

Date of Meeting: June 12, 2025, at 5:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

Members Present: Chad Henke, Lou Larson, Michael Martens, Tom Neal, Sarah Watson

Also Present: Mayor Diny, Eric Lindman, Allen Wesolowski, TJ Niksich, Dustin Kraege, Andrew Lynch, John Kahon, Gary Gisselman, Lori Wunsch, Stephanie Christensen - EMCS

In compliance with Chapter 19, Wisconsin Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted and received by the *Wausau Daily Herald* in the proper manner.

Noting the presence of a quorum, at approximately 5:15 p.m. Chair Henke called the meeting to order.

Approval of minutes of the May 8, 2025 meeting

Neal moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Larson seconded and the motion passed 5-0.

Discussion and possible action on preferred design alternative for STH 52 (East Wausau Avenue) from 6th Street to 18th Street

STH 52 from 6th Street to 18th Street is scheduled for reconstruction in 2029. It is a connecting highway, so WisDOT is taking the lead on this project. It is their road to rebuild, and they are heading the design effort. WisDOT has hired EMCS for design. The next step is to recommend a preferred alternative to the DOT as to how the City would like the road rebuilt although ultimately it is the DOT's decision.

Stephanie Christensen, EMCS, was hired by the DOT to design and help implement a biddable package for STH 52, which is planned for reconstruction 2029. The public information meeting handout was included in the packet and has a lot of background. The existing pavement has met its end of service life and there are other infrastructure needs, such as city utilities, curb ramp issues, drainage issues, and poor signals at North 6th Street. In addition to the infrastructure needs, there is a pattern of rear end crashes between 6th Street and 13th Street. Typically, in scoping a project, a crash review is done. This project went to scoping a couple of years ago. At that point they looked at the 5-year crash pattern. Between 2017 and 2021 there were 41 crashes with about half of them involving rear end collisions. About 37% were angle collisions at both driveways and intersections. These were particularly from 6th Street to 13th Street where there are no turn lanes. This section of roadway is posted at 25 MPH then it increases to 35 MPH east of 13th Street. School age traffic was a contributing factor to crashes as about 40% were under 25 years old. Most crashes occurred during the am and pm hours when school is beginning and ending. In looking at the data that continues to come through, they are seeing similar types of crash patterns. In the scoping of this project, the project did qualify for funding for safety improvements between 6th Street and 13th Street.

A public information meeting was held on May 14th. The comment period was held until May 28th, but they will continue to accept and address comments throughout the life of the project. A summary of the comments received prior to June 2nd was included in the packet. There have been additional comments since then. Improvements along the project other than pavement replacement include drainage improvements, bringing curb ramps up to ADA compliance, and possibly adding sidewalk on the north side from 13th Street to 18th Street for continuity and pedestrian circulation, replacing the signals at 6th Street, and look at improving that intersection for pedestrians. Engineering staff is evaluating the full scope of sewer and water improvements. The project would evaluate street lighting, which is subject to City approval. To make those improvements, there are some right-of-way and easements required. This is an MPO bike route, so they want to make sure that bike lane accommodations are included in whatever typical section is selected. Part of the process is also evaluating potential typical sections that would address the crashes.

Alternative A is a safety improvement alternative. It includes a center two-way left turn lane throughout the project. Alternative A1 has 12' travel lanes with a 13' median. Alternative A2 is a minimal approach with 11' travel lanes and 12' center turn lane, which would help reduce impacts. Slightly narrowing the travel lanes has been found to help calm traffic.

Alternative B would maintain a typical section similar to today. It is 36' face to face with sidewalk and terraces. Alternative B1 is similar to today. Alternative B2 is where 10th Street to the east shifts the center line about 6' to the north to address steep driveways. There is a grade differential from the south side to the north side. This alternative tries to balance the left and right side of the roadway.

An Alternative C could come out of public input and discussion. It could include a two-way left turn lane for part of the project. It could be the current typical but with turn lanes at select locations.

