

WORK SESSION/RETREAT

The City Council of the City of Norfolk, Nebraska, held a work session/retreat in the City Administration Conference Room, 309 North 5th Street, Norfolk, Nebraska, on Tuesday, March 31, 2015, beginning at 4:00 p.m.

Mayor Sue Fuchtman called the meeting to order.

Roll call found the following Councilmembers present: Councilmembers Clausen, Fauss, Granquist, Lange, Merrill, Moenning, Murren, Pfeil and Fuchtman. Absent: None.

Staff members present were City Administrator Shane Weidner and City Clerk Beth Deck.

News media present were Susan Risinger, WJAG/KEXL; and Jerry Guenther, Norfolk Daily News.

Notice of the meeting was given in advance by publication in the Norfolk Daily News, and notice of the meeting was given to the Mayor and all members of the Council prior to the meeting.

The Mayor informed the public about the location of the current copy of the Open Meetings Act posted in the meeting room and accessible to members of the public.

Budget Levels

Weidner explained the City of Norfolk budget levels. Level I assumes a 1% increase; Level II assumes a 2% increase; Level III assumes a 3 1/2% increase; and Level IV assumes a 4-6% increase in the amount of funding. The previous budgeting model was Level I, 4% decrease; Level II, no increase; Level III, 4% increase; and Level IV was unlimited budgeting within reason; however, layoffs were severe in Levels I and II and the levels of services to the community were drastically reduced. The City continues to budget conservatively.

Merrill questioned whether placeholders are identified in the budget; e.g. a trailer not purchased in one year carries over to the next year.

Weidner stated a placeholder would be more like expenditures for council priority dollars; e.g. the Ta-Ha-Zouka connector trail for \$100,000 with the opportunity to add that project and complete the entire loop. Projects, such as the new financial software, GIS and landscaping dollars, are identified in the budget.

Pfeil questioned what happens if budgeted dollars aren't spent, e.g. lower fuel costs and snow removal costs.

Weidner stated any funds not spent in one fiscal year carry over in the balance brought forward the next year and items not purchased would need to be re-budgeted.

Sidewalk on Victory Road

Granquist and Pfeil have safety concerns about the lack of a sidewalk along Victory Road. Engineering staff have been working on a way to provide citizens in the northeast area of Norfolk access to the trail system. Currently, the closest point is the round-a-bout on Highway 35 and Victory Road.

Staff suggests a sidewalk on the west side of Victory Road, the installation of an un-signalized pedestrian crossing at Cedar Avenue, the use of connector sidewalks through the Meadow Ridge development to Benjamin Avenue by Northeast Community College and the Norfolk Veterans Home, and a signalized pedestrian crossing on Benjamin Avenue to connect to the trail.

Weidner stated the Veterans Home is very interested in a stop light by their facility; however, a traffic study needs to be completed and the light would need to follow traffic manual regulations. Another option would be to order in a trail south along Victory Road to connect to the round-a-bout. However, a lot of the land isn't developed on the west side of Victory Road and putting in a sidewalk prior to development can cause problems/additional costs to developers.

Elected officials briefly discussed sidewalk waivers and Weidner stated the City could tighten down on sidewalk waiver and also order the installation of sidewalks throughout the community.

Merrill questioned the cost per square foot for installation of a sidewalk.

Clausen said the cost depends on a lot of variables but an estimate would be about \$4.00 per square foot.

Fuchtmann said elected officials may need to have a more in-depth discussion regarding trails and sidewalks in the community. Part of the problem with certain areas that don't have sidewalks is that trees have been planted in the front yards where sidewalks would normally be located.

Lange suggested looking at placing the sidewalk on the east side of Victory Road to possibly move pedestrians further away from traffic. Lange stated sidewalk waivers are always approved with a stipulation that when it is deemed necessary for sidewalks the property owners must install them at their expense. Lange also feels elected officials need to seriously look at installation of sidewalk on all snow routes to keep children out of the streets.

Weidner stated Engineering staff can take a look at placement of a sidewalk on the east side of Victory Road but the safest route appears to be on the west side.

