

**WORKSESSION OF THE ANOKA CITY COUNCIL
ANOKA CITY HALL
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
APRIL 25, 2022**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Wesp called the worksession meeting to order at 5:06 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Present at roll call: Mayor Pro Tem Wesp, Councilmembers Barnett, Skogquist, and Weaver.

Staff present: City Manager Greg Lee; Police Chief Eric Peterson; Police Chief Eric Peterson; Community Development Director Doug Borglund; Assistant City Engineer Ben Nelson; Public Services Administrator Lisa LaCasse; Public Services Director Mark Anderson; Streets Supervisor Jon Holmes; City Attorney Scott Baumgartner; Communications Manager Pam Bowman.

Absent: Mayor Rice.

3. COUNCIL BUSINESS and/or DISCUSSION ITEMS

3.1 Discussion; Minnesota Department of Transportation Highway 47 (Ferry Street) and BNSF Railroad Crossing Update and Open House Reminder.

Assistant City Engineer Ben Nelson shared a staff report with background information stating the intersection of Trunk Highway 47 (Ferry Street) and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad in the City of Anoka has many decades of safety and delay issues. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation Railroad Administration, this crossing was considered one of the worst crossings in the state of Minnesota due to many criteria. In 2016, the State of Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) completed a study of safety issues at this crossing. The feasibility study recommended separating the highway and railroad crossing by constructing a bridge over the train tracks. Council should be aware that staff's position on the preferred alignment has been the Mayor's annual 2022 goal which is the Trunk Highway 47 through Alter Metal Recycling option. And as a reminder, pursuant to Minnesota State Statute §161.164, the City of Anoka will have to provide municipal consent to MnDOT for any trunk highway project that results in any of the following items: Alters local access (i.e. Martin Street intersection); increases or reduced traffic capacity; acquisition of permanent right of way including permanent easements. Mr. Nelson reviewed project milestones and shared that MnDOT will be hosting the Highway 47 (Ferry Street) and BNSF Crossings Open House on May 25, 2022.

The State has worked in partnership with Anoka County and City of Anoka in the planning of this project for both, the community and region.

City Manager Greg Lee said the open house was being offered by MnDOT for the public's information.

Mark Lindeberg, MnDOT Metro District Project Manager, provided an update on the project process ahead of the upcoming open house, evaluation process, and next steps. He spoke about the proposed crossing separation, safety improvements at railroad crossing, tentative construction in 2024, surveys of the area and support for overpass and underpass and feedback on the area. He outlined the primary need to address the railroad crossings and secondary needs as well and outlined the evaluation process at different areas and alignment at Highway 47. Mr. Lindeberg spoke about the roadway going up and over the crossing as the recommended option and the roadway tunnel as well as other options then outlined the intersection improvement for height at Martin Street and sight line concerns. He said neighborhood support of the proposed improvements was present but they still had concerns with sight lines and other aspects of the project. He spoke about alignment alternatives and proposed options and speeds on Ferry Street and other data.

Councilmember Barnett asked how many more vehicles would be needed to complete buildout over the bridge. Mr. Lindenber responded traffic forecasts go out 20 years.

Councilmember Weaver asked if MnDOT had reviewed growth in Nowthen, Isanti, and other cities. Mr. Lindeberg said they had, adding one important thing to note was that Highway 10 improvements at Ramsey Boulevard and Sunfish Lake Boulevard will improve and the hope is that traffic stays on Highway 10.

Councilmember Skogquist asked about poor road conditions with the north/south segments and said even if Anoka County approved these improvements, they would not affect those on Highway 47 as it is not a major roadway.

Mr. Lindeberg spoke about the possible relocation of Alter Metals and impacts and proposed options. He outlined the value engineering study and work with Anoka County on proposed refinements, constructability, traffic impacts, and public input. He said if approved construction would begin in 2024 with completion in 2026. He said they were trying to do the best they could and lessen the negative impacts then spoke about costs and alternatives to going through Alter but noted they did not know the cost site cleanup which was a risk as it was an unknown, adding the same could be said for the park property as they did not want to impact the fairgrounds. Mr. Lindeberg said public comments had been shared about the need to relocate the fairgrounds and the importance of finding the best solution. He noted MnDOT allocated money to grade separate but that

they realize there will be impacts which have to be balanced with the best public use.

Councilmember Barnett asked if MnDOT's decision is final. Mr. Lindeberg said after the open house they hope to have a preferred alternative in June, adding staff will continue to be part of the discussions, after which they could return to Council for municipal consent.

Councilmember Weaver commented Minnesota Firearms was present and did not want to see that business relocated as it was important that they remain successful. Mr. Lindeberg agreed, stating it was not their goal to relocate businesses then spoke about factors in selecting alternative involves rights-of-way. He said they understood that left-hand turns were a safety concern and that they needed to work with Minnesota Firearms to address.

Councilmember Skogquist said the impact was the turn was too tight and stressed the need to be creative to address this concern.

Councilmember Weaver said they may need to provide southern access to address the concerns for a larger parking lot.

Mr. Lee spoke about operational issues with Alter Metals then said the preferred Option #2 addressed safety concerns while Option #5 leaves the S-curves in place and may even make the intersection more dangerous especially with truck traffic turns at 90-degree turn. He spoke about the contamination concerns at Alter and that Option #2 removes that concern while Option #5 would be more difficult then spoke about the importance of monitoring contamination.

Mr. Lindeberg spoke about ongoing discussions with MPCA who will be engaged at this stage to ask the right questions and obtain details with respect to contamination. He spoke about the need to get more details so we can start to research the data then commented on the speed curves and traffic from the through lanes and semis not having to slow to make such turns. He said they will continue to have discussions with Alter and options, adding the worst-case scenario is Option #2 followed by Option #5.

City Attorney Scott Baumgartner spoke about monitoring the MPCA and how to utilize that data from a planning stage and believed they made a mistake and stopped monitoring prematurely. He said they may be more amenable than originally thought and would like to see Alter go away as well.

Mr. Lindeberg referred to budget limitations and did not disagree that this is the most ideal spot but said the funding may not be sufficient.

Mr. Lee said the City was just asking MnDOT to do what is the best and safest solution for the public which should result in other benefits, adding they had two municipal wells that tested three years ago with good water.

Anoka County Commissioner Look (inaudible) asked how the \$53 million cost was established. Mr. Lindeberg said the feasibility study in 2016 was used for a cost estimate which he believed was closer to \$45 million estimate but said either way the estimate spoke about moving the access point, not moving Alter's site access to be off of Garfield and staying within MnDOT right-of-way.

Jennifer Wiltgen, MnDOT North Metro Area Coordinator, shared that when reviewing the study and estimates there was much to consider as there were many unknowns with the project's work. She said this will be a project that will be part of the community for many years to come and stressed the importance of due diligence and leaning on the process to take the appropriate steps.

Mayor Pro Tem Wesp summarized the need for staff to continue to be involved throughout the design most dangerous crossing in the State and noted Coon Rapids has received three grade separations already and that planning was needed. He said Anoka County has a vested interest and we need to continue to work with the Legislature to address, adding it was important to get to the north side of the community and currently there were no other options.

3.2 Discussion; The Anoka Area Chamber of Commerce Manufacturing Cohort.

ITEM POSTPONED

3.3 Discussion; Rental Boat Slip Expansion Lower Rum River.

Public Services Administrator Lisa LaCasse shared a staff report with background information stating in 2012, the City began offering rental boat slips on the Rum River. The Akin Boat Launch location has continued to grow in popularity with the number of slips increasing from 6 slips in 2012 to 20 slips today. This dock system encompasses about 400' of shoreline north of the boat launch. It includes a public dock for use at the launch and slips separated by a locking gate. The resident lease fee is \$1800 annually; the non-resident fee lease was increased from \$2100 annually to \$2400 annually in 2022 for new non-resident leases. Current lease terms allow for the annual renewal for residents with no expiration date; non-residents are allowed 8 seasons of annual renewal. All 20 of the lessees from the 2021 season renewed for 2022. Unless there is a voluntary cancellation, no slips will be open for a new lessee until 2025. There is currently a waiting list of 34 individuals (11 residents, 23 non-residents) for the Akin Boat Launch location. This is the most popular slip location because of the access it provides to the Mississippi River. Staff evaluated several locations along the banks of the lower Rum River for the new dock system to be installed. Multiple factors were considered prior to presenting the options to the Park and Recreation Advisory

Board in January. The primary factors considered were availability of parking, ease of access for lessees, amount of obstruction of the slips would have in the navigation channel and/or strength of the current, shoreline condition i.e. rocks, overhanging trees, riverbank height/drop to water level, water level, potential impacts/issues with river debris, ease of access for dock installation, ADA accessibility or limitations, and impact to adjacent property owners. Staff initially identified two options for dock locations within Akin Park and two options for dock locations within Peninsula Point Park. She outlined the 2022 budget included an internal loan of \$125,000 from the Urban Redevelopment Fund 202 (SAC/WAC) for the purchase of EZ Dock for establishment of 12 slips including the dock sections, handrails, gangway, locking gate, and shore stabilizing equipment for \$124,378 and delivery is expected around May 15, 2022. Ms. LaCasse said staff was seeking direction on which location is preferred for the new rental slip location for 2022.

Community Development Director Doug Borglund shared comments about the different types of boats that could be used in this area and evaluations that continuing COVID-19 concerns disrupted discussions with a riverboat group but were in expansion mode in Milwaukee, Nashville, and Excelsior and with the social district legislation starting with activity and exposure the group was very interested.

