

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS AND STREET MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: November 11, 2021, at 5:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

Members Present: Lisa Rasmussen, James Wadinski, Lou Larson, Debra Ryan, Tom Neal

Also Present: Eric Lindman, TJ Niksich, Cord Buckner, Tara Alfonso, Chad Abbiehl, Lori Wunsch

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 Rasmussen called the meeting to order.

Presentation and discussion of Director's Report

There were no questions on the Director's Report.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approve minutes of the October 14, 2021 meeting**
 - B. Action on Easement with Aspirus Buildings, Inc., for bike/pedestrian path at 905 North 2nd Street**
 - C. Action on Easement with Third Street Holdings, LLC for bike/pedestrian path at 151 McIndoe Street**
 - D. Action on Preliminary Resolution to vacate and discontinue the unpaved alley bounded by Bertha Street, Lake View Drive, Mount View Drive, and Elmwood Boulevard**
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Larson moved to approve the consent agenda items. Neal seconded and the motion carried 4-1 with Ryan the dissenting vote.

Discussion and possible action on petition for annexation – Grube (076-2907-284-0004, Town of Stettin)

The property owner is requesting annexation for water and sewer. Larson moved to approve. Ryan seconded and the motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Discussion and possible action on creating an Assessor's Plat for 901 Townline Road, 1309 Torney Avenue, 1315 Torney Avenue, and 1321 Torney Avenue

Lindman reminded the committee that Torney Avenue is scheduled for reconstruction in 2022 with Community Development Block Grant funds. The property lines in this block do not line up with how the land is being used. The City can create an Assessor's Plat to correct the lot lines.

Larson asked if this has been discussed with the property owners and if their tax base would go up or down. Lindman said the tax rate is based on square footage of the land. The property to the north would gain property. If Council approves moving forward, staff recommends completing this inhouse. Property owners will have the opportunity to have a say in it once the properties are staked. There would be a public hearing once it goes to the DOA. Residents would have 30 days to bring suit.

Larson is in favor of Torney Avenue getting fixed and if this is needs to be done for that, he would be in favor. Rasmussen noted that on the north side some of the property lines are through people's houses. It makes sense to fix and may solve headaches for people going forward.

Ryan said there might be a similar situation on the west side, near where she lives and worried about hardship on property owners for survey work. Lindman explained the City has the option to charge, but staff is recommending doing this survey inhouse at no cost to the homeowners. This would clean up the plat so property lines match the current use.

Larson moved to approve. Ryan seconded and the motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Discussion/review of parklets

Last spring the committee talked about issuing a permit to add parklets in the downtown along the River District corridor and agreed to come back to committee to review results. Communications have been received from neighboring businesses on 3rd Street.

Tyler Vogt stated things went fantastic with the parklet. He estimated between 3,000 and 3,400 people used it in an 18-week period. They were so busy he had 7 servers on for the first time in his history, had to add help in the kitchen resulting in another permanent job, and extra shifts were opened for bartenders. They had 48 shows of live music for 18 weeks. They had jazz shows on Sundays with local jazz teachers and students. Foot traffic was up nearly 2½ times on Sundays. He has no doubt there was more commerce and people in the area. On Friday night shows, people from the Elks Lodge danced on the sidewalk. He has read the letters from The Mint, Brushert's and Jane Janke and noted 18 people were using an area that 2 cars could fill. In the spirit of working together and being a good neighbor, he brought forward a couple of ideas to maintain the pros of having a parklet downtown.

Rasmussen mentioned a meeting that was held in October with stakeholders, leadership of the Festival of Arts, Lindman, herself and the Mayor. They talked about parklets, the downtown traffic flow in general, and how things can work together. If the right people talk and understand each other, there are good outcomes. Sometimes when people are upset about things it is because they haven't had a proactive dialogue. There was a pinch point between the Art Festival and some of the 3rd Street businesses when the streets closed for the Art Festival. Getting them all to talk was helpful and this situation could also be that way. There might be value in having Lindman and Opal-Wahoske get together with stakeholders. Feedback on the parklet was received from Jane Janke, Brushert's, The Mint and La Prima. All basically saying downtown parking is at a premium and anything occupying parking long term is a concern. However, when people come downtown to eat they also buy stuff, which helps the retailers.

