

# City Council Proceedings

## Regular Meeting/Work Session

August 22, 2005

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, August 22, 2005, at 5:30 p.m. in the Bemidji City Fire Hall, Mayor Lehmann presiding.

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

Staff Present: Mack, Haluptzok, Albrecht, Oakes, Swenson

Parks & Recreation Commission Present: McRae, Smith, Auger, Thayer, Meuers  
Absent: Warno, Colford and Sande

Other Present: Julie Bratvold

Mayor Lehmann stated that the purpose of the meeting was the implementation of the Sales Tax and the 2001 Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan. Mayor Lehmann stated that Minke had a power point presentation to make and turned the discussion over to him.

Minke stated that the discussions of this meeting would focus on the 2001 Park Plan with additional discussion as to what the next steps should be. He stated that it is very important that it be decided what the roles are of the City Council, the Park Commission, and the staff.

Minke explained that the Staff Team for the Project is, Rita Albrecht, Assistant City Planner, as the Team Leader with the other team members being: David Minke, City Manager; Dan Haluptzok, Park Superintendent; Brian Freeberg, City Engineer; Al Felix, City Attorney; Curt Oakes, City Planner; and Andy Mack, the Public Works Director. Minke feels that this team provides for a very inter-disciplinary approach.

Minke explained that the 2001 Park Plan uses the language, "City as a Park", which the Council adopted as one of its key visions.

Albrecht stated that the Park Plan is important because there was a lot of community input into it. She stated that, whether it has been known or not, many of the projects being done or projects that have already been accomplished are being guided by this Plan. Albrecht also pointed out that the local option sales tax must be used for Parks and Trails and must be based on this Plan, but Albrecht also noted that the Plan is designed to have flexibility, to be updated, to adapt to changing demographics, uses and needs within the City.

Albrecht pointed out a few projects that are in the Park Plan that the City has already accomplished, including the following:

### **PARKS/GENERAL**

- Provided winter skating on Lake Bemidji – one thing Erickson really championed;
- Provided a new dock at Paul & Babe.
- Replaced the fishing pier at the outlet when the 197 Enhancement Project was completed.
- Made upgrades to ice arena – remodeling, roof repair and floor replacement. The decision made to replace the floor was in keeping with the Park Plan.
- Added play equipment and a picnic shelter at the Roger Lehman Park.
- Initiated discussions with the hospital for Ridgeway Avenue Park. Some development was accomplished, including a ball field.
- Recently authorized filling Park & Recreation staff vacancies.

### **TRAILS**

- Partial purchase of the Rail Corridor.
- We have been included in the DNR Bonding request in 2005 and 2006.
- Completed the trail from Trunk Highway 71 Bridge to Rako Street.
- Completed Lake Boulevard pedestrian upgrade. We now have the potential for getting a bike trail segment around Lake Bemidji through the BSU and Lake Boulevard areas.
- Completed the trail from Paul & Babe to 1<sup>st</sup> Street SE.

**ORDINANCES PASSED**

- Parkland Dedication
- Tree Preservation
- Landscape Requirements

**FUNDING**

- Passing the sales tax
- Getting the Referendum passed
- Gained Legislative support
- Pass Resolution to implement the Sales Tax

Albrecht passed control of the presentation back to Minke. Minke stated that when he asked Albrecht to put together a list of accomplishments, he did not realize that the list would be that long. He said that to move forward, roles needed to be defined of the City Council, the Park Commission and citizen and stakeholder groups. Minke stated that a review of the 2001 Park Plan needs to be done and feels that the Park Commission is probably the organization to lead that task and ask the tough questions about what has been accomplished, what has not been accomplished and what has changed. The community has changed both from a development standpoint and an opportunity perspective. The Plan talks about how priorities were arrived and one of the criteria listed is opportunity.

Minke stated that retailers have already started calling him and questioning how they should administer the ½ cent tax. He said that if retailers have questions, they need to be directed to the Department of Revenue. He explained that if the Ordinance is adopted, as of January 1, 2006, the City's sales tax will increase from 6.5% to 7% on most goods purchased within the City. The proceeds from this tax will be \$9.8 million, which was identified on the Referendum and in the Legislation. He stated that one other challenge is inflation, as the estimates were done in 2001 and we are going to be starting the projects in 2006 and continuing for the next three to five years. The Park Commission needs to prioritize the projects accordingly. Minke then outlined the tasks that the City Council needs to accomplish with regard to the sales tax implementation: the Resolution was passed on August 15, 2005, the Ordinance's First Reading will be on September 6, 2005 with the Final Reading scheduled for the October 3, 2005 Council meeting.

Minke suggested the Park Commission should take the lead on implementation. The Council has other priorities they need to be working on. The Park Commission will need to review the Park Plan and will need to make revisions available to the public. Minke stated that the City will need to retain a Consultant to actually do the detailed design for the specific projects.

Downs brought up the subject of the trail system that the Council has been working on so hard for the past few years and stated that he believes that the Council is up to speed on the trail issues and Southeast Corridor/Lake Bemidji issues more than anyone else and he feels that the Council should work on that exclusively with the legislators and John Zacher. Erickson stated that there are a number of sections of trails, not just that particular piece, and asked Downs to clarify whether he was speaking of just the South shore section or all sections. Downs stated that he was speaking of just the part of the trail that the Council has been working on, has vested so much time in and have been working so hard on.

Minke stated that all projects will in some way be inter-related and that there would have to be relationships built with other entities, such as the University when talking about Diamond Point Park. Therefore, there will need to be more frequent contact and more elaborate updates between the Park Commission and the City Council to be sure everyone is going same direction.

Minke stated that there are a number of related park and trail issues, including the Paul Bunyan Trail Connection. He pointed out that the City has been very fortunate because the DNR has \$2 million in its 2006 Bonding Request for land acquisition for the Paul Bunyan Trail in Bemidji. He said that the City has never started out in that good of a position, with a State agency saying that this is their top priority. It was also stated by Minke that the HRDC is in the process of doing a Feasibility Study on a trail around Lake Bemidji and that project is going to be ongoing. He stated that he, Albrecht, Freeberg, and Joe from the HRDC met regarding the trail getting through Diamond Point and around Lake Boulevard.

Minke stated that there is a park fund through the Northwest Minnesota Foundation and at this time, there is not a lot of money invested, maybe a \$1,000 or so, but that it is a fund that is in need of a cause, of direction, and obviously, some fundraising, but it is an additional long term source of money that the City and the Community could build and access. Minke pointed out that there was a Regional Trails Assessment done in 2002 by the HRDC and that the Council and Park Commission need to be sure that they are reviewing that information as well.

Minke provided a tentative time line, which he explained may be a bit ambitious. He stated that from now until September the Council and Park Commission need to evaluate the Park Plan and establish project priorities. By October, Minke would like to see a park planner selected and beginning in December through March there should be detailed planning for the top priorities and in the Spring of 2006, construction will begin of the highest priority projects. The following Fall of 2006, the process would start over with the detailed planning for 2007 priorities. There will be probably three or four years where the Council and Park Commission does a detailed analysis, have public input, and construction beginning each spring. Lehmann agreed that this is a process that is many years in the making.

Minke stated that the projects obviously need to be prioritized, but also coordinated with other related projects. He stated that the Council decided to go with a “pay as you go” plan. He does not feel this will be a problem, as the most recent estimates of the revenues, which are from 2002, put the revenues at about a million and a half dollars per year. Lehmann questioned if the Council will have the estimates updated, explaining that he has had a number of people question him about that, feeling that updates should be done. Minke explained that if the Council is patient enough to wait until after the first quarter of 2006, we would have actual numbers. He doesn't feel that it is necessary to pay to have the estimates updated, when they would only be approximately six months ahead of having the actual numbers. Johnson stated that in two years we will have more in the City than we have now and he did not think it would be a bad idea to know what we're dealing with in revenues, dependant on the cost of the new estimates. Minke said that we could do that, but it should be kept in mind that it is very hard for them to estimate five years out after the annexation. He stated that we know from the initial figures, 90% of the retail activity in Beltrami County takes place within the City of Bemidji. Therefore, any annexation into the City will likely be a very small percentage of additional revenues. He reiterated that if it is expensive to get new estimates, he feels it would be better to wait until end of the first quarter.

Erickson pointed out that the Park Plan was created before it was realized that large tracks of land would be annexed into the City and it was not known at that time what kind of parks may need to be added as a result of that annexation, possibly changing the 2001 Plan. Albrecht stated that the Parkland Dedication Ordinance also needs to be factored into the Plan, where there has probably been approximately \$20,000 already accumulated in property thus far.

Minke stated that we need to identify which projects are the Council's top priorities. Downs pointed out that there is a list of park priorities in the Park Plan – Diamond Point Park, Bemidji City Park, Paul Bunyan/Library Parks and Brinkman Park. Albrecht pointed out that there is also a list of the Neighborhood Park priorities on the next page. Downs stated that when the discussion of the priorities arises, specifically the City Park, he hopes that there is some discussion about putting in updates to make the softball fields into a tournament usable facility so that the City could draw the tournaments that are currently going to other communities. Lehmann stated that Downs makes some very good points as far as deciding the issues of upgrading and that it would be nice to give a facelift to our priority items. He stated that, for example, with Diamond Point Park, it is not only giving the park a face lift, but it is considering what is going to draw people in and as Downs pointed out with the City Park, there are ball diamonds that are utilized 5 nights a week during the summer, but tournaments could attract additional weekend use. Markeson commented that along the same line with the City Park area, he stated that there is an item in the Plan regarding there being a youth advocate for considering such things as a skateboarding park or Frisbee golf area. He suggested that a group, such as the Bemidji Youth Advisory, be brought in as a youth consultant to consider what kinds of things would bring our City youth into our City parks. Meuers and Lehmann both agreed that this is an excellent idea so we can keep our youth active in the community.

Erickson questioned whether the money spent in the City Park on the ice arena to replace the floor could be reimbursed to the City, as the Plan includes making upgrades to the ice arena, or will those recent dollars be considered as maintenance and operations to the arena. Minke stated that he remembers reading that portion of the Plan and if that was an

option, those funds would come from that \$9.8 million and we would not be able to do a different project with those funds. He argued that since the Council already, in essence, has the arena repairs funded, that the Sales tax money not be used for the arena and rather, use it to fund another project identified in the Plan. Erickson stated that the arena was a considerable expenditure and being the City Park is a cornerstone park receiving a high priority in the Plan, that it seems coincidental we got Sales Tax about the same time that we spent money the City really doesn't have. Downs questioned how the City could get paid back for something that has already been done. Lehmann stated that it could be discussed in that future, but as Minke had stated, it has already been funded from other sources and if the City was reimbursed, that argument could then be used to get reimbursed for other purchases that have been made. Minke concluded that it may be permissible to be reimbursed and it will be kept on the table for later discussions. Erickson stated her concern about following the plan rigidly because it is actually a guideline and the desires and needs of the community have changed in the past five years and is therefore, leery about spending dollars that may no longer be applicable. Johnson also pointed out that there may be areas inherited with the annexation where additional parks may be needed or upgraded that need to be included in the revision of the Park Plan.

Markeson questioned where money from the Park Dedication would be spent. Minke stated that the park dedication fees need to be put into the parks in the neighborhood that the funds came from. Lehmann questioned if there are funds received through the Park Dedication, how it would be determined which park is available to a certain neighborhood. Haluptzok stated that the Ordinance specifies geographical areas. Minke noted that an assessment would need to be made as a Council. Erickson then questioned if that money could be used for a specific need in the community, for example a skateboarding park, that the whole community would use. Minke and Albrecht could not say for sure without research.

Meuers stated that the Park Commission has decided to go look at some of these parks and wanted to know if this is something the Council would like to do. The Council said they would like to do it on their own.

Downs stated that since we are going to use the Sales Tax dollars on a pay as we go basis, it seems we will need to lay out a timeframe for the money and decide which items take priority. He felt the money should be focused on the main trail system and the four main cornerstone parks. He noted that the Park plan prioritizes the parks projects, the trails projects and the neighborhood park projects as well. The neighborhood priority list is: Ridgeway Park, Cameron, North Lake Irving Park, Nymore Park, Gordon Falls Park and Roger Lehman Park. Haluptzok stated that Downs' point is well taken as to how to divvy out the money. Is it done on a percentage basis regarding parks versus trails or base it on the opportunities that arise.

Lehmann pointed out that the Council needs to concern themselves with these projects getting done the right way and as economically as possible. There cannot be projects half done and then have the focus diverted to another opportunity. Once a project gets started, the focus should be on completing it. Johnson stated that it needs to be kept in mind that the improvements that are made and projects that are completed will need to be taken care of after they are finished. He further stated that this Plan was completed before Wal-Mart and Home Depot were here and this additional revenue will likely make these continued improvements easier than first planned.

Lehmann stated that the Council needed to decide how to start the process and whether they want to the Park Commission to review the Plan, decide what has been done already, look at the parks and trails in a more detailed review and make recommendations to the Council through the study process. Haluptzok noted that down the road, possibly within 10 years, the Council will probably need to make a decision of whether to ask for another increase in the sales tax and the public will likely base their decision on how well the City uses this tax implementation. Johnson agreed, stating that the City needs to good job on whatever it is they decide to do because the public needs to see the sales tax at work for them and feel good about it. Erickson offered that the City needs to be sure they interact with other agencies and also needs to be realistic in their expectations.

Minke questioned if anyone from the Park Commission has any thoughts. Smith stated that the Park Commission needs to rethink what has changed since the Plan was adopted and realize that any changes made to these parks are going to be ongoing for the rest of these parks' lives. Abrecht noted that the Planning Commission meets every month and questioned if the Park Commission would be willing to consider this and the members present were in agreement. Smith stated that he feels the Parks and Recreation

Commission has been underutilized. Lehmann agreed and noted that it is great that the Commission members were there and ready to take this huge project on. Auger stated that in listening to this conversation, she felt that it has just re-enforced the Park Commissions struggle on what projects hold priority. These struggles have been between the “park people”, the “trail people”, the “softball people”, the “hockey group” and so on. She stated that when her children were young, her priority was the playgrounds. She said that the group needs to be able to put personal values aside and look at interests for the community at large by listening to what community is asking.

Downs stated that this is not about Parks versus Trails, but about opportunities that the Council has been working on for three or four years. He went on to state that studies have been done showing that 85% of the community’s population will use a trail if there is one. He went on that the longer the City waits, the more expensive building expenses are. McRae and Markeson agreed that the parks need to be used and the youth need to be brought into this. Lehmann encouraged Markeson to have this discussion with the Youth Advisory Commission.

Johnson stated that there are a lot of different ways Diamond Point Park could be updated. He said that the City needs to come up with what could be done with a lot of different projects and each one will need to be addressed separately. Lehmann said that it will need to publicize so that different areas of the public could be involved in each meeting. He stated that Meuers is on the Park commission and that will be the Council’s connection to the Park Commission’s work, besides the regularly scheduled meetings. McRae asked if the Council could give the Park Commission a more concrete direction to go as far as the Council’s priorities. He asked if they could follow the priority list directly of the Plan. Minke stated that that is a great guideline, but things have changed.

Minke stated that in listening to the discussion, that it sounds like there is some agreement and that that there looks to be a 3-pronged approach: Diamond Point Park needs to be revitalized, an overall assessment needs to be done to see what changes are needed based on the Plan, and the City needs to keep an ear to the ground for opportunities. He stated that if we proceed simultaneously, it is a lot to do, but feels it can be managed. It is up to the Park Commissions to make good recommendations and then Council to make good decisions on what needs to be done.

Lehmann asked if the Park Commission members are ready to take this on. Auger stated that having Councilmember Meuers on their commission will be helpful as there are a lot of unanswered questions. She further stated that they will want to be cautious that things are not developed that will be obsolete in 10-15 years. Johnson questioned whether there is any money left over to update Park plan. Minke stated that the plan was to retain a park planning consultant to do the detailed plans.

Minke questioned that since Park Board is here, if they would be willing to set their next meeting date, which they did schedule for Tuesday, August 30, 2005 at 5:00 p.m. in the City Hall Conference Room. Minke also stated that Dave Hengel from the HRDC has asked to present to the Council some Event Center information. The Council agreed to schedule a Special meeting for Thursday, September 1 at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

**ADJOURN**

There being no further business, motion by Hellquist, second by Downs, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shawn M. Swenson  
Deputy City Clerk