

**STAFF SUMMARY
CITY OF MINNETONKA
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 2008
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Council Present: Dick Allendorf, Bob Ellingson, James Hiller, Terry Schneider, Tony Wagner, Brad Wiersum, and Mayor Jan Callison.

Council Absent: None

Staff: John Gunyou, Geralyn Barone, Perry Vetter, Dave Johnson, Ron Rankin, Lee Gustafson, David Maeda

Callison called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. City Manager John Gunyou reminded the council of the upcoming joint meeting with the comprehensive plan steering committee, the economic development authority, the park board, and the planning commission. Barone said there would be a report on the activities of the comprehensive plan steering committee, review of potential policies and discussion of next steps in the process.

1. Upper Minnehaha Creek Corridor update

Gunyou gave the presentation.

Wiersum noted that the Buckthorn removal along Minnetonka Boulevard is quite noticeable. Gunyou said Public Works had crews out the past couple of weeks.

Gustafson noted that a traffic circle had initially been considered in the McGinty Road and Plymouth Road area, but another idea is a tunnel on the south side of the bridge connecting the parkway. This would allow people to crossover Plymouth Road without having to go over the street.

Wagner said the reason the Mills district is special is because it is an area people go to. Any future plans should ensure the business area remains a place where people go. He asked for an update on the request he made at a recent council meeting for how the business community will be engaged during the process. Gunyou said the planning up to this point has not looked specifically at the area other than to conclude it should remain a retail village. He noted a local developer has begun working with the owners of the residential homes north of the Mills area independently of the city's process. The developer has met with city staff to discuss coordinating planning efforts so that the public vision for the creek is incorporated into any private redevelopment.

Barone reported on the schedule of upcoming meetings for public involvement.

Schneider asked if the potential relocation of the old city hall has been looked at. He said the past discussion was that it made sense to move the building as long as there was a good use for it. Barone said the issue would be discussed at the joint meeting with the history commission and the historical society. A discussion

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should also include the Minnetonka Community Church, who owns the building, to see what their plans are.

Allendorf said it's important to look at what will be done in the near future to open up the creek to those who want to enjoy the area. The money that is needed for the project is taxpayer money whether it comes from federal, state or local funding. He encouraged including amenities that would be used by many of the city's residents.

Ellingson agreed with Schneider on the future of the old city hall. He said the future of the building should be determined by first figuring out a use.

Wiersum said the project is an exciting concept. He agreed with Allendorf that a phased approach is needed to ensure the best interests of the city. He also agreed with Wagner on the importance of the retail area.

Gunyou noted there are near term and long term ideas being considered. Improvements in the Burwell Park area are more imminent, because it is a city project that has been funded. He said it makes sense to improve some of the trails at the same time to provide linkages. The potential private development in the Mills area will require city attention to make sure public objectives are met. The timing for the area that includes the interpretive center will depend on how quickly the watershed district wants to proceed and the availability of regional funding. The timeframe for improvements to the gateway area is also less certain, because MNDOT has reallocated the funds. Gunyou said it is important that all the groups involved share a common vision and direction as individual project details are developed.

Callison said she envisions two months of gathering feedback from the stakeholders, then the steering committee will have to analyze the feedback to proceed.

2. Boards and commissions interviews

Callison thanked the residents for applying. She said filling vacancies involves consideration of geographic balance, gender and specific skills.

Carl Adamek

Adamek said he has been a resident of the city for 32 years. He said of the six cities he has lived in, Minnetonka is the best managed. He applied because it is time for him to give back to the city. His interest in serving on the police board comes from his positive interaction with police officers from the city. With the city becoming more diverse there are more opportunities and challenges.

Allendorf asked Adamek what he meant with the term "leveraging diversification."

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Adamek said diversity is not something to shy away from or be nervous about. With diversity comes a multitude of ideas and perspectives. He said the best decisions come out of a difference of opinions and ideas.

Schneider said Adamek's skills and interests might make him a good fit for the Community Commission.

Adamek asked what the city council's vision and expectations were of the Police Advisory Committee and the Community Commission. Callison said the council looks to the committees to give guidance when necessary. Wiersum said the objective of the Police Advisory Committee is to provide more interaction between the department and residents. He said the committee's meetings are more informal than other boards and commissions. Allendorf said the committee also serves as a sounding board for the police to get feedback from what residents are hearing in the community.

Ellen Weishar Cousins

Cousins said she has been a Minnetonka resident for the past 16 years.

Allendorf asked why Cousins was interested in serving on the Planning Commission. Cousins said she likes visualizing growth.

Schneider said his standard question for Planning Commission applicants is how an applicant would balance the conflict between an application that meets the criteria of the ordinances but has significant opposition to what is being proposed. Cousins said conflict is the toughest part of the job. She said at times it comes down to whether the proposal is a legal use of the land. Other times community concerns have to be listened to in determining if the project fits in with the entire city and not just the particular area.

Wagner said the timing commitment of the Planning Commission is more than the other boards and commissions. He asked Cousins to elaborate on her availability to meet the needs of the position. Cousins said she is busy with other commitments but can set aside the time to do the duties.

Hiller commended Cousins for her work for the Hopkins School District. He said her application noted that she wants to take an active role in development, direction and vision. He asked her to elaborate. Cousins said she wants to make sure the projects coming forth are good for the city.

Callison asked what lessons Cousins learned from her service on the Hopkins School Boundary Task Force. Cousins said she learned for many people change is difficult. A balance is needed between what is good for a neighborhood and what is good for the district.

