

CITY OF ANOKA
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 8, 2021

Call to Order: Chairperson Finn called the EDC meeting to order at 7:10 a.m. at Anoka City Hall, 2015 First Avenue North in the City of Anoka.

Roll Call: EDC Members present were: Mathew Finn, Jeff Lee, and Julie Smith. EDC members absent were: Quinn Garrick, Curt Rekstad, Allen Acklund, Brendon Eason, and Joe Riley. Staff present: Community Development Director Doug Borglund and City Planner Clark Palmer

Chairperson Finn stated that there is not a quorum present, so formal action will not be taken.

Approval of Minutes: This item delayed for lack of quorum.

OLD BUSINESS:

Downtown Outdoor Seating Update: Mr. Borglund stated that the spring/summer plan has been rolled out and provided an update. He stated that the City attempted to provide materials for the businesses and some businesses chose to make additional outdoor seating investments as well.

Chairperson Finn stated that if the City expects conformity in the future, he would encourage the City Council to communicate that with businesses to ensure investment is not spent on materials that will not be allowed to be used in the future.

Mr. Borglund explained that this temporary seating is COVID related, and the intent would be to return to the previously allowed outdoor seating in the future. He noted that perhaps some of the loan programs could be redirected to allow businesses to use that program to invest in outdoor seating. He noted that even if restrictions are lifted, the City is going to allow the outdoor seating currently in place to remain throughout the full season. He stated that staff has met with the bar and restaurant owners multiple times this year to continue these discussions and ensure everyone is on the same page. He stated that everyone understands that long-term the road will not be shut down in the current manner. He noted that they have had discussions on the long-term vision for the Jackson Street corridor to make it more pedestrian friendly and to better accommodate outdoor uses.

Chairperson Finn asked and received confirmation that the old Post Office building establishments would have the same opportunity for outdoor seating if desired.

Mr. Borglund confirmed those businesses would have an opportunity, but staff would need to review that with the businesses. He stated that Mr. Palmer has been having discussions with Mr. Abeler about outdoor seating at that location.

Commissioner Smith stated that it has been great for businesses to have an opportunity for outdoor seating.

Mr. Borglund commented that this has been a great test for businesses to experiment and determine whether it would make sense to invest in the outdoor seating patio in the future.

Commissioner Lee stated that he likes that there is a long-term vision for Jackson Street to make it more pedestrian friendly and change the scale to focus more on entertainment.

Mr. Borglund stated that Gary Serum put together a proposal for live outdoor music in downtown on Friday and Saturday nights starting this summer. He noted that staff will meet further with him before it goes to the City Council.

Chairperson Finn stated that it would be great to have that opportunity. He noted that if there is not agreement with both weekend nights, perhaps one weeknight could be added that would help to bring more people in.

Mr. Borglund noted that they currently have a summer concerts in the park on Tuesday nights and they will be moving the farmers market downtown near the grain bins this summer as well to increase activity.

Commissioner Smith asked if it would make sense to add food trucks for some of these events.

Mr. Borglund replied that there is a food truck event, but the City does not allow food trucks to openly come into the area because of the competition it creates for the brick and mortar establishments.

Mr. Palmer agreed that there are a lot of established restaurants in the area, and they would not want to create additional competition.

Mr. Borglund explained that food and beverages from local restaurants are allowed to be brought into the park for the summer concert series, so customers can get drinks and something to eat from a nearby business and bring that into the park.

NEW BUSINESS:

Discussion – East River Road Commercial Area: Mr. Borglund stated that the East River Road area is zoned neighborhood commercial.

Chairperson Finn asked if there is a fear of traffic flow if that area is more developed.

Mr. Borglund commented that it is a County collector road that is meant to service a higher level of traffic.

Commissioner Lee commented that there is not a large section of the roadway within Anoka and most of the traffic drops off before Anoka.

Mr. Borglund provided an overview of the corridor. He noted that as you move down the corridor there are issues with utilities and some commercial properties are still on septic.

Chairperson Finn asked if rezoning to light commercial for some properties along the corridor would create issues for the homes behind those parcels on Elm Street. He stated that if he lived in one of those homes, he would not be happy with that type of change.

Commissioner Lee commented that those parcels are already zoned for neighborhood commercial.

Mr. Borglund identified the border of the different zoning areas.

Chairperson Finn referenced the low-lying commercial lot and asked if raising that site would cause drainage problems for the adjacent residential homes.

