Public Services – Parks & Recreation

JOINT MEETING MINUTES
OF THE
ANOKA PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD,
THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION, AND
THE HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2016 – 5:35 P.M.
COUNCIL WORK SESSION ROOM OF ANOKA CITY HALL
2015 FIRST AVENUE, ANOKA MN

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT
Parks and Recreation Advisory Board: Chairperson Steve Nelson, Joe Anderla, Mary Blankenship, and Ellen Ward

Economic Development Commission (EDC): Chairperson Tracy Kelly and Tom Redmann

Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC): Chairperson Bart Ward, Peg Flaig, Colleen Hansen, Cory Rahn, and Barbara Thurston

CITY STAFF PRESENT: Lisa LaCasse, Public Services Administrator and Clark Palmer, Associate Planner/Code Enforcement Technician

GUESTS: Geoff Martin, Landscape Architect/Consultant, Kimley-Horn Associates

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION: RIVER WALK / RUM RIVER WEST TRAIL, THE NEXT STEPS

LaCasse opened the meeting with an introduction of Geoff Martin, Consultant with Kimley-Horn Associates. Geoff Martin was involved in the design plans for Riverfront Park and Peninsula Point Park. She indicated that Mr. Martin was hired to prepare the Riverwalk Concept Plan which involves the Ferry Street Corridor on the west bank of the Rum River extending from the Anoka dam to Peninsula Point Park. The east side of the Rum River Trail is currently established, but the west side will soon be experiencing changes for much of the distance. The overall intent is to create an appealing, resourceful gateway into the City of Anoka.

The Economic Development Commission (EDC) and the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has expressed interest in this Riverwalk concept, which is the purpose of this joint meeting. The Council reviewed the concept plan in February 2016. LaCasse noted the presentation by Mr. Martin is being taped by Quad Cities Television (QCTV) for future use during comprehensive planning process.

Mr. Martin stated that the city started looking at the South Ferry Street corridor in 2013. The existing amenities along the corridor were noted. Mr. Martin's task was to present a concept plan refining what exists and to present what it could be in the future. A variety of funding opportunities for this project will be looked into in the future. Details of the concept plan were presented to those present utilizing a Smart Board aid. Following the presentation, questions were taken and discussion encouraged.

Tom Redmann felt the proposed concept was very exciting. He did express concern for pedestrian access along adjacent Highway 169 (Ferry Street) for those using the Mississippi Regional Trail (MRT) while still managing 20,000-30,000 cars through that area per day. Will there be room for expansion or road improvements?

Mr. Martin responded that he has not followed the Highway 169 planning proposals to understand how the state plans to route traffic in the future. This corridor is so very valuable and needs to be used efficiently. He noted a “skinny” street concept, similar to that of Washington Avenue in downtown Minneapolis, which reduced the lane width by about one foot off each lane, leaving approximately 10.5 foot lanes in that area. In order to create a buffer between traffic and sidewalk, the boulevards could be hardscaped, not a green boulevard. This could create a psychological buffer between traffic and sidewalk, if created efficiently.

Peg Flaig recalled that the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has not allowed boulevard trees to be planted in the past in that they decrease the size of their traffic lanes and add a maintenance issue within their right-of-ways. Mr. Martin concurred, adding that lighting concepts have a greater potential of success. He felt the speed along Ferry Street is quite low. Flaig asked how do we propose to find the extra space if MnDOT says no. Mr. Martin stated once we control the open space, we can move the sidewalk further away from the curbline, noting it would not be possible to do that in the area adjacent the amphitheater. Barb Thurston stated in 1969 MnDOT went in two feet too far into that historical area as it was. Mr. Martin agreed it is always a battle procuring the desired boulevard space from MnDOT. However, we can attempt to get a variance and could consider a more urban treatment design.

Long-time Park Board member Joe Anderla stated this plan looks similar to that of other plans we have seen over the years. He could see where we can move the sidewalk back wherever possible. However, when we discussed putting a pedestrian bridge from Riverfront Park across the Rum River to Peninsula Point Park, we ran into an elevation problem and American Disabilities Act (ADA) problems. We have looked at the existing amphitheater numerous times and never found it feasible to renovate due to traffic on Highway 169, no nearby parking, the physical condition of the structure, and it was bordered on either side by private property owners. Anderla pictured this derelict amphitheater being allowed to remain as is, and if we put a trail in front of it, it would seem the city would be creating an attractive nuisance. Mr. Martin indicated that is something that would have to be addressed.