Granquist feels elected officials need to strongly look at putting in a trail along Victory Road south to Norfolk Avenue.

Weidner reminded elected officials that a funding source for a trail/wide sidewalk would need to be found. Most of the trails in Norfolk have been constructed in conjunction with a federal project or on public property. The trail/sidewalk along Victory Road would be assessable to the property owners but any sidewalk larger than the required width in City Code would need to be paid for with city funds. Weidner asked whether elected officials want to fund trails with property tax dollars or assess the costs to adjoining property owners. Weidner said the required four foot sidewalk width in City Code could be changed to five foot for all new sidewalks at the direction of elected officials. Either way, elected officials will need to decide on a funding source for the trail/sidewalk along Victory Road. Elected officials have the option of ordering in the sidewalk and assessing the property owners with most assessments being amortized over ten years; however, the assessments can be paid back for up to twenty years. Weidner said sidewalk installation on the west side of Victory Road on undeveloped property causes consternation to builders. Weidner stated a sidewalk on either side of Victory Road can connect to the trail system and get a loop in the trail system by going to the stop light on Benjamin Avenue. Weidner stated an un-signalized pedestrian crosswalk can be put in rather quickly at Cedar Avenue and Victory Road.

Pfeil said elected officials need to “bite the bullet” sometimes to make things happen and safety is a real concern for pedestrians along Victory Road.

Murren is in favor of a trail/sidewalk because of the safety aspect for citizens.

Moenning questioned whether the Trails Committee identified this area as a priority?

Weidner indicated the Trails Committee did identify Victory Road as a priority as well as looking at the trail loop up to Benjamin. However, the City needs to finance the trails and/or sidewalk installation. Weidner stated elected officials will need to prioritize a list of sidewalk installations throughout the City.

Fuchtmann likes the idea of sidewalk installation on the east side of Victory Road with the additional crossing on Victory Road to get to the round-a-bout.

Clausen is concerned with the cost to property owners if the sidewalks are installed and said it is a major investment for citizens. Clausen feels elected officials should look at a 20 year amortization schedule option. Clausen said the option of which side of Victory Road to install the sidewalk needs to be studied first. Clausen would like the Trails Committee involved in the decision. Clausen estimated a trail along Victory Road would cost \$200,000 but would also require grading and other preparation work that could increase the cost.

Weidner stated the Trails Committee would ideally like a 10-foot sidewalk installed and then the City would be responsible for paying for the additional sidewalk width.

Granquist moved to have City staff look at options and do a cost impact analysis for installation of a sidewalk on either the east or the west side of Victory Road, seconded by Pfeil. Roll Call: All Ayes. Nays: None. Absent: None. Motion carried.

Moenning suggested a broader discussion on ordering in sidewalks throughout the City of Norfolk.

Weidner said the discussion can start at the Planning Commission level about changing the sidewalk width requirement in City Code.

Nuisance Ordinance

Weidner stated Norfolk’s City Code provides staff with the ability to address most nuisances.

City staff has been directed by elected officials over the years to try to get compliance without using a heavy hand and nuisances are generally addressed when a neighbor complains or when staff are notified of a problem.

Merrill questioned whether City staff is doing enough with nuisance abatement or whether the current method isn’t working. A tougher approach may be necessary. Merrill said the Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District (NENEDD) has programs to help with nuisance abatement. Merrill suggested having a City staff person, whether from Permits & Codes or the Police Division, drive around and take pictures of nuisances that need to be addressed.

Weidner questioned how many chances a citizen should be given because Permits & Codes Division staff is often criticized for being heavy handed with code enforcement.

Murren suggested providing public education about ordinances addressing nuisances and then move to enforcement.

Merrill said the easiest way to address a nuisance is to send letters and then, if no reply, spend personnel time contacting citizens. However, dealing with out-of-town property owners can be difficult.

Clausen stated NENEDD may also be able to help write a grant for fixing up properties.