Alternative D is a direct replacement and would match grade. This would be a situation where you would not be fixing geometrical issues, but it fixes the pavement.

Alternative A is the primary alternative that addresses crashes. Alternatives B and D do not address crashes. The public information meeting included discussion of the alternatives and impacts. An alternative table of impacts was laid out. There is a slight variation for the amount of right-of-way needed.

This is a fairly vegetated corridor. There are a lot of tree root systems buckling sidewalks. About half of the trees are ash trees. Many other trees are in poor condition. Because of the depth of excavation for the pavement structure it will have similar impacts across all alternatives to tree root systems. With the various alternatives they tried to show a 3' terrace or 5' where they could, with the idea of replanting trees under a future City project or there could be community sensitive funding requested by the City.

Written comments were received from approximately 12 people. Some of the comments supported a two-way left turn lane. Some questioned the need for a center turn lane. There were comments requesting the City evaluate speed reduction. From 6th Street to 13th Street it is 25 MPH. It is 35 MPH from 13th Street to 18th Street, which is not an area where a lot of crashes occur. Some questioned why the center turn lane was proposed all the way to 18th Street. If a center turn lane was carried to 13th there would be about a 1000' gap where you would go back to an undivided section and then at 18th you would come back to a divided section. The center lane was proposed for the entire length for continuity purposes and because property owners who live or work in that section reported there have been recent crashes or near misses.

Wesolowski's staff report recommends Alternative A2 based on the safety aspect and it reduces the footprint. It is an attempt at traffic calming and reduces real estate impacts. He recommends a 5' boulevard for replanting trees and green space.

Henke noted the committee received an email with public input.

Larson questioned how much more property on each side would be given up to accommodate A2. Wesolowski said A2 has less impacts than A1. Christensen characterizes it as a 1' or less, but it depends on where it is. East of 13th Street there is an existing 66' right-of-way and west of 13th Street there is 60'. In some cases it is zero and some cases it is 1'.

Henke said this is a big project and a lot of information. He asked if a decision was needed tonight. Wesolowski explained the project is in the middle of design. 60% plans are due at the end of the year. Staff would like a recommendation to move forward. Christensen said part of the issue is final plans are due May 2028. We typically have to back that off about 2 years to acquire real estate. That takes us to May 2026. Christensen was targeting to get an environmental document early next year. Some of the steps to get the environmental document include refining the preferred alternative and running it through 30% plan review by the DOT and City. They would also go back to the public and share the refined design.

Martens asked if street lighting and tree impacts should be discussed before making a decision. Christensen stated lighting and sidewalk are independent of which alternative is selected.

Lynch feels there would be viable input if the Bike and Ped Committee could have a chance to look at the plan at their June meeting. Henke said this committee could still make a decision with this going to Bike and Ped before it goes to the full Council.

Larson moved to approve Alternative A2. Seconded by Watson.

Neal asked why the turn lane has to be 1' wider than the travel lane and if the bike lane could 3.5' instead of 4'. If both were done it would help us get the most out of the terraces. Christensen explained it is a geometric standard. Every piece of the typical section has a minimum. For this particular highway, travel lanes can be a minimum of 11' or the typical desirable is 12'. The center turn lane range is a 12' minimum and a 14' desirable. Bike accommodations are 3' or 2'. The desirable for bike lanes is 5' to 6', but it can qualify as a bike lane at 4'. This is an MPO bike route. We should not go less than 4' because then we cannot call it a bike lane.

Martens is leaning towards A2. He knows about the congestion during school hours and when there are events at the schools. He can see the benefit of the turn lane. He likes the idea of narrow lanes for traffic calming. He has read a lot about street bloat in design of roadways. He would like to keep towards the minimum. He has done a lot of cycling on roadways. With a 4' bike lane motorists will veer towards the turn lane and overtake a bicyclist. It is an element of safety even though it is the bare minimum for a bike lane.