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Wiersum asked of all her volunteer work, what Cousins found to be the most rewarding. Cousins said the playground project was the most rewarding because it changed the community in a significant way. The project allowed children access to a playground they otherwise would not have had.

Cousins said she thought there is more contention with proposed projects than in years past. Callison said the Planning Commission has struggled with some recent difficult applications. The meetings have been longer and the discussions more difficult. She said the commission has at times struggled with their role in advising the council and how much freedom they have in altering a proposal.

Allendorf said redevelopment projects are more difficult than development projects because redevelopment projects involve neighbors who are used to seeing something and change is difficult. He said the commission's role is to interpret ordinances and advise the council.

Wagner said he feels the commission at times has not solved enough issues before an application gets to the council.

Schneider said it may feel contentious now but it is nothing compared to how things were in the 1980s when he served on the commission. He said in the past, very rarely would an application get approved in one meeting because of the number of questions, the give and take and the open ended nature of the process. He agreed redevelopment proposals tend to be more contentious but the next challenge will be lot splits.

William Hippee, Jr.

Hippee has lived in Minnetonka for a year and a half. He practiced law for more than 30 years. He said he did not know a lot about city government and was open to suggestions how his skills could best be used by the city.

Wagner asked what prompted Hippee to apply. Hippee said when he was practicing law it was difficult to find time to volunteer. Now that he has the time city government work interests him.

Schneider said Hippee may benefit in participating in the city's Citizen Academy that teaches people about the various city functions.

Callison asked Hippee to elaborate on an answer in his application to the question about the most important issue the city faces in the next several years. Hippee responded to the question by stating the importance of providing resources to disadvantaged residents. Hippee said his answer was based on his interest in working on mental illness and substance abuse issues.

Hiller said he liked Hippee's answer about conciliating consensus decisions between

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staff and the board of the Mental Health Association. He asked the secret in reaching consensus. Hippee said in dealing with a dispute, listening skills are important. He said it is also important to ask the right questions to facilitate moving people closer together.

Wiersum said he liked Hippee's comments on the importance of listening. He said as residents come forward with concerns it is important to listen and develop a position that people can live with and understand or at least believe the decision is well reasoned.

Hippee said in the comments he heard about the Planning Commission process he was unsure if the commission's role was simply to interpret the ordinance or if the process was more interactive where the commission could facilitate bringing opposing interests together. Wagner said that in the past the commission did more facilitation but the council has to do more work in trying to find solutions between differing concerns.

Schneider said it depends on the circumstances. If a developer comes forward who is inflexible and the proposal meets all the ordinances, it is difficult to get the developer to change the proposal. Most developers come to the city asking for something and this provides the city the ability to seek improvements.

Anne Malm Hossfeld

Malm Hossfeld is a lifelong Minnetonka resident. She said she is a problem solver and wants to get involved in the development process when there are a lot of options still on the table and there is a chance to be creative.

Wagner said in one of Malm Hossfeld's answers in her application she mentioned the city should avoid ad hoc land use planning. He asked her to elaborate. Malm Hossfeld said current ordinances and the comprehensive guide plan serve to let people understand what future planning may be. When a proposal comes along that requires changes it is important to listen to residents to understand expectations. It is also important to work with the developer to come up with changes that make the proposal closer to the guide plan.

Schneider asked Malm Hossfeld to respond to his question about weighing feedback against interpreting what is in the ordinances. She said when something is in a certain land use there has been some forewarning. She said property rights are important. She said in some instances it is about talking with the applicant to see if they are willing to accommodate the neighbors by changing the proposal. The process of mediation is finding what the true objection is and to find a solution to the objection.

Wiersum asked for an example of Malm Hossfeld's ability to ask great questions. She said her business has an office staff and a shop staff. There is a wall between

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the two areas. The phones only ring in the office and management wanted to get the salesperson to respond to more calls. She asked the question if the phone rang in the salesperson's office. By asking that question it prompted a discussion about getting the right tools and avoided asking questions about dealing with different personalities.

Wiersum asked if Malm Hossfeld was only interested in serving on the Planning Commission or if she would consider other boards or commissions. She said she was interested most in the Planning Commission but she was open to serving on another committee if it was decided her skills would be beneficial.

Hiller asked Malm Hossfeld what she saw as the importance of consensus in the planning process. She said one goal is to diffuse anger and dissatisfaction and if there is dissent, finding something in the middle. Consensus is about finding what people are upset about and finding a solution.

Allendorf said Malm Hossfeld's skill set would fit well on the Community Commission. He said as projects come forward it is very difficult to satisfy both sides. What often happens that when people don't want a project in their neighborhood, no matter how much the project is changed to accommodate concerns, some people remain opposed and feel their concerns were not listened to. He said often over time people see that the projects turn out to be an asset.

Malm Hossfeld agreed that often the process is about two parties with different goals. She said if all questions have been answered satisfactorily she won't hesitate to vote for what is best.

Paul Kobs

Kobs said growing up his parents were always very involved with the school board, parent/teacher organizations, and church and community organizations. He learned at a young age the importance of giving back to the community.

Callison said as she read Kobs' application the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District seemed like a natural fit given his background. She asked him why he chose the Planning Commission as his second choice. Kobs said he always had been interested in planning issues. Having listened to the time commitment discussion with the other applicants and given this would be the first time serving on a board he said he would be willing to serve on a committee other than the Planning Commission.

Hiller noted Kobs has been active with a yacht club and sailing associations. He asked what Kobs liked most about working with those groups. Kobs said he likes the policy making process.

Wiersum asked Kobs how