Moenning said the most noticeable and fixable nuisance is improper parking of vehicles in yards and on terraces and it shouldn't be hard to identify those problem areas.

Mayor would like a discussion with Permits & Codes Division staff before making a decision on nuisance abatement.

Weidner will set up a Public Safety and Community Development subcommittee meeting to discuss this issue further.

City Planner

Weidner has had discussions with staff from various first class municipalities to draft a job description for a City Planner. The Planner would report to the City Administrator. The Planner would need to develop a good relationship with Planning Commission members as well as elected officials. One of the first items to be worked on by the Planner would be updating the City's Comprehensive Plan. Weidner said elected officials would still need to make some hard decisions for growth of the community and would need to support the Planner.

Murren feels a City Planner may be able to take some of the work load off Engineering staff, Permits & Codes staff, City Administrator and other staff.

Moenning sees the Planner as the main contact person for developers and help facilitate communication with realtors. Moenning feels the timing is right for the community to hire a City Planner.

Merrill feels the Planner can also be a front person for Economic Development staff and the person also needs to be able to "sell" the community.

Weidner said housing is one issue that can also be part of the job duties for a City Planner.

Clausen said an argument can be made that there is only so much land for development in the community and there needs to be give and take in the decision making process, especially for a community the size of Norfolk, e.g. there are only so many arterial streets for businesses. Clausen sees a push towards redevelopment of older homes in the community at this time. Clausen isn't opposed to a City Planner but elected officials need to have "wobble room" otherwise people will say it is too hard to do anything in Norfolk. Clausen feels the City Planner needs to be associated with the Economic Development staff because developers don't need another hoop to jump through regulations.

A brief discussion was held regarding parking requirements, green space, lot size, etc.

Weidner stated a planner can hold the line on green space, density, parking requirements, etc.; however, the political process won't change much by hiring a planner – there is only a certain amount of property in the community. Weidner stated the last City Planner for Norfolk got frustrated and said the City of Norfolk needed a zoning administrator and not a city planner.

Merrill would like people to talk to the City Planner first before going to Permits & Codes, Economic Development staff, and other city staff. Merrill said facilitating growth in the community is one of the top priorities for the City Planner.

Fauss questioned whether the City Planner could help the City's Economic Development staff.

Weidner said the City Planner would be part of the team; however, the City is only hiring one person and some internal reorganization will be done for support staff.

Moening moved to finalize the City Planner job description by April 30, 2015; identify funding for the position; discuss salary range; and move forward with the City Planner position, seconded by Merrill. Roll call: Ayes: all. Nays: None. Absent: None. Motion carried.

Weidner will bring the Planning & Community Development subcommittee members together to review the proposed job description in more detail as well as discuss a salary range.

Armor Coating

Weidner explained there are still a handful of gravel streets in the City of Norfolk. Armor coating has been used in several alleys, on South Pine Street and on Grove Avenue. However, armor coating is only good for about five years compared to a much longer life for paved streets. Armor coating is also harder to maintain than paving but paving is more expensive. Weidner would like elected officials to consider whether the public is better served by hard surfacing all streets and assessing the benefiting property owners or having all taxpayers pay for armor coating in certain areas.

Fauss feels armor coating has worked well, especially in Skyview Park.

Lange said that life cycle costs show paving is less expensive than armor coating.

Merrill sees armor coating as a benefit to citizens living on 15th Street by Hayes Avenue because those houses were constructed before sidewalks were required. Merrill questioned how special assessments work for future ownership of property.

Weidner explained special assessments run with the property.

Lange said the problem is that the entire block may not be completed at one time and many citizens look at the upfront cost instead of paying off the special assessment over a number of years.

Clausen feels it is tough to order in paving in older neighborhoods because many of the people are on fixed incomes and a special assessment doesn't add value to the property. Clausen feels armor coating works in certain areas of the city and is better than gravel.

Pfeil suggested giving a five year notice to property owners that the street will be paved so they can plan ahead or downsize. Merrill agreed with the suggestion.

Fuchtman feels elected officials need to look at a longer special assessment amortization schedule. Fuchtman said it is time people move forward to make this community better.

Lange feels armor coating should be assessable to the property owners for as many times as the street needs to be armor coated. If a street is paved, it is assessed against the property owners.

Granquist said armor coating would not work on streets with heavy traffic.

Fuchtman would like to see estimated costs to armor coat 15th Street and volunteered to discuss the issue with property owners in that area. Merrill agreed to go with the Mayor to visit with the property owners.

Weidner will have the Public Works subcommittee review and update the numbers for paving and/or armor coating 15th Street and to look at funding sources for armor coating.

Landscape Plan

Weidner explained Olsson Associates prepared a Landscape Master Plan in May 2009 for the City of Norfolk which analyzed existing landscaping and made recommendations for approximately 15 miles of highly traveled roadways in the community. Some of the Plan recommendations are completed and some are not. The City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) includes funding of \$232,788 in fiscal year 2015-2016 for landscaping but no project is specified. Weidner recommends a subcommittee review the Landscape Master Plan, triage dollars and identify projects.

Clausen said it is important to address where the funding is coming from because some citizens don't feel landscaping is important and the money could be used elsewhere in the community.

Weidner stated the funding for landscape improvements would be either bonding or General Fund transfer from the Street Division budget.

Moenning said elected officials approved the Plan in 2009 and funding has been in the CIP for several years but not used for landscaping because of other priorities/projects. Moenning feels it is important to take pride in the community and make the major corridors and roadways look nice. Moenning suggested the Master Gardeners group may want to help with implementation of the Plan.

Murren feels elected officials and staff need to have interaction with community members, including the Tree Advisory Board Committee and Trails Committee members, to discuss landscaping and provide some direction on what projects should be done. Murren suggested looking for grant dollars to help with landscaping.

Fauss suggested inviting 2-3 citizens from each ward to provide input.

Weidner reminded elected officials the Landscape Plan is designed for major corridors and roadways. Weidner feels there is also a need to improve South 7th Street.

Weidner will move forward with getting a subcommittee together to review the Landscape Master Plan, triage dollars and identify projects.

Johnson Park Plan

Moenning requested the discussion on Johnson Park improvements. Moenning would like to keep this project “on the radar” and provided an update. The City applied for and received a recreational trails grant for the improvements. Moenning also said there may be increased private development to help enhance the area. Moenning said one of the big components of the plan is whether or not to keep Nebraska Avenue open. Moenning feels the river is underutilized and closing Nebraska Avenue would enhance the concept by providing a connection between the park and the river. Moenning questioned whether a traffic count has been done on Nebraska Avenue.

Fauss stated old pictures show Johnson Park as very impressive many years ago.

Granquist agrees Nebraska Avenue should be closed and received a lot of questions about Johnson Park and Nebraska Avenue while campaigning for public office. There are also many questions about the Norfolk Avenue bridge project and where traffic will be routed.

Weidner stated the Norfolk Avenue Bridge is being replaced but total closure or partial closure of the bridge during the project has not yet been determined. If the bridge is totally closed, the project will take approximately six months to complete. If one lane of the bridge remains open, the project will span over two construction cycles and will be more expensive. City staff is reviewing the options and also where traffic will be routed. Weidner stated public input will be needed before closing Nebraska Avenue in Johnson Park. Time line for the Johnson Park trail is the 2016 construction season with the construction of a new park maintenance shop at the Street Division and demolition of the current shop in Johnson Park. Weidner will check to see if the traffic count has been completed on Nebraska Avenue. Weidner also said the Park Division budget will include funding for some of the less expensive ancillary facilities for Johnson Park such as a basic amphitheater on slab and without a structure.

Murren questioned whether the Norfolk Sanitary District is involved with the Johnson Park improvements.

Weidner stated the Norfolk Sanitary District is supportive of the Johnson Park improvements but probably won't be able to provide a lot of money for the project.

There being no further discussion, the Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 6:36 p.m.

Sue Fuchtman
Mayor

ATTEST:

Elizabeth A. Deck
City Clerk

(S E A L)