

**CITY OF NORTH ST. PAUL
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2021
6:30 P.M.**

North St. Paul City Hall – Council Chambers
2400 Margaret Street

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Barton called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

COMMISSION

Elaine Barton, Commission Chair

Patrick Blees, Commissioner ATTENDED VIA ZOOM

Erik Brenna, Commissioner

Rick Gelbmann, Commissioner

John Monge, Commission Vice Chair

Lisa Wong, Commission City Council Liaison

Andrew Wise, Commissioner

Allan Worm, Commissioner ABSENT AND EXCUSED

STAFF

Eric Zweber, City Planner

Brandy Howe, WSB Consultant

Lisa Ritchie, Planning Secretary

III. ADOPT AGENDA

Chair Barton requested that Agenda Item 12, Meeting Open to the Public, be moved to Item 5.

Motion to adopt agenda by Commissioner Monge, and seconded by Commissioner Gelbmann, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to adopt the October 7, 2021 Agenda as amended.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Blees requested the following correction:

-Page 3, third paragraph, line 4 should read, “completely screened from adjacent streets, walkways and parks”

Motion to approve Minutes by Commissioner Wise, and seconded by Commissioner Brenna, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to approve the September 16, 2021 regular meeting minutes as amended.

V. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

John Schmahl, 2750 Chisholm Avenue, stated repairs to the community center are budgeted in the Capital Improvement Plan at \$650,000. He asked why the Enterprise funds are so cash heavy. He added the Enterprise funds should be used for budgeted items for use by the general public.

Mr. Schmahl asked whether the Planning Commission has purview over the proposed amounts listed in the Capital Improvement Plan.

Chair Barton stated decisions related to funding are made by the City Council, and the Planning Commission focuses on whether proposed projects are consistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. She added priorities can change.

VI. PUBLIC HEARINGS

-None.

VII. COMMISSION BUSINESS ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Review the 2022 to 2031 Capital Improvement Plan

City Engineer Morgan Dawley reviewed the proposed Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), which is being considered for adoption by the City Council. The Planning Commission's role is to comment and guide city Staff where appropriate on project areas that have been identified, infrastructure improvements, and other priorities. The Planning Commission is requested to provide input and feedback on what they feel is important with respect to the CIP, and how these issues relate to the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Dawley reviewed maps showing what is identified for 2022 as well as long range planning through 2029 and 2031. He added it is important to note that any plan is subject to change. The CIP is a new process for North St. Paul and there will be regular reviews and amendments, as the CIP is reviewed each year on a regular schedule as part of the budgeting process. He reviewed recent proposed projects including pavement replacement Ariel Street, which began with discussions with the City of Maplewood as a project cost sharing effort.

Mr. Dawley stated another project area, west of the high school, is on hold until the School District finalizes details for their building renovation project to begin next year. The City hopes to combine their improvements with infrastructure improvement and replacement, including the addition of curb and gutter.

Mr. Dawley reviewed two project areas in the downtown area – west on 7th Avenue in the Uptown Commons development area, and Helen Street from Seppala to the alleyway south of 7th Avenue, including alley work. This is a continuation of concrete pavement replacement projects. There is no impetus at this time to change the parking arrangements on the east end. The City recently invested in irrigation and landscaping on 7th Avenue from 1st Avenue to Helen Street. City Staff will use the downtown revitalization plan as a guiding plan for design.

Mr. Dawley stated a 6th Avenue surface parking lot is planned. A minor layout modification could result in additional parking stalls, and the alleys will be improved. Charles Avenue north and south would be repaved, but that was already on the maintenance overlay list.

Mr. Dawley stated some sanitary sewer lining is planned as budgets allow, as part of the comprehensive sewer plan. A large area of the water distribution network extends to Maplewood residents, serving them with North St. Paul water. Ramsey County is planning a roadway overlay in 2023, and there have been water main breaks in the area, so City Staff recommends replacement of the main line with new pipe in 2022.

Chair Barton asked if in the 2013 CIP Parking Plan, were parking lots were addressed?

Mr. Dawley stated City Staff were focused on the street improvement plan in 2011, and parking lots were not included at that time. Pavement as an asset is an important consideration, and there has been recent discussion about the 6th Avenue lot and other City parking lots.

Chair Barton asked a question about the 6th Avenue parking lot. Mr. Dawley stated City Staff feels there is a good opportunity to make improvements to the electric system in the 6th Avenue parking lot, using grant funds to install electric car charging stations and a renovation of the lighting system. That surface parking lot will be important for the downtown area for the next 25 years.

City Council Liaison Wong asked how that plays into alternative modes of transportation, including pedestrian access and sidewalks.

Mr. Dawley stated there are multi-modal opportunities in the 7th Avenue portion of the project, including the transit route maintained by Metro Transit, and sidewalks are a part of the downtown area. There is currently no plan to add a bike lane on 7th Avenue. The general consensus in the community is that access to the Gateway Trail as a regional amenity is important, but street bike lanes will not be implemented.

Rick Gelbman asked if bike lanes are included plans on Seppala Boulevard.

Mr. Dawley stated Seppala Boulevard is not identified for trails in the Comprehensive Plan or the County's Active Living Plan, but it is an evolving corridor that functions as a reliever of congestion of both cars and pedestrian traffic. He added Seppala is too narrow to add bike lanes.

Chair Barton stated the redevelopment master plan envisioned the potential use of Seppala Boulevard as a more bike and pedestrian friendly environment. She added plans changed when it was renovated as a two-way street, as there is not a lot of room, and the parking situation is poor. She noted that is a corridor that needs to be looked at.

Mr. Dawley stated there is potential for the vision for Seppala Boulevard to be a pedestrian and bike plaza.

Chair Barton stated, reviewing parking numbers, she does not like the current parking situation. She asked why, on page 10, the range for target replacement years varies from 10-15 years up to 25 years. Mr. Dawley stated time frames are approximate for budgeting purposes.

Chair Barton asked about the life of the improvement that ranges from 10-25 years in the column. Mr. Dawley stated the Finance Director would be a good resource for asset management issues. He added an overlay improvement might have a 10–20-year life cycle, and the level of financial investment increases project life expectancy.

Chair Barton stated the trail life expectancy is listed as 10 years, which seems short. She added sometimes concrete has been used on trails or paths, but asphalt is cheaper. Mr. Dawley stated it is common to refer to a trail as multi-purpose for bikes and pedestrians. He added concrete is a better bet when there are grading issues and ADA compliance requirements.

Chair Barton stated trail connections are a big part of the Comprehensive Plan, connecting areas within the City. She stressed the importance of not losing sight of other opportunities.

City Council Liaison Wong stated the City Council has had discussions regarding pedestrian access, which is a good direction. She added Ariel Street would be a good place for pedestrian accessibility. Mr. Dawley stated he is unsure whether the City of Maplewood has plans for a sidewalk on Ariel Street. He agreed to look into it. He added he does not believe there is a reference to a trail or sidewalk on Ariel Street in the Comprehensive Plan. He noted, as with any trail project, there can be trade-offs including loss of trees.

Chair Barton stated there might be space for a shoulder. Mr. Dawley agreed, adding there is width there, and striping is reasonable and cost effective.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated that seemed logical.

Chair Barton stated the Comprehensive Plan was not clear but there was the intent to create connections.

Mr. Dawley stated the Comprehensive Plan contains a trails and sidewalks map, and there is a reference to the Living Streets Plan as well.

Commissioner Brenna stated some residents do not like having a sidewalk added in front of their house. Mr. Dawley agreed, adding property owners are required by North St. Paul City Ordinance to remove snow from sidewalk segments in their right of way. He stated there was much discussion when a sidewalk was added to the east side of Lake Boulevard, and Public Works does snow removal at that location as it is viewed as a regional connection.

Chair Barton stressed the importance of sidewalks in neighborhoods, which is related to the long-term view of what the City wants to provide for its residents.

Commissioner Gelbmann asked whether the water tower will be replaced, or whether there will be an additional water tower constructed. Mr. Dawley stated additional water storage has been a planned improvement for many years, and an engineering consultant completed a tower sizing analysis in 2020. It was recommended that a new tower would be built with size and capacity to replace the existing water tower, which would remain online until the new water tower is fully operational. He added nothing has been budgeted or authorized, and this would be a very

expensive improvement and it is not an immediate need as the City's wells are operating successfully and meeting demand. He noted it will be more cost effective to upgrade the entire system than to split the city into two water zones.

Mr. Dawley stated the more pressing issue is that there are areas of the City with water main pipes that are over 80 years old, which is past the life span of cast iron pipes.

Motion to adopt agenda by Commissioner Gelbmann, and seconded by Commissioner Brenna, with all present voting aye (6-0) (vote at 1:12:14). Motion carried to forward Planning Commission findings to the City Council related to 2022 to 2031 Capital Improvement Plan in compliance with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Dawley reviewed proposed actions identified by the Planning Commission: review potential for multi-modal opportunities on Ariel Street; and continue to review trail improvement opportunities as they arise.

Mr. Dawley stated Ramsey County has cooperative project opportunities, which may include potential sidewalks on County roads. He added jurisdictions will be competing for regional funding for infrastructure projects, including the Highway 36/Highway 120 interchange, which has an estimated cost of \$50 million.

Mr. Zweber stated he and Ms. Ritchie did not believe there was a vote on the motion.

All presented voted aye (6-0). 1:20:18, 2nd vote

B. Sign Code Update

WSB Planning Consultant Brandy Howe reviewed the Sign Code update, which began in August 2021. She added City Staff is requesting Planning Commission guidance with regard to project scope, the number of meetings, and amount of necessary research, to provide an amended Sign Code.

Ms. Howe reviewed the overall project goal of revising City Code to provide a simplified, clarified Sign Code that is legally defensible. She reviewed during and draft purpose statements, with an emphasis on community safety and business environment, as well as what the City wants to enforce in the Sign Ordinance.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated, under Item 4, "provide fair and consistent enforcement of regulations", is a good addition. He added one of the most difficult aspects of the Sign Ordinance is having people understand what it means, what is being regulated, and why. He added the Ordinance is superseded by State law, which makes it confusing. He noted there are illumination considerations.

Chair Barton stressed the importance of keeping it simple and meaningful when dealing with issues of signage and visual distraction. She added the Sign Code should explain what and why the City is regulating, with regard to location, type of sign, and appearance.

Commissioner Wise stated the most important goal of the Sign Code is to ensure that everyone follows the same rules, which increases clarity.

Commissioner Brenna stated he appreciates the references to constitutional guarantees with regard to freedom of speech.

Ms. Howe stated the Mixed-Use Regulations is an attempt to simplify the rules, but actually makes them more complicated and inconsistent. She added City Staff can evaluate the rules of the chart and make potential changes.

Chair Barton asked whether “pylon” is defined. Ms. Howe stated there is a definition for “freestanding signs”. She added that can be clarified.

Chair Barton stated there are some basic definitions that are not clearly defined. Mr. Zweber stated City Staff can take a look at that as city part of the overall Ordinance review. He added another point for review is the required 10-foot setback for all signs, which is not logical in the downtown area. He noted the City is receiving more requests for digital signs. He noted a 25-foot free-standing digital sign is very different from a 10-foot monument sign.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated there are different requirements for different building sizes. He added this could be simplified by requiring 10% or 100 square feet of wall area, whichever is less, consistently for all building sizes. He added at least one of the criteria can be eliminated.

Chair Barton asked whether institutional uses are the only ones that can have a monument sign, as listed in the MU-1 district requirements. Mr. Zweber stated City Staff can review that definition. He added the Sign Code could be simplified so that applicants can decide what they want to use their allowance on, or try to find nuances and appropriate sign size based on location.

Mr. Zweber stated he would recommend that different sized lots are allowed to have different size signs. He added, in the current Code, the maximum sign height is 6 feet, regardless of use. He noted institutional use would be subject to the regulations of the landscape Ordinance, but residential districts would not be subject to the same regulations.

Chair Barton stated all that is allowed in R-1 for single family homes is 2 square feet of sign. Mr. Zweber stated the requirements can be simple, but may be troublesome for some types of signs, which could cause unintended consequences. He noted the sign Code should be designed to discourage rather than encourage monument signs.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated he likes the idea of tying sign size to property or building size or height. He added property owners can accomplish their goals without overregulation by the City. He asked about enforcement.

Chair Barton stated illumination should be addressed, especially for the new restaurants because businesses want that. She stressed the importance of differentiating between types of signs in residential areas and business areas. She noted temporary signage should be defined, including banners, balloons and decorative signs.

Mr. Zweber stated temporary signs should only be reviewed for size, length of time and how many.

Mr. Zweber stated there is a definition of a wall mural in the City Code. He added there is the opportunity to have a place to start, but murals should not be regulated as signs and should be non-commercial in nature. He noted they can be exempt from the Sign Code.

Ms. Howe stated murals are already listed as exempt in City Code, along with statues and other works of art.

Commissioner Wise asked whether the charts could include visual elements and images of sign types.

Mr. Zweber stated many communities tie their sign code into design districts. He added, in North St. Paul, it will be important to determine what types of signs are appropriate in the downtown area.

Mr. Zweber stated some images can be added but not so many that they regulate design standards. He added text and images can be tied together, and all elements in place before a recommendation to the City Council.

Mr. Zweber stated education about the Sign Code can be done through the public hearing process, soliciting input from residents and businesses, or doing simple handouts that can convey the intention of the Sign Code. He stressed the importance of including business owners who are not developers.

Commissioner Gelbmann stated that he thinks we are going to have a real hard time engaging people in it, unless they have an investment in it.

Mr. Zweber stated the Planning Commission can get by without we can get to that without it. He added he remembers former City Planner Erin Perdu prepared exhibits related to the Comprehensive Plan process, and the same could be done for the Sign Code.

Commissioner Monge asked whether there is urgency to get the Sign Code complete due to new development in the downtown area. Mr. Zweber stated the City Code is still in place, although there are some inconsistencies. He added a text amendment can be added to address this issue if necessary.

Commissioner Wise asked if the EDA is the initial point of contact? He stated they are much more connected with the owners than the planning commission.

Elaine Barton stated there is also the North St Paul Business Association as well.

Mr. Zweber stated the full scope of the Redevelopment Master Plan revision has not yet been determined. He added there may be opportunities to combine public engagement and education with the Sign Code. He noted the Task Force can reach out to the Business Association.

Commissioner Monge stated the fact that we've never had that many people living downtown.

Mr. Zweber stated he and Ms. Howe will bring back a summary of what has been discussed today and methods for addressing these issues. He added a proposed meeting schedule can be drafted after it is determined whether public engagement would be appropriate.

Chair Barton the issue is we have an ordinance, but whether we could enforce it or not. There is merit in going forward, and it is very out of date.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

-None.

IX. REPORTS FROM STAFF

Ms. Ritchie stated the City's wayfinding plan is long overdue for a review and potential adoption by the City Council. She added the plan would align with the new Ordinances that have been discussed. She noted the Parks & Recreation Commission wants to ensure that signage in the City's parks matches the plan.

Ms. Ritchie stated Anchor Storage has submitted a permit application for additional signage on one side of the building.

Mr. Zweber stated Schifsky's has not yet applied for permits to install the silos on their property.

Mr. Zweber stated North High School's renovation project has not started, as an amended set of plans is required for the building permit.

X. REPORTS FROM COUNCIL LIAISON

City Council Liaison Wong stated the City Council approved the North High School renovations request. She added she has received comments and concerns from residents regarding traffic issues near Richardson School. She noted she saw that a crossing guard was added.

City Council Liaison Wong stated the newly formed Arts & Culture Commission is interested in meeting with the Planning Commission as well as the City's other commissions to review potential areas for collaboration.

City Council Liaison Wong stated the City has two new restaurants: Brother's Bistro, and Mac's, which has not yet opened. She added there is also a new tattoo shop opening soon. She noted Booya is this weekend.

XI. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Gelbmann stated the Silver Lake Improvement Association has been undergoing mitigation efforts related to purple loose strife, an invasive plant species that populates quickly. He added the Association has organized treatment of the plants on sites that are located on public property.

Chair Barton stated the first Redevelopment Master Plan review meeting is scheduled for October 25, 2021.

Chair Barton stated the Joint EDA/Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for October 21, 2021.

Ms. Ritchie asked whether the parking study should be on the Joint Meeting agenda. Chair Barton stated that issue will be reviewed by the Task Force, along with the Sign Code. Mr. Zweber agreed.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, motion to adjourn by Commissioner Gelbmann, and seconded by Commissioner Monge, with all present voting aye (6-0). Motion carried to adjourn the meeting at 9:24 p.m.

The next regularly scheduled Planning Commission Meeting is Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

Members, please notify any planned absences to: Lisa Ritchie
Planning Commission Secretary
lisa.ritchie@northstpaul.org
651-747-2400