Anderla added this concept plan would be a fantastic addition to the city’s assets, but at what point do we look at hiring additional Park maintenance people to keep this in the condition expected. Mr. Martin responded that with this kind of investment, the city would want to maintain it. This would be a matter to be answered by City Council and staff.

LaCasse indicated it is her understanding a structural engineer is being brought in to review the city-acquired Ferry Street buildings to determine if the foundations need to stay in place to help support Highway 169. That will be the next step. The intention is that all those buildings are to be demolished and cleaned out of there. While we do not believe there is anything historic there, there will be a walk-through. Demolition can take place as early as January or February 2017. The city has $75,000 budgeted to continue with these concept plans, taking a closer look at topography, and do additional survey work to determine trail locations and what can feasibly happen within this area. Tonight’s meeting is merely the sharing of the conceptual plan. Before looking at funding sources or construction, we will need to have a master plan approved and only then start putting numbers together to apply for grants. This is all several years away.

Redmann asked if the city now owns the property along the west bank of the Rum River within this identified area. LaCasse confirmed it did. He also asked if staff was aware of anything happening with that Walker senior high rise located on the corner. LaCasse responded that Walker had talked about an expansion and it was included as part of the concept plan. When asked if Tax Increment Financing Funds (TIFF) could be used for this city project, Clark Palmer, the city’s Associate Planner/Code Enforcement Technician, stated it is thought to be a TIFF district but he was not sure if TIF funds would be used to construct the park/trails.

Nelson asked what the potential cost could be for this plan. Mr. Martin stated he was not asked to drill down that far on setting costs. There is a great deal involved. As a general guide, he recalled the trail behind City Hall on the east side of the Rum River cost in the area of $750,000. Demolition has to be factored in, concrete, lighting, and it goes on.

Barb Thurston, HPC, stated her advisory board has expressed the position that the expansion of the Walker high rise is a bad idea. The current structure cuts off some of the views of the river, and an expansion would only add to the problem. An expansion would encroach onto the Giddings property where all the gardens were, prohibit the stonehouse views…it would block all those historic elements in that area.

Bart Ward concurred with Anderla with regard to keeping this River Walk maintained. We have to give some serious thought as to where we get the funding. As we have learned, bringing in federal money, which is quite a process in itself, will allow the federal people to tell us how we complete our project. He felt it would be best to figure out where and how to get a regional grant and find out what they will let us do. Doing this project on our own would certainly be preferred. Ward added that along with the feds having a significant say-so in our project, we would be given a limited amount of time to use the money or it will be given to someone else.

Thurston asked if there were enough room under the bridge on the west side for a trail and where it will not get flooded. Mr. Martin stated we would have to plan for the flood level. We would also have to delve into the restrictions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers. LaCasse stated anything within 300 feet of the river will need Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) approval. This is currently conceptual only; there is a lot of work ahead of us.

Thurston asked if any of the lawn of the Woodbury house would be affected by this project. Mr. Martin stated it depends on how the city handles the edge of Highway 169. Because it is tight anyway, the path could be brought in to the east side of the wall. Thurston followed by asking if it would affect the National Register status by doing that. LaCasse was unsure, but noted that the Woodbury property is now three parcels; two public parcels and one where the house is located. The Park Board previously talked about a trail being located on the river's bluff rather than on the street side of the property; thereby, getting away from Highway 169.

Anderla asked if the parking lot recently built at the Woodbury property to accommodate the Mad Hatter Restaurant might have changed the historical status of that property. Ward stated it did not.

Ward added that at some point, Highway 169 could be moved out of here.

LaCasse asked if anyone present was opposed to the demolition of the Riverplace Counseling building(s) so we can take that next step in 2017. She then pulled up aerial maps of the location on the Smart Board to ensure everyone understood what buildings/location she was talking about.

Redmann stated he was considering cost versus benefits with regard to this project. On the plus side, this project would create a more interesting entrance into Anoka, create more recreational opportunities, and entice more people to move into Anoka perhaps. The balancing consideration is there is going to be a huge cost associated with this project. The question is: Which gets more priority. We do not have the answers yet.