Henke is happy to see improvements at 6th Street. He also likes to see the 3' curb area to help with bike travel. He noted this will go to Council in July and Bike and Ped in June.

There being a motion and a second, motion to approve Alternative A2 passed 5-0.

Wesolowski indicated there is some existing lighting at the intersections. If we want continuous lighting throughout, it would be the typical trombone arms and the DOT would participate 50-50 with the City's cost being \$357,500. This is not in the current State/Municipal Agreement. Decorative lighting or anything beyond would be the City's responsibility.

There is no sidewalk on the north side of the road from 13th Street to 18th Street. If we want to add sidewalk to make it a continuous sidewalk to 18th Street, the State would pick up 80%. The City's estimated cost would be \$19,500.

Martens questioned the advantage of having extra lighting. Wesolowski said this would be a continuous lighting system that provides the same amount of lighting the entire length. One would not be going from a lighter area to a darker area. It is a safety advantage. Martens asked about impacts to homeowners. Wesolowski explained the lighting is designed to push light onto the roadway.

Watson asked what the proposed lighting would be similar to and Wesolowski responded Sherman Street. Watson questioned the 50-50 cost. Wesolowski explained the total lighting cost is \$750,000, with the City's cost at \$357,500. Watson said this area leads to schools and noted students walking. Wesolowski said that currently there is sidewalk on the south side and kids have to cross the street. Henke asked if extending the sidewalk was discussed in the Safe Route to School Plan and if not, he is sure they would recommend it.

Larson has the same concern of Martens. Some neighbors do not like light shining in their house. When looking at the cost for this, it will add to City debt. He thinks the safety features with sidewalk and lighting will outweigh costs.

Henke asked if this is budgeted for on the 5-year plan. Wesolowski said all costs would be included in the 2029 budget request.

The sidewalk and lighting options will be brought back to committee for further consideration. Neal requested a look at traffic counts during dark hours.

Discussion on street reconstruction tree preservation

Henke noted that the next two items are just discussion items. If changes are wanted to the policies, he encouraged the people driving these discussions to make changes and bring the policies back to be voted on.

Niksich explained that each year we have street reconstruction projects and with that some tree removal is required due to the nature and scope of the project. Once projects are passed through the budget process staff starts the design process. The roadway width is determined. Our ordinance for our typical projects is 33' to 37' to the back of curb. When determining what width to go with, we look at the existing street width, is it handling traffic, what the average daily traffic is, is it a bus or truck route, the proximity to schools, parking restrictions, pedestrian access and bike lanes. The street is chosen for reconstruction not only because the roadway is in poor condition but also the utilities are old and failing. Most projects include replacement of water, sewer and storm sewer. Sanitary sewer and storm sewer have to have 8' of separation from the water main. Water main is typically 8' deep. Sanitary sewer can range from 8' to 12' with some at 20', which requires larger excavation. During street reconstruction, sidewalks, drive approaches, service walks, and water and sewer services are replaced. With a typical 37' street we typically have a 4' boulevard between the sidewalk and back of curb. With a 33' roadway, we usually have a 6' to 7' boulevard. When you factor in narrow lot widths, driveway widths, and excavations for services, there is not a lot of area left unscathed in the boulevard. This is why we end up losing a majority of the trees. When we finish design, we hand it off to the City Forester, who looks at the species, condition of the existing tree and the condition once excavated is done around the tree. He determines which trees should be removed.

Kahon's first step is to look at the quality of the tree. Anything that is in fair to poor condition gets looked at for removal. Ash trees are removed. Then the excavation process is looked at. These are big projects with extensive excavation. He referred to the 2nd Street project with deep excavations of 20' plus. If you try to leave a larger tree standing there, it physically will not stand. He looks at the structural integrity of the tree. It is different by species, but a rough number is 3 times the diameter is the structural stability of the tree. A 20" tree needs 60" for structural stability. The area between the curb and the tree is smaller and much more important for a tree to retain stability. If you remove 1', it is a huge issue for tree stability and trees falling. If we are cutting on 2, 3, 4 sides of the tree, we are isolating the tree and creating stability issues. The smaller tree is more likely to survive construction and keep stability.

