

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS
BEMIDJI, MINNESOTA
Regular Meeting/Work Session – February 11, 2008

Pursuant to due call and notice, a regular meeting/work session of the City Council of the City of Bemidji, Beltrami County, Minnesota, was held on Monday, January 14, 2008, at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, Mayor Lehmann presiding.

Upon roll call, the following Councilmembers were declared present: Lehmann, Hellquist, Meuers, Markeson, Downs, Erickson, Johnson.

Other Present: Mike Kamnikar, Bob Green, Joe McKinnon, Michelle Buller

Staff: Craig Gray, Brian Freeberg, Alan Felix, Curt Oakes, Kay Murphy

Mayor Lehmann asked the following items be added to the Work Session agenda: Resolution Approving Gambling Permit for BYH at Corner Bar, Resolution Supporting Passage of a Comprehensive Transportation Bill during the 2008 Legislative Session, and Travel Authorization for Mayor Lehmann as needed to St. Paul.

RESOLUTION NO. 5471: Approving a Gambling Permit for BYH at Corner Bar was offered by Councilmember Johnson, who moved its adoption, and upon due second by Councilmember Markeson was passed by unanimous vote.

RESOLUTION NO. 5472: Accepting a Supporting Passage of a Comprehensive Transportation Bill During the 2008 Legislative Session was offered by Councilmember Johnson, who moved its adoption, and upon due second by Councilmember Markeson was passed by unanimous vote.

Motion by Johnson, second by Meuers, to authorize travel for Mayor Lehmann to St. Paul on February 13, 2008 and as needed during the Legislative Session. Motion carried unanimously.

MnDOT Presentation on TH197 Access Management Study

Mike Kamnikar, MnDOT Traffic Engineer, stated that MnDOT hired Alliant Engineering to complete an Access Management Assessment of TH197 within the City. MnDOT along with City staff identified the project needs. He stated that the goal of this project was to develop a preferred corridor plan for TH197 that preserves and enhances mobility and safety, provides reasonable and viable access and is appropriate for the environment and adjacent land uses defining the corridor.

Bob Green, Alliant Engineering Project Manager, stated that the benefits of access management are to reduce congestion and crashes, preserve road capacity and postpone the need for road widening, improve travel times, ease movement between destinations, and support local economic development. He stated that in a three year crash study from 2004 to 2006 both the SE segment and NW segments were above the Statewide average for crash and severity rates. He then reviewed potential solutions for the three segments of TH197. In considering the potential solutions, needs will be balanced with cost. He noted that there is inconsistency between MnDOT guidelines and the Zoning Ordinance and suggested an amendment to the ordinance. The access density along TH197 is almost twice the recommended guidelines and is contributing to the high crash rate and severity rate along the corridor.

Mr. Kamnikar stated that the Public Advisory Committee has been working with the process. The Committee is made up of Lori Paris, Steve Inkel, Rich Siegert and Kevin Williamson. The Technical Advisory Committee includes MnDOT, City and County staff. MnDOT will be hosting a Public Open House at MnDOT on February 28; 5-7 p.m. Next steps: Evaluate Alternatives–March 2008; Recommended Plan–April 2008; City-MnDOT Concurrence–May 2008; and Final Report–June 2008.

Downs asked who would be responsible for the costs if Rako and Roosevelt Roads were realigned.

Mr. Green responded that the costs would be mostly the City of Bemidji's. However, the City may not want to consider realigning.

Mayor Lehmann asked if MnDOT could provide cost estimates based on future dollars regarding the various options.

Mr. Green responded that they could provide ballpark costs; however, it might be harder to identify right-of-ways needed and to put a dollar value to that.

Events Center Committee Discussion

Design Committee

Mayor Lehmann reviewed a request from the City Manager requesting two committees to assist in the events center process. He recommended that the Council consider a Design Review Committee to assist with the task of developing an acceptable design to the citizens and one that fits Bemidji. A design needs to be put together quickly. The proposed Design Review Committee members are: Mayor Lehmann, Councilor Onen Markeson, Sandy Kaul–Local Artist, Cindy Serratore–HPC, Craig Gray–City Engineer, John Winter–Landscape Architect, Dennis Parker–Forest Service Park Planner, Mike Pollock–WSN Architect, Chamber of Commerce Representative and Youth Advisory Commission Member.

Downs recommended adding Gayle Quistgard, VisitBemidji to the Design Committee. Mayor agreed with Downs' suggestion in adding Quistgard to the Committee. Downs also suggested adding another council person on the design review committee. He stated that having more council representation could keep open the lines of communication between the Council and the committees and build consensus on the project.

Mayor Lehmann responded that having a Design Committee will allow public input without the Council steering the decision. He commented that the Council will review the Committee's recommendation and will make the ultimate decision.

Hellquist commented that he agreed with Downs regarding adding a councilor as there were concerns expressed by citizens regarding the lease negotiations done in the City Manager's office regarding BSU. He felt that with three councilors on the committees there will be good communication to the Council and that information should be given to the press to ensure that it is open and honest communication.

Mayor Lehmann stated that the lease negotiations included three councilors.

Hellquist commented that there were no minutes from those meetings.

City Attorney Felix stated that the purpose of the meetings was to negotiate and the ability to have open and frank discussions was not a violation of the Open Meeting Law.

Hellquist responded that he never questioned the Open Meeting Law but it is a perception from the public. He suggested that these meetings could have been open but were not. He stated that the Council is given information from the various committees and expected to act on items in a relatively short time and to go along with the decisions.

Steering Committee

Mayor Lehmann stated that the second committee recommended for formation was the development of a Steering Committee.

Erickson asked for an explanation of the purpose of the Steering Committee.

Hellquist commented that he has concerns that the committee is being set up to direct the Council on what to think.

Brian Freeberg, City Engineer, explained that a lot of information needs to be gathered to prepare a package that will result in a set of clearly stated ideas to bring forward. There are more ideas that need to come together for development of the SE Lake Bemidji area than staff can provide and recommended it be expanded to a committee approach.

Johnson noted that it is not much different than other committee approaches, i.e., Public Affairs Committee. Ultimately, the committee makes recommendations that come to the Council for the final decision.

Erickson asked for clarification of the Steering Committee's agenda.

City Attorney Felix responded that the Steering Committee was intended to bring together events center players who could assist in guiding the process forward. The Committee

could assist with the volume of work and provide the expertise to pull the project together along with public input, and to do it in a short time.

Meuers stated that in the past the Council has no idea about what has gone on. She felt that perhaps written reports from the committee should be provided weekly to the Council; however, she was uncomfortable with a steering committee.

Hellquist stated he is not in favor of a steering committee because they will make decisions in place of the Council much like what happened at Diamond Point Park when the Committee brought information and they were “coerced” into approving a more expensive project. The information needs to be open and honest and provided on a timely basis.

Freeberg stated that there are a number of routine conversations between the City Manager and Leo A Daly. Sometimes there have to be interpretations or priorities established and it could be helpful if there was a broader perspective to answer day to day questions.

Erickson asked for clarification on how and why the individuals were selected for the proposed steering committee.

Felix commented there will be a great deal of coordination between a number of people. The Steering Committee will be the representation of that community effort toward the common goal of the events center. He stated that it is not meant to usurp the critical decision-making of the City Council but to coordinate and facilitate the Council’s decision-making because staff is unable to do that.

Hellquist stated that there are two different situations as one is reactionary and the proper path in the situation is that staff gets direction from Council and staff manages the project. Currently, we have two city engineers and a city manager and he does not see where this comes up and is not comfortable that these people are the visionaries on the project. The committee is heavily weighted with BSU people.

Mayor Lehmann asked if Hellquist was suggesting that the City Council be the steering committee.

Hellquist responded that he is questioning if there is a need for a steering committee. He stated that the City has a strong City Manager and this is his main task and has department heads and capable staff to assist him. He asked if this group would mitigate the tough decisions that the manager has to make or is this something to hide behind, or what. He stated he was not comfortable to add a committee with artificial deadlines.

Downs stated he would like to see another councilor on the committees for the reasons he stated earlier.

Motion by Meuers, second by Markeson, authorizing a Design Review Committee with members as proposed adding Gayle Quistgard from VisitBemidji. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Hellquist, second by Erickson, to postpone the appointment of an Events Center Committee. Motion carried with the following vote: Ayes: Hellquist, Erickson, Downs, Meuers. Nays: Lehmann, Johnson, Markeson.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, motion by Downs, second by Meuers, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Kay M. Murphy
City Clerk