Ms. LaCasse said the group was also talking about providing tubing along the river as an option and a water taxi service similar to one in Minneapolis and even ferrying people from Champlin at prescheduled times at docks.

Councilmember Weaver suggested lineal docks off the foot bridge for people to walk into the area and help with economic impacts as this unique aspect was 20% of the project and the reason we did this in the first place was to give nonresidents the ability to use the river. He said whatever option chosen is fine but Akin Park provides 2:1 overflow parking and noted the greatest benefit was the dedicated funds to park capital will always be there.

Councilmember Barnett said she was confused about the insight into public input and how to address if there was a likelihood of tree buffer available. Ms. LaCasse explained about an email from a resident with concerns regarding installing docks and noted Anoka County Parks had no jurisdiction in this area but that staff was trying to address.

Ms. LaCasse said with the current offloading the dock locations could easily move if needed. She said Peninsula Point ADA accessibility and steps were interchangeable as long as we have good connection to the shore. She noted the Park Board voted to relocate to Akin as it was the location of least resistance.

Councilmember Skogquist said he did not want all of Akin Park lined with docks as he liked the diversity of the river but recognized the goal was to get people to the river.

Councilmember Weaver said there was a dedicated fund for this work which was very important and impacted the large cottonwood trees by the slips.

Ms. LaCasse said there would be 146 feet of lineal dock plus the fingers and in order to go 12 docks we could reduce to 10 then create the finger as the other system separates the public from the private docks and the overlook is only 20 feet before we approach the woods so the entire dock system has to go the north.

Park Board Member Joe Anderla commented if in favor of the option there are opportunities and need for direction on location and parking impacts.

Councilmember Weaver shared concerns about lack of parking which would result in on street parking instead.

Mayor Pro Tem Wesp said there are significant times with multiple parking options and if nice weather this area would be very popular and understood using Peninsula Park and suggested the other location instead.

Councilmember Weaver said this would be just the beginning and suggested phasing the project and suggested not using the Mississippi and install docks on the Champlin side for now until we learn more.

Councilmember Skogquist asked if we do not have public dock space how much would that reduce rental slips. He said he was thinking ahead of adding additional overflow parking and was in favor of adding more slips. Mr. Holmes said staff was just brainstorming at this point and noted they did have fingers in Mississippi and could bring more forward to accommodate those.

Councilmember Weaver suggested raising funds through the adopt-a-dock program as well.

Park Board member Joe Anderla asked if there was enough water to do these docks. Ms. LaCasse noted her drawings were not to scale and that water levels would be sufficient.

Councilmember Weaver asked if a formal vote on a policy would be needed. Ms. LaCasse noted all dock funds were currently in the general fund but starting in 2023 would be separated into the park capital fund except the newest location at Akin Park.

3.4 Discussion; Social Media Policy Review.

Communications Manager Pam Bowman shared a staff report with background information stating at the March 28 worksession, the City discussed revisions to the Social Media Policy. However, there may be some confusion in the language in which we determined to add to the policy. By adding this language, other areas of the policy will need to be updated and it does mean that elected officials are exempt from the policy because the City does not have control over personal social media accounts of elected officials. “The policy below is written to explicitly exclude social media accounts of elected officials.” While the overall policy reflects the use of City social media accounts, staff recommendation is to leave the above language out. In the policy under Personal Social Media Use, it requires City representatives to “act in a prudent manner with regard to website and internet postings that reference the City of Anoka, its personnel, its operation or its property” and when posting to a social media platform to include “These are my own opinions and do not represent those of the City” as applicable. Elected officials are representatives and therefore should not be exempt from the policy in relation to this section. As a reminder, as noted by the League, “Some cities may choose to have and control social media accounts for their council members. In that case, this policy would be changed to include those council member accounts as city accounts. This policy should not pertain to solely personal accounts of council members or any other social media accounts outside the control of the city’s social media managers.” Staff needs clear direction on whether or not elected officials shall be exempted from the policy.

Councilmember Skogquist asked what other cities do as well as the League of Minnesota Cities as it was different for Councilmembers commenting then staff and said the disclosure and practicality would be difficult. He said it was important to act in a prudent manner and noted he had a personal account to avoid the public forum. Ms. Bowman responded she would contact other cities for their policies but the model policy presented was from the League

Mr. Baumgartner spoke about the distinction and policy scope to be amended to be authorized by City Council because it takes into consideration the line between personal and City Council and the goal was to protect yourselves and the City overall.

Councilmember Weaver shared his frustrations with sharing a City post but not being able to comment as a Councilmember.

Councilmember Barnett understood how this could be trivial and commonplace but did not want to be dismissive and stated these are our own opinions and that we should get more direction from the League. She shared the Anoka Community page where Councilmember Skogquist was a moderator stating this page provided an incredible reach to the community and how Councilmember Skogquist can respond, delete, or remove comments and ban people from the page. She said she felt this action was a gross overstep in his abilities and said the

page has had comments on different groups including some hate speech and how there was no overlap or way address as a moderator and no disclaimer.

Councilmember Weaver said he had similar concerns but noted Councilmember Skogquist's Boy Scout posts and police reports did not deserve the same disclaimer then commented about a personal email he was called out for and his frustrations that they were shared.

Councilmember Skogquist said Councilmember Weaver's email was brought up as an example about dealing with a City-related issue and whether if it was different if it was a personal email. He shared concerns about overregulating which needed to be addressed.

Ms. Bowman agreed with having a disclaimer on the page and in each profile but not on every post, stating it was similar to the City's page because we can then hide comments that are not appropriate.

Mr. Baumgartner reason for this continual review is because this is difficult at best and we can do what makes the most sense, adding a disclaimer on the page is good.

Councilmember Barnett said she wanted to address the Community page and if Councilmember Skogquist he believed this could be an overstep.

Councilmember Skogquist said this was a Facebook page and not a City Council meeting which operate under a private group and was different than his personal page.

Ms. Bowman said staff will do more research on what other cities do and contact the League regarding the Community page participation.

3.5 Discussion; Feral Cat/Volunteerism.

Police Chief Eric Peterson shared a staff report with background information stating an Anoka resident, Betsey Ebner from the 100 block of Madison Street, has volunteered her time assisting a team of individuals with Anoka's feral cat colonies. A feral cat colony can grow quickly from one or two cats to dozens as they reproduce, eat your pets' food and any garbage they find, spread disease, and engage in conflict with local animals and children. If not addressed, a feral cat colony can become a major nuisance for a community. One method to reduce the numbers in cat colonies is to completely remove the supply of food available to the colony. Another is to trap, neuter and return the animal to prevent the growth of the colony. Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is a humane and effective approach for stray and feral cats. Now in practice for decades in the US, scientific studies show that Trap-Neuter-Return improves the lives of feral cats, improves their relationships with the people who live near them, and decreases the size of

colonies over time. With this technique, cats are humanely trapped and taken to a veterinarian to be neutered and vaccinated. After recovery, the cats are returned to where they were trapped. Kittens and cats who are friendly and socialized to people may be adopted into homes. TNR stops the breeding cycle of cats and therefore improves their lives while preventing reproduction and eliminates any need to euthanize feral animals.

Betsey Ebner, Anoka, introduced Jackie Wilson, Susan Walsh, and Mia Anderson who spoke about the number of cats trapped in the last year in the community.

Councilmember Skogquist asked where the trapping occurred. The group outlined the areas cats had been trapped and once spayed/neutered how this helps address these concerns and others.

Ms. Ebner said the group was spending money and time on traps and would like to see a partnership with the City to help address the problem. They explained more about their work regarding feeding bans that do not work because of the area and how the best thing to do is to have colony caretakers to monitor, trap, address, rabies, treat, then release.

Councilmember Skogquist how much of the costs were covered by the Humane Society and others. Ms. Ebner outlined how costs were covered which were substantial and mostly by their group.

Councilmember Weaver how they address the population of disappearing songbirds. Ms. Ebner said if there is a feeder, the cats are much less apt to go after birds and when colonies are controlled, they do not go after birds.

Chief Peterson spoke about the need for education for the public on how to address these things.

Councilmember Weaver spoke about the need to raise funds.

Mr. Baumgartner suggested the group form a non-profit as he did not want to encourage the public to do this type work, adding the City had to be cautious about supporting some types of activities and choosing who to support and who not to support.

Ms. Anderson said this was because as funding sources become available and they apply for grants and ask for donations instead they could do education about TNR and partnership with the City and the Humane Society and encourage donations of money or supplies.

Councilmember Barnett said she did not want to segregate the group from coming along and respected the process and trying to help with supplies and would like to partner with the group.

Ms. Anderson said they had decades of experience, which was why they were so successful, even though there is certification available.

Councilmember Skogquist said some sort of partnership was needed and suggested contracting for some services.

Mr. Baumgartner outlined a process of collaboration that would recognize the group and their work.

Ms. Anderson encouraged the City to enact ordinances that protected community cats that supported this action.

Mr. Baumgartner agreed but said ordinances were only good if enforced.

Council consensus was to continue the conversation regarding community cats for further direction.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Weaver, seconded by Councilmember Skogquist to adjourn the Worksession at 8:09 p.m. Motion carried.

Submitted by: Cathy Sorensen, *TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*

Approval Attestation:

Amy T. Oehlers, City Clerk