talking. He suggested inviting businesses, faith leaders and others to get together and have discussions. He said it starts simple and will grow but we need a center in which to do that and connect with people.

Councilmember Justen said it's important to reach out to apartments because they are a big part of our community where we are missing those conversations. He said they may have a community room we could use to talk with the residents there. Councilmember Justen would like to see this clarified.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said she is still hearing from people who want the City to incorporate other languages. She asked about translating the newsletter.

7. Council Initiative: Actively Pursue All Resources to Facilitate Initiatives in Recognition of Current Fiscal Constraints

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$ O

- Integrate financial policies, position and plan into budgeting, CIP/CEP, audit and decision metrics
- Prioritize projects and programs including metrics for leveraged revenue inputs
- Coordinate ongoing focus on legislative funding efforts

Long Term and Ongoing Efforts \$ O

- Conduct an examination of City services and programs to identify those for elimination or revision
- Identify long term cost drivers which consume resources beyond expectations proposing policy to reduce or eliminate cost drivers

8. Council Initiative: Create Active Plan to Deal with Vacant or Blighted Properties

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$\$ M

- Create plan to address vacant and problem properties with targeted resolution dates; include vacant and blighted properties within internal problem property reviews; revisit vacant property registration
- Prioritize community and private parcel aesthetics relative to community standards and expectations
- Seek volunteer/community involvement with resolution of problem properties
- Prioritize communication of properties returned to community expectations

Long Term and Ongoing Efforts \$ M

- Create programming/funding to address problem properties including opportunities for ownership changes

Discussion on Initiative:

Councilmember Eng-Sarne suggested changing 'deal with' in the initiative title to 'address.'

Schroeder said it has become more apparent that we need to visit a vacant property registration.

Councilmember Fernandez asked if vacancy is increasing. Schroeder said that people talk about it a lot.

9. Council Initiative: Improve Accessibility Regarding Walking, Biking, Wheelchairs, Bus Routes

Immediate and Short Term Efforts \$\$ M

- Provide update to priority bikeway/walkway project completion and priorities for future completion within 2011 Bike/Pedestrian Plan in concert with the 2018 American Disabilities Act (ADA) Plan
- Participate in County transit planning as opportunities arise
- Seek third-party funding for future priorities
- Identify any deficiencies in accessibility in public and commercial properties
- Create base mapping for bike/pedestrian facilities within the area bounded by 494 and the rivers to understand connectivity gaps including an understanding of associated amenities and public facilities of interest

Long Term and Ongoing Efforts \$\$\$ M

- Complete infrastructure investments with partners including Marie/Oakdale trail, Wentworth trail, Wentworth/DARTS pedestrian crossing, Thompson Avenue sidewalk gaps (east of Robert), River to River trail projects,
- Create marketing plan for trail users with connectivity to commercial establishments and public/recreational and historic amenities


5. Franchise Agreements

Due to lack of time, Council did not discuss this item.

6. Adjourn

Motion was made by Councilmember Justen and seconded by Councilmember Berry to adjourn the meeting at 6:27 p.m.

All members present voted aye. Motion carried.



David J. Napier
Mayor
City of West St. Paul