Neal said part of the selection process for buying his house was how beautiful the neighborhood was. It is a tunnel of trees, picturesque, and a huge asset to quality of life. Fulton Street from 1st to 7th has basically been denuded of trees. The 600 block has 1 tree left and 18 were taken. The next two blocks all the trees are gone. The people that rent or bought houses on those blocks could have gone through a selection process and liked the character. They woke up one morning and the character was gone. He feels this is unacceptable. Several years ago, the Milwaukee tree czar was here talking about their efforts to conserve trees during the construction process. We had extensive discussions on the fiscal value of trees, the quality of life, the real estate value of trees, shade, wildlife. It would destroy him if he woke up to the 900 block of Hamilton cut down. He doesn't know if we are looking at every possible avenue to save trees like the tree czar in Milwaukee does. He would like to know if that program is still alive and have that person come back. We did develop some standards/recommendations at that time for ongoing projects. He is not sure if that is being used. In one block on Fulton there were 19 trees and now there is 1. It would be nice if there were at least 7 instead of only 1. We have to look at extraordinary measures and see what we can do as work arounds. He wants to start seeing this mindset going forward. He does not lend a lot of credence to the engineering mind which sees a straight line and a quick way to get there. He hopes we are starting a discussion and process that stops the normal way we are doing things. He would like this committee and/or Park and Rec part of the discussion on every road project in terms of the number of trees and the effort to conserve. He doubts that the 18 trees on Fulton were all ash or diseased. He does not want to see this happening in the background.

Kahon could not agree more. His job is to take care of the trees and maintain as many as we can. On Eau Claire Boulevard a lot of trees were left with the hope of retaining the canopy.

Martens recalled about 10 to 12 years ago when Prospect from Townline to Forest was done. The extent of tree removal for that project was not the same as what we are seeing now. Today there is a nice mix of younger trees and mature trees along Prospect. For that to happen, there was a conscious effort to leave the larger trees during the reconstruction project. Many moderately-sized trees were left behind and are still thriving 10 years later. Looking back at projects like that and the strategy used to address trees might help save trees moving forward.

Gary Gisselman, 319 Park Ave and Alder for District 5, said several years ago there was a City of Wausau tree planting and preservation specification manual. He wants to emphasize that we need to have a very conscience effort to preserve trees. Fulton Street was clear cut and so was Grant Street the year before. It is not a matter of saving one or two trees, it is a matter of clear cutting entire blocks. If we want to preserve the sense of what Wausau is, we have to make an effort to come up with plans to preserve trees. He hopes that this committee, as well as Park and Rec, look at this again.

Lindman said Engineering does not cut trees for convenience. He does not want the thought out there that we do it because it is easier. We look at each tree and at each block. He also feels it is important to keep a canopy where we can. There will be some significant considerations that will have to be made, such as narrowing streets and widening boulevards. Those are decisions this committee and Council will have to make even if there is pushback from the community because they want on-street parking and other things. We will also have to look at the operation and maintenance of the streets.

Neal wants the committees and Council part of the process of street reconstruction. He does not want to be surprised, and he does not want constituents asking what has happened to their neighborhood. He wants to know we have done everything we can. He wants to work towards getting that process in place.

Henke asked if there is a document showing the step-by-step process of street reconstruction projects. Wesolowski can lay this out. The difficult part is the budget is approved in November, and we bid out projects in January. We could bring some preliminary plans forward with the trees we think need to be removed, but it is a relatively tight time frame. We have tried to save trees in the past only to have some blown down, which creates a hazard. What we want to avoid is knowing the root structure of a tree will be compromised, but this committee wants to save the tree. Then a year later the tree blows down on someone's car or house. We are then in a situation where someone could point fingers. There are things we can do but the road and laterals need to be there.

