

**APPROVED MINUTES  
OF THE CITY  
COUNCIL WORK SESSION  
CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2020 – 5:00 PM**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

*The Work Session of the East Grand Forks City Council for Tuesday, November 10, 2020 was called to order by Council President Olstad at 5:00 P.M.*

**CALL OF ROLL:**

*On a Call of Roll the following members of the East Grand Forks City Council were present: Mayor Steve Gander, Council President Mark Olstad, Council Vice-President Chad Grassel, Council Members Clarence Vetter, Dale Helms, Tim Riopelle, Tim Johnson, and Marc DeMers.*

**DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM:**

*The Council President Determined a Quorum was present.*

**1. Downtown Transportation Study – Earl Haugen**

Mr. Haugen introduced himself and stated how he was excited to present the Downtown Transportation Study along with Mr. Mike Bittner . He explained how this study focused on Demers Avenue because one of the major issues is the traffic signal equipment on the Minnesota side. He stated the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) has the funding to replace the system on the Minnesota side and they are trying work with both sides so the timing of the traffic signals would change based on the current traffic conditions. He turned it over to Mr. Bittner to present the study.

Mr. Bittner stated again they were looking at both downtowns in this study and they were trying to find a balance for all modes of transportation and Demers Avenue. He said this study was unique because of all of the funding that was available and how many projects were already planned for the downtown so they are able to utilize some of those projects to help with the improvement strategies that were identified during this study. He explained there was a three-phase process, which included identifying needs and opportunities, develop and assess improvement strategies, and then formulate implementation strategies. He said there were four steering committee meetings and three public engagement opportunities to collect information. He added the steering committee was a diverse group made up of downtown stakeholders, leading oversight agencies, and city representatives.

Mr. Bittner continued saying project prioritization was based upon public feedback, steering committee feedback, and technical assessment which helped them rank alternatives and when things should be implemented. He started with the high priority projects and the first item was the Riverwalk Centre parking lot, which was the only location in the downtown areas that currently did not have pedestrian facilities. He said improving this area would make it more pedestrian friendly. He said another complaint area was on crossing Demers Avenue and suggested installing a beacon allowing for safe pedestrian crossings.

Mr. Bittner reviewed the crash and injury statistics for the study area, many of the crashes were rear end crashes, and that was due to the traffic lights not coordinating. He stated this was why they were looking at an adaptive signal control system for the traffic signals, which adjusted to current conditions and could be used on both sides of the river. He said scheduled traffic signal projects allowed them to help inform the scope of that work so they were able to get what was needed. He continued with another concept of the addition of a pedestrian bridge because the current bridge cannot provide a safe crossing for bikes and was not the best for pedestrians. He commented how the idea was to utilize the BNSF pier that is already in the river, which would create a bike/pedestrian corridor crossing and it is estimated to cost \$2.6 million so it would be quite expensive. He added in Grand Forks they were looking at bulb outs for some of the crossings, creating a connection to trails, and safety improvements to 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

He quickly reviewed the medium priority projects that included lane reconfiguration, a possible bike lane, the East Grand Forks quiet zone, and bike policy changes. He said there were low priority items that he would answer questions about or they could be reviewed on the project website, which was [www.dtforksmobility.com](http://www.dtforksmobility.com). He asked if there were any questions or comments.

Council member Helms asked what the blue lights were for on the traffic signals. Mr. Haugen explained it was to help notify a police officer when a light turns red so they can see if a driver runs a red light. Council member Helms commented he drives through Grand Forks at different times of the day and asked if the timing was changed on the traffic lights. Mr. Haugen said most of the signals in corridors are on timing plans; there were at least six to ten timing plans depending on the day and time of day. He added the timing plan was only as good as the day it was monitored and there were variety of reasons for possible issues. He added the days they are good conditions meet the timing plans. Council member Helms said MNDOT is on board with the upgrades, there are two that are farther apart, and he asked if the system would be synchronized. He added he did not see much for backups on the Sorlie Bridge except during construction and asked if the distance would be an issue. Mr. Haugen said the current equipment cannot communicate, when the equipment was replaced they would be able to communicate, and the Demers corridor will be on one system. He stated the adaptive signal control would help and change as traffic changed. Mr. Bittner commented how the closer the traffic signals the more difficult can be and with the changing traffic, an adaptive signal system would help instead of trying to have timing plans for all of the different scenarios. Mr. Haugen said they were already investing \$1 million into the traffic signals and they are supporting an additional \$25,000 to \$30,000 investment for the system to make it that much better. There were no other questions.