Ward stated if the city can convince the Metropolitan Council that this Rum River West Trail is an extension of what we already have, then we can probably get money out of the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB).

Upon discussion of the demolition of the counseling center buildings, Redmann stated it would seem their removal would be beneficial to these park plans. However, he was unaware of the condition of those buildings and asked if the Giddings gardens are still there. Thurston stated it is. Ward clarified that the border rock is there. The terraces could be rebuilt pretty easily; it would not take much. Ward stated the amphitheater, however, is monstrous.

Anderla stated we are going to be knocking down buildings and terracing to the river. It is a fact that the amphitheater has many negatives. He felt now would be the time to take it off the Historic Register. In place of the amphitheater, the city could provide plaques showing where it was and how it was enjoyed by the city during its prime. At the same time, we could do something else in its stead, saving a huge

amount of money in the process. Anderla asked if the HPC has ever felt it a benefit to the city to take it down.

Flaig asked why not just leave the amphitheater as it is. Anderla explained his position, stating if we restore access to the area, leaving the deteorated amphitheater as it is, it will encourage people to access that dangerous structure. This would be an opportunity to be done with the amphitheater, provide a historical memorial of sorts to this facility, and move on. When Thurston expressed feelings that the city has lost a lot of nice old things it has had, Anderla stated he has lived in this city for 50 years; and that property has been in this same deteorated condition that whole time.

Ward acknowledged Anderla's point, yet expressed his opinion that he likes the idea of keeping the amphitheater ruins. He stated the National Register gives an owner access to federal funding. An owner does not need to get it deregistered to tear it down. He acknowledged the many mixed feelings about this. The HPC is now driving the rebuilding of the stonehouse, knowing that kids are going down there.

Nelson shared his mother-in-law's opinion, stating if we keep it, fix it; otherwise, it makes Anoka look like a dump. Just pick a course of action. Anderla added he is simply opposed to keeping this amphitheater where it is at in the condition it is in.

Cory Rahn, HPC, asked for more information about the demolition of the Counseling Center in February and the structural integrity of the bluff. LaCasse stated the structures will at least be removed to the ground level, there has been discussion about backfilling the foundations and leaving partially in place.

Ward asked if there were any objections to these buildings coming down. Thurston recommended the city do a walk-through. There might be some elements worth preserving.

During further discussion of the amphitheater, Palmer stated that ruin has been discussed for many years. Does this concept plan change anyone's thoughts? Nelson stated some portion of this plan will take place in order to open up the sight lines of the city.

The question was asked if there would be any improvement at all to the amphitheater or if a chain-link fence would simply be constructed around it. Nelson stated his mother-in-law would have felt any improvement would be beneficial.

Redmann added if the city left the amphitheater ruin untouched and preserved as a ruin, the entire thing should be preserved that way. If we were to restore it and bring it up to code as a useable outdoor theater, he did not think the benefits would outweigh that cost.

Ward felt the southern-most part of the theater is the best structural part. Thurston concurred, adding the north side caved in because the dressing rooms caved in. The top one-third of that is unsafe. She stated some of the steps are gone, but people could walk down there.

LaCasse reported that the city's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Executive Director Darin Berger is in charge of handling the demolition. He will be setting up a walk-through opportunity. This is a starting point plan. The city is looking for major objections, if any. LaCasse invited the group to provide comments to staff as we move forward.

As for the Park Board and HPC, LaCasse stated in future we will need to set up a subcommittee to develop historic components of this area. The HPC should identify a list of the key components for interpretation. As for the Park Board there is money in the 2017 budget for additional master planning. In addition to this project, we have comprehensive plan revisions due in 2017.

Flaig asked when Riverplace Counseling will be vacating these buildings. LaCasse thought it would be in December. Their new facility is located along Highway 10 across from the technical college.

Shoemaker asked if we have the option to save or perhaps sell items in these houses that can be kept and salvaged. Ward stated there usually is very little to salvage in these old houses.

Redmann stated he feels more positive than negative about this project. He is excited to see what can happen. There will be opportunities and challenges along the way.

Tracy Kelly, EDC, stated he enjoyed this open dialogue. As an EDC member, his question is where will the money come from. He felt it important to preserve our heritage and how it ties into bringing in a tax base while acknowledging it.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, this meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa LaCasse
Public Services Administrator

Mava Mikkonen
Public Services/Recording Secretary