Neal mentioned a tree at 8th and Hamilton where several years ago sidewalk was being replaced. The area was excavated, and he noticed the sizeable roots sawed to create a flat area for the cement. He thought that the tree would not stand, and it did blow over into the street. He noted a house on McIndoe off of 10th Street where the sidewalk circumvented trees rather than sacrificing the tree. The tree is gone now but it didn't fall over. Perhaps we could have done the same thing for the tree at 8th and Hamilton. The tree czar does things that are not in the norm for most construction projects and Neal would really like to have him come back and talk again. That tree needs respect, the neighborhood needs respect, and the aesthetics of the City needs respect. We need to stop thinking everything needs to be in a straight line.

Wesolowski indicated that a lot of sidewalk replacement is done because of tree roots. We have been working on how the contractor cuts those roots. We have ramped some sidewalks to get over roots. Kahon added that we have narrowed sidewalk in some places. Some species can handle root cutting better than others. We also look at placement. In the past, trees were measured and put in every 30 feet/40 feet. It did not matter if utilities, sidewalk, or driveways were there. In some cases, there are trees in spots where they should not have been planted. Henke suggested Neal work with Engineering to come up with a proposal or policy and find a month to squeeze in street projects at a Park and Rec meeting.

At this time a resident asked to speak about East Wausau Avenue. Henke noted that item was voted on but will go to Bike and Ped on June 23rd at 5:00 pm and then to full Council.

Discussion on City Street Light Policy

The current policy was included in the packet. Street lighting in subdivisions is handled in the Development Agreement. Consideration of adding street lights is given during design of reconstruction projects. A request received for a light on an existing road is forwarded to Inspections. The criteria is reviewed to see if a light is warranted. Henke asked if 500' between lights is the standard minimum and Wesolowski confirmed. Henke asked about the process to add a light mid-block on a street with a longer block. Inspections would review the

request and if it met the criteria in the policy, they would make a request to WPS.

Larson feels this is one thing where we are damned if we do and damned if we don't. Some people want extra lighting and others do not want light shining in their house. Henke had two comments come forward about this. He wanted to get it out in public so everyone knows the process. If changes are suggested, we can bring the policy back.

Martens would like to absorb the information and bring it back. This is something over the last few years he has come to value. Recently we have had some nice astronomical events where you have to get several miles out of town to get a dark enough sky to see. It does not necessarily need to be that way. In a City the size of Wausau, it will be a big lift to change how we look at lighting and address it in a way more conducive to allow you to see stars at night from your back yard. Larger communities have addressed this and have been successful. He spoke of the five lighting principles for responsible outdoor lighting: useful, targeted, low level, controlled, and warm colored. He would like to bring the policy back.

Neal mentioned the reconstruction of Washington Street. At the time a request was received for decorative street lighting. It was not part of the project budget. He was told the infrastructure would be put in to accommodate future lighting. He questioned what the policy says about the future addition of lighting where infrastructure has been installed.

Update on 2025 Street Reconstruction Projects

The downtown project of Washington Street, 3rd Street, and Jackson Street is going extremely well. The contractor is ahead of schedule. Washington Street from 1st Street to 3rd Street is open. Washington Street is paved from 3rd Street to 4th Street. They are proceeding to pour concrete south on 3rd Street, between Washington Street and Jackson Street.

Randolph and Cherry Street will be done in three phases. The first phase is Cherry Street from West Wausau north to Eldred. The underground utilities are done, and gravel is 80% down. Curb is expected to be poured next week. The underground crew has moved to the intersection of Merrill and Randolph, which is part of the second phase. They should be out of the intersection the middle of next week. They will be working west to east to 3rd Avenue. The deadline for this phase is based around school and has to be done by mid-August. Phase 3 is Cherry Street from Eldred to Randolph and Randolph from 3rd to Burek. When they finish the underground on Phase 2, they will move to Phase 3, which is expected shortly after the 4th of July. The project will be completed by mid-October.