## **2. Discussion on Lease Agreement for the Metropolitan Planning Organization – Nancy Ellis**

Ms. Ellis stated she had received the request from the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to continue renting office space in city hall. She explained their rental rate was based off the federal government and the rent increased up to \$12.57 per square foot. She added they do not foresee moving at this time so she may request a two-year lease allowing negotiations to be opened up at the end of next year to receive the CPI number for rental space without exceeding a 5% increase. There were no questions.

This item will be referred to a City Council Meeting for action.

## **3. Discussion on Recreation Facility Improvement Plans – Reid Huttunen**

Mr. Huttunen reminded everyone the City won a \$30,000 prize from Kraft, they had reached out asking what the City had in mind to use the prize money for, and he said it would be saved until the plan was in

place for updating the ice plant. He said when he shared that information the NHL asked if they could speak with their partners to see if there was some way they could help. He explained they helped last year's winner from Michigan retrofit their ice plant for approximately \$200,000, which would be a big change from a brand new system for \$2 million. He stated he had another meeting set up in the coming weeks with the same partners, they needed more information about the current system, and he could bring back their recommendations. He said he had included slides from a previous meeting to remind the Council about the project priorities such as new locker rooms.

Mr. Huttunen then asked if they would like to continue the discussion on a local sales tax. He commented he knew the timing was not great with everything going on with COVID but the League of Minnesota Cities sent out information that the State Legislature did not make any changes to the criteria for a local sales tax. He said if they wish to pursue a local sales tax it could be voted on in November 2022 and the request could be resubmitted to the State by the end of January in 2021. He asked for direction on how the Council would like to move forward.

Council President Olstad stated his personal opinion was to move forward and get information to the State Legislature by January. He said he did not want this rushed, if the City gets approval it will allow time to plan, to hold meetings, and gather public input. He added waiting until the following year would put them into a time crunch so they should move forward with it. He commented how this had to be voted on within two years once the State gives their approval. Council member Riopelle said if this gets kicked it back for some reason it would give the City time to fix the issues and submit it again. Mayor Gander said he agreed it is a good faith effort on the City's part to restart the community conversation, and determine what the community wants. He added this would give them something to look forward too.

Mr. Huttunen informed the Council the application for the updates to the LaFave Park area was not granted funding. He explained the funding for these projects was reduced by 20%. He added he was told they liked this project and encouraged the City to apply again. Mayor Gander said there was feedback from the Visitors Bureau and Explore Minnesota about the fishing opener application. He stated they were impressed with the application and he would not be surprised if the City was hosting the fishing opener in a few years.

#### **4. Consider Potential Resolution with BNSF for Closure of 3<sup>rd</sup> St NW Railroad Crossing – David Murphy**

Mr. Murphy said the next step in the quiet zone implementation process was a resolution that BNSF was requesting from the City for the closure of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street crossing. He explained the railroad does not pay for road closures but they do offer incentives for closures, he had handed out the engineer's estimates for the Council to review, and the initial offer from BNSF was \$100,000. He stated the estimate for all of the work was around \$450,000, which included engineering costs. He said if they looked at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street option he estimated the cost would be approximately \$200,000 with soft costs and they need to come up with a counter offer. He added BNSF made it clear this was an initial offer and they do expect counteroffers. He suggested going back with at least a \$200,000 counteroffer to cover the costs of closing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street crossing. Discussion followed about if the City could opt out of the agreement or have the right to refuse to continue, based on the estimate the railroad would be paying for the upgrades to the gate system, and how the system for a possible pedestrian crossing by 3<sup>rd</sup> Street has not been finalized yet.

Council President Olstad asked when this needed to be finalized. Mr. Murphy said January or February. Council member DeMers suggested to find out what funding the City would be receiving from MNDOT.

Mr. Murphy said funding from MNDOT depended on when this project was completed. Mayor Gander asked if there was going to be a local share. Mr. Murphy said there was. More discussion followed about the counteroffer and going back with 100% of the costs after it is determined how much funding was coming from MNDOT removed from the total. Mayor Gander said he agreed they should try to keep this project so there was no local costs including the engineering costs. Mr. Murphy said he would bring that back as a counteroffer.

This item will be brought back to a future work session.

**ADJOURN:**

**A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER DEMERS, TO ADJOURN THE NOVEMBER 10, 2020 WORK SESSION OF THE EAST GRAND FORKS, MINNESOTA CITY COUNCIL AT 5:43 P.M.**

*Voting Aye: Grassel, DeMers, Vetter, Helms, Riopelle, Johnson, and Olstad.*

*Voting Nay: None.*

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David Murphy, City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer