

City of North Saint Paul
March 14, 2024
Approved City Council Special Workshop Meeting Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Monge called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Council Member Schweer
Council Member Nordby
Council Member Cole
Council Member Wong
Mayor Monge

Staff: City Manager Brian Frandle, Assistant to the City Manager Jennie Kloos, Finance
Director Dan Winek, Public Works Director Ron Ritchie, Public Works
Superintendent Randy Miller, Communications Kari Erpenbach

III. ADOPT AGENDA

On motion by Council Member Wong, seconded by Council Member Schweer, with all present voting aye (5-0), motion carried to approve the agenda as submitted.

IV. TOPICS

A. Community Center Discussion

Jonathan Loose, Wold Architects and Engineers, discussed and explained where the community center process currently stands and potential options moving forward. He stated the first step was understanding the condition of facility and the second was the potential purpose of the facility. A facility assessment was completed along with an approximate current price adjustment for inflation of approximately 6-8% according to the Minnesota projected data for construction projects. This assessment concluded that life safety of the facility was deemed the highest priority.

Mr. Loose explained the definition of deferred maintenance and the reprioritization of certain renovations and building projects. He also discussed the various ways they have engaged the community, gathered support, and created partnerships.

Mr. Loose stated this process started with a core planning group to establish three guiding principles. Those principles are as follows:

- True cost of maintaining the community center must match or exceed the community's interest and be justifiable to the City's residents
- Facility should promote the potential Parks and Recreation Department and become an asset they could manage and operate

- Project should build on the momentum of the resident's engagement sessions to create a relevant and usable space

Mr. Loose stated the overall cost of the entire project including contingency plans would total approximately \$6.3 million dollars. He provided information on investment into this facility, stating the objective of the facility condition index is to guide the cost of repairs versus the cost to rebuild the building. He stated the community center is at an index of approximately 45%, which means it is a building that people would want to invest in. He also noted a budget analysis has not been completed yet.

Mr. Loose noted he met with a variety of groups and summarized the community outreach notes and found 80% of the business entities had support for some component of this building. These meetings also provided a summary of the needs of the community which included a gym, walking track, and various-sized community meeting spaces.

Council Member Schweer inquired about resident attendance during the businesses outreach meetings. Mr. Loose stated yes, there were community meetings where residents spoke.

City Manager Brian Frandle stated the public meeting had approximately 30-35 people in attendance but that about half of those were children.

Council Member Cole noted the discussion surrounding the community center has focused solely on the financial aspect.

Mr. Loose stated there was strong support for the continued use of the library. Mr. Frandle added he has met with the library community and they desire to continue the partnership going forward.

Mr. Frandle noted the addition of the library was paid for by them and the contract stated a payment of \$1.00 for 20 years. There is some debate about the contract start date.

Council Member Schweer suggested a chronological timeline of how the City landed in the current position. Mr. Frandle stated he will provide that information to the City Council.

Mr. Frandle provided a very brief overview of the past 20 years providing information on past tenants as well as financial difficulties that led up to the closing of the community center 12 years ago.

Council Member Cole suggested staff provide all City Council Members with the same updated information. He also noted the building had two previous offers, both of which were turned down by previous City Councils.

Council Member Wong stated the chronological explanation would be beneficial and would allow Council Members to make informed decisions once all the information has been presented.

Council Member Wong stated the information the City Council had tonight provided the big picture but suggested another opportunity to revisit this item to discuss and review the financial aspects of this project. She also suggested looking at potential revenue coming in as well as out going expenses and how that could affect the total price.

It was noted that the Legislature would provide North St. Paul with \$5.35 million dollars from the state and federal government. Mayor Monge expressed his concern regarding the financial aspect and how it may affect the financial feasibility of this project with changing demographics.

Council Member Schweer expressed her concern regarding potential revenue from rentals but cautioned against putting the money back on taxpayers and the inaccessibility for resident use.

The City Council also discussed the grant timeline and requirements. It was noted the DEED grant stated the money has to be used within five years and that most proposals have already been sent in with a plan and goal in place in order to ensure a proper process.

The City Council also discussed the necessity of moving forward on this grant in order to be able to use the money efficiently and effectively. Mr. Frandle noted the grant requirements are a very lengthy process and recommended the decision be made soon.

Council Member Cole expressed his concern regarding decisions based on financial data only and its impact from this project. He suggested the City Council look at all aspects including revenue sources and stated this discussion requires multiple meetings.

Mayor Monge stated interested parties have toured the facility but noted the most common concerns from parties were the parking limitations and little to no green space.

Council Member Nordby suggested opening up the meeting for public comment.

Kari Blees referenced the details surrounding the 80% of the 22 identified business entities. She noted 14 were not for profit and recommended more extensive outreach meetings to include the large businesses in North St. Paul.

Tom Armitage, representing the non-profit Ashand Productions, stated they are looking for a theater to bring an art and youth focus to the City and would pay rent. He commented on his desire to rent the facility long term.

Jerry Lind expressed his opposition to this project, stating it is too expensive and the commitment is too long.

Elaine Barton encouraged a documented timeline of this facility in order to make an informed decisions.

Cameron Muhic suggested City Council think about what the community center can bring to the community, potential impact over the loss of the library, and other options to reduce operating costs.

George Sin expressed his concern regarding the Franklin Center parking lot and opposition to this project.

John Schmahl discussed the lack of parking for any potential group coming in to use the community center.

Mr. Frandle noted he will send the requested information to the City Council and schedule another workshop to discuss this further at the next City Council meeting.

Council Member Cole referenced an article about community centers around the Metro and the country, indicating they are facing the same issues. He thanked Mr. Loose as well as those who attended and spoke.

V. ADJOURNMENT

On motion by Council Member Cole, seconded by Council Member Wong, with all present voting aye (5-0), meeting is adjourned at 5:29 p.m.

/s/ John Monge, Mayor

Attest:

/s/ Brian Frandle, City Manager / Clerk