Vogt stated that last year was a probation period to see if there was a demand. It resulted in a lot of entertainment and foot traffic. The quad area by the 400 Block was full every Friday night when he had entertainment. People brought food from other areas and enjoyed the atmosphere. He provided a picture of the street as designed, the street with the parklet, and an idea for next year. That idea being removing trees and a trash container. He could then use the performance stage 5 days a week and provide free music downtown. The companies complaining mostly about limited accessibility for patrons are The Mint and Brushert's. Parking could be shifted to their end of the block and install a curb ramp where there is already an accessibility lane. Rasmussen asked if the parklet would sit in the dashed accessibility area with people still entering and exiting the parklet on the sidewalk side. Vogt confirmed and thought this would be a nice compromise to move forward with all the things that were gained this year. In the spirit of being a good neighbor, he thought this might solve all problems. If the handicap spots were moved further north in front of the businesses asking for it, when the parklet is gone an extra parking spot would be reclaimed without any further investment.

Rasmussen feels we should have an interaction with stakeholders after the engineers have looked into Vogt's suggestion. The challenge would be parklet permits are available to everyone, approved case by case. If they gain favor, we may have more requests and will have to be mindful of placement. If too many modifications are made to curbs and ramps, we will have to be prepared to make similar modifications in other areas. We should first assess the value of the way we have it. There may be value in keeping as is rather than modifying curbs.

Neal hands it to Vogt for his thinking. Neal's first reaction was to be dismissive of the pushback. Vogt didn't take that route and got creative. Neal does not ever remember thinking he wouldn't come downtown again because he could not park. Anyone that makes a judgement like that because they cannot park immediately in front of where they want to go should not be given a lot of weight. He likes Vogt's future thinking. What transpired this season was an example of creating a sense of place and bringing life out to the street. Having a street scene and a vibe going on is important. We need to have flexibility and street life to attract people. We need to keep thinking along progressive lines and what's best for commerce and branding.

Rasmussen referred to the meeting with stakeholders regarding the Art Festival. There were similar complaints because downtown streets were closed for 3 days. We have 10,000 people a day wandering downtown that would not come otherwise. We need to look at the greater value. We also must weigh that this is available City wide. If we only consider a small amount of feedback, we might be shortsighted. Neal feels every case has its own logistics and should be looked at creatively. Discussion followed.

Larson is in full agreement with Alder Neal. He attended the concerts on the square. He is not going to stop coming downtown because he cannot get a parking space. He is in full agreement to give Lindman the go ahead to look forward and see how this can be improved. He added the need to be very careful not to create more of a problem by allowing too many parklets. Larson also feels closing the streets for Dining on the Street was a plus. People could walk around downtown and not worry about dodging traffic.

Ryan is a baby boomer and doesn't get downtown as often as she would like. She has a bum knee and tries to park close to where she's going. She understands The Mint probably has an older population that want to be able to park out front. She agrees that taking the tree down and using the bump out would be ideal. She realizes this is fighting two generations.

Vogt said if one is hoping for open parking spots when there is only 12 in the block, you are basically hoping there are less than 24 people in the area. Parking is a district-wide problem. He applauds the City for what it is doing. When he moved downtown 15 years ago to start a business, other people told him he'd fail due to lack of parking. His response was he wouldn't have to maintain a parking lot and there is plenty of parking. He understands both perspectives, which is why he tried to come up with a compromise. He doesn't want his neighbors feeling ill will towards him. There are multigenerational businesses that we need to respect, and he is trying to find a way to deal with everyone. Rasmussen admires that viewpoint. Some of the places that are opposed to this are also doing boom business during events. She feels we need to look at the greater value. We could agree by consensus to develop a plan for 2022 to consider in February.

When Wadinski came tonight he was worried about parking spaces, worried about the other businesses that didn't have the opportunity to use these facilities, worried about people who were disappointed with parking being reduced downtown, worried about the parklet taking the space of 3 parking spots. However, he is impressed with this business owner that wants to work with his neighbors and do good for the community. He suggested parklets do not take up more than 1 space if possible. Rasmussen said these do work in other cities. This is something new to Wausau and requires adjustments.