Project B consists of 1st Street/River Drive, 2nd Street, and Fulton Street from 1st to 7th. 1st Street/River Drive is 100% completed and open to traffic. On Fulton Street the majority of work is between 1st and 3rd. 3rd Street is closed as underground work takes place in the intersection. The intersection will be open for the weekend. It should be paved by Friday next week. The underground crew will then work east from 3rd to 7th. The project is on schedule for completion in early October.

The multiuse trail on 72nd Avenue from Stewart to Sunnyvale Park will be completed by August 1st. South bound traffic on 72nd is detoured using Stewart and Packer Drive. This is due to work under the overpass to get retaining walls in. The detour should be lifted mid-week. Project completion is August 1st but Nicksich expects it open mid-July.

Larson mentioned a block of Hamilton Street that has been torn up by lead line replacement. To lay a patch on this is a half measure. We have the equipment so he doesn't understand why we can't tear up the blacktop and lay new down. If he was a resident on that block, he would be furious. This is just the beginning of many streets that will need this. The only additional cost would be for the blacktop that we have the money for since we have \$250,000 surplus from snow removal. It is a laughable situation to dig up the street for lead laterals and make it worse than it was. He is wondering if there is action this committee needs to take. For next month, Henke requested to see a 5-year plan of streets that could be resurfaced.

Lindman said while it sounds simple, it is not and the reality is Council has not approved the money to do those things. We can do more in-house if Council is willing to allocate additional money in 2026 for asphalt overlay. We will bring back the streets we think we can do for the \$250,000. Doing 1 block at a time is not the best use of money. We can do a lot of streets as long as we have the money. We are trying to put the majority of money into lead service line replacement, so they are just patching the holes they are making. Wesolowski noted that money goes further on a street where the curb and gutter is in good shape and you can mill off an inch or two and overlay. A street like Hamilton you will be taking all the asphalt off and putting all the asphalt back. \$250,000 will only get you a couple of blocks in the whole city.

Discussion on truck route enforcement

Larson brought this forward because of complaints he has received. He would like to move this until next month so someone from the Police Department and from 3M are present to work on a solution.

Update on the proposed Fleet Maintenance Facility and possible location

While there is not a lot to update, staff is moving forward with all options on the table. We are continuing to look for other properties that may be available. Neal brought up the Cherry Street location, one location he did not support. He was not sure where the property was and thought it was elsewhere. He has since found out where it is and will rescind his opposition.

With no objections from committee, Henke allowed a resident to speak regarding East Wausau Avenue.

Gordon Clements lives on East Wausau Avenue around 13th Street. Since he lives there, he can see foot traffic. He does not believe there is enough foot traffic to warrant sidewalk from 13th to 18th from a volume perspective. The Wausau East kids do not walk; they either drive or ride the bus. If he sees a half dozen kids walking a year that is it, so one cannot make the case it is a school issue. If walking to Horace Mann they would come down 13th Street but there is no sidewalk on 13th. He does not see the value in adding sidewalk. Most of the crashes that happen on East Wausau Avenue happen up to 13th Street; that cannot be disputed. If you gobble up real estate from 13th to 18th for aesthetics, he does not know that has all the value people are putting on it. He referred to the email his son sent to committee. His son's position is if a turn lane is added it will increase speed. People are not going 25 MPH to 13th Street, and they are not going 35 MPH after 13th Street. There is no logic in putting in a turn lane which will enhance their ability to go faster. Living there is like living next to an airport. When cars take off at 13th Street it is like sitting under a runway. One cannot have a conversation until traffic is a block away. He read that the roadbed would go from 38' to 47' wide, which seems to be more real estate than what was talked about. If Alternative A2 goes from 38' to 47', the property assessment is not accurate. The plan he read said A1 and A2 do not coincide with the City's bike plan. It seems to him that someone is not talking to somebody about the City goals. He added that traffic and sound are issues.

Adjourn

Neal moved to adjourn the meeting. Watson seconded and the motion carried 5-0. Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:05 p.m.