Mr. Palmer replied that the area was previously zoned B-1 highway and was rezoned to neighborhood commercial in the early 2000's in order to have less conflict between the existing residential and potential commercial uses that could be developed. He stated that there are also performance and architectural standards in place to help mitigate any potential issues.

Mr. Borglund stated that there is a huge economic development across the border in Coon Rapids further down the corridor and perhaps there can be something done to spark adjacent redevelopment geared towards those office and/or medical uses.

Chairperson Finn suggested that perhaps review should be done as to what the Mayo Clinic did in Rochester in order to make that area more medical focused.

Mr. Borglund agreed that perhaps other day services could be developed related to medical services performed at the hospital, such as clinics or day surgery centers.

Commissioner Lee stated that for the whole section of East River Road, the biggest impact the City could have would be street and sidewalk improvements. He stated that when looking at West and East Main, the City did a great job of improving the road and sidewalks and with the light posts, which helped to transform the whole area. He stated that the zoning seems appropriate for the corridor, but the City could make a huge impact with the street and sidewalk in terms of streetscape and make it more like Main Street.

Mr. Borglund commented that East River Road is a County road and therefore the City would have to work with the County.

Commissioner Lee commented that Coon Rapids was able to do it. He stated that cleaning up that area would help to bring in development interest. He noted that it would be the

same with the section of 7th Avenue from East River Road to Main Street, or even Highway 10. He stated that the light posts with the banners would be a great addition as well. He recognized that there is a cost but stated that perhaps that could be phased over ten years. He stated that when you come down East River Road from Coon Rapids, it does not give a good impression.

Commissioner Smith agreed that would help to attract better businesses.

Mr. Borglund stated that the starting point would be to speak with the County and find out where East River Road is on its radar for improvement. He stated that the updates to Hwy 47 and Highway 10 projects will likely consume the next three years.

Commissioner Lee commented that improving the streetscape would be something that would really help that corridor. He commented that the segment of 7th Avenue from East River Road to Main Street, or even Highway 10, would similarly benefit from streetscape improvements as that is a heavily used area that does not provide a good impression.

Mr. Borglund provided details on possible redevelopment opportunity across from the new Kwik Trip on 7th Avenue. He explained that for the City to be involved in land acquisition and redevelopment is not cheap, noting that the investment in Highland Park is already at \$8,000,000. He recognized that there are underutilized parcels throughout that 7th Avenue area.

Commissioner Lee stated that he would prefer to focus on the areas where people are coming into Anoka and the impression that gives people.

Mr. Borglund noted that 7th Avenue is a County road as well, which would require the City to work with the County. He stated that there are improvements planned to 7th Avenue to the north in preparation for the Highway 10 project but was not aware of any plans for the southern segment.

Commissioner Lee commented that in terms of economic development, improving the streetscape would be the action the City could attempt to take to bring forward redevelopment.

Commissioner Smith agreed but believed that East River Road should be higher priority.

Commissioner Lee agreed that he would place East River Road above 7th Avenue.

Mr. Borglund summarized that the EDC would recommend that improvement be focused on streetscape along the East River Road corridor rather than suggesting a change of use. He stated that staff will gather additional history and information related to the County schedule for improvements, again noting that Highway 10 and Hwy 47 will be taking up the majority of the next few years. He recognized that this would be a longer-term goal/vision.

Chairperson Finn agreed that the least amount of investment the City could make to clean up the area would help to attract additional investment through development and redevelopment.

COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS:

Marketing and Communications Updates:

- Discover Anoka: No update.
- Chamber of Commerce: No update.
- ABLA: Mr. Borglund replied that he provided a development update, and the group conducted their typical business. He noted that ABLA is preparing for Riverfest but recognized that will look different with the increased outdoor seating in the downtown area.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Discuss May Meeting Agenda: Chairperson Finn stated that it could be great if there is an update on any of the matters discussed today and if not, perhaps a summary could be provided of the discussion for the members that were not present today. He stated that he would be curious to have an update on the driving range.

Staff Update: Mr. Borglund stated that staff will be speaking with the property owners, noting that there is one interested property owner. He stated that the Council supports moving forward in attempt to pursue a driving range.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned upon a motion by Commissioner Lee, a second by Commissioner Smith, and a unanimous vote of those present at 8:27 a.m.

Amanda Staple, *TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*