The committee agreed by consensus to direct staff to meet with the stakeholders and come up with a plan for next summer.

Discussion and possible action on 28th Avenue corridor, Pine Ridge Boulevard to West Wausau Avenue

Lindman explained that the County Infrastructure Committee recently indicated they no longer wish to pursue this corridor. Staff feels the corridor has merit. The steep hill is at 18% to 20% grade. The corridor carries traffic to the Village of Maine. The Village would also like to see the corridor kept. The original corridor was drawn for a 4-lane road. Traffic counts do not warrant a 4-lane road. Staff would like to go ahead with a three-way split to have an engineering firm scale back the corridor to a 2-lane road. Landowners who want to build or expand cannot get a building permit because the land is on the Official City Map. We still want to consider the corridor but scale it back to a 2-lane road, which would allow businesses to expand.

Wadinski asked if it would be a 2-lane road with bike and turning lanes. Lindman said there would be a cul-de-sac on the north end before the hill to eliminate the steep stretch. The 4-lane road was wide with a median. Traffic counts are around 3,000 and projected at 5,000 to 5,500 in 20 to 30 years. Counts of 14,000 a day are needed before a 4-lane road is considered.

Larson has found himself going around and avoiding the hill. He is sure a lot of people do the same because of the condition of the hill. He questioned if traffic flow would increase if the road was fixed. Lindman said a traffic engineer looked at that and didn't feel there would be a considerable increase. Initially it was designed for

a 4-lane road as there was potential for development of land to the north. Since the township became the Village of Maine, that potential no longer exists without access to water and sewer.

Rasmussen feels 2-lane infrastructure does tend to slow down traffic. Westwood Drive was overbuilt intentionally for development. Originally the plan was for the infrastructure to work together in case they ever had to shut down Highway 51.

Wadinski asked if this was a County road. Lindman confirmed it is a County road up to Stewart Avenue. Initially when the corridor was to go through it would have been County R. The County wants to do away with the entire corridor. City staff feels there is merit to keep a portion of the corridor in place. The County put in over \$1 million buying properties along the corridor. The City has deferred maintenance on 28th Avenue because of the County's intentions. From staff's perspective, it is a little disingenuous to have the County arbitrarily back out on something they committed to and would be a benefit to the City. The County Infrastructure Committee asked for Highway Commissioner Jim Griesbach to work with the City and there were discussions at the MPO. The Village of Maine and City staff feel the corridor is a good idea to keep but scaled down.

Rasmussen thinks we need to keep options open for future development and traffic movement. To abandon the idea completely rather than scale it down may be shortsighted of us. The land, except for the piece north of West Wausau Avenue, is in the City. She feels we should keep this on the Official City Map so we can plan for infrastructure. If it is removed from the Official City Map, building permits could be issued. She believes it is a good idea to narrow down the corridor and keep as an option.

Per Lindman, one of the reasons this came forward was the Achieve Center at Madonna Drive and 28th Ave applied for a permit to expand to the east. A permit was not issued as it was encroaching on the Official City Map area. Rasmussen asked if it would help them to amend the Official City Map by reducing the corridor. At this time Lindman does not know how the reduction would look; we would have an engineering firm determine that.

Wadinski is disappointed the County isn't considering something that benefits the 40,000 residents in the City, and thousands of others that may use the road to go to the hospital. It can be a main thoroughfare from the City to the Village of Maine. Any infrastructure built because of the road will not only benefit the City, but the County tax base as well. He is hoping the County reconsiders.

Rasmussen said a large portion of the wheel tax comes from City of Wausau residents. All residents pay wheel tax and not one dollar can be used to shine up City streets or even in town portion of County roads. She is also disappointed and thinks we need some of the corridor protected.

Ryan moved to direct staff to protect the corridor and work with the appropriate professionals to downsize the corridor. Seconded by Neal and the motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Adjourn

Larson moved to adjourn the meeting. Wadinski seconded and the motion carried unanimously 5-0. Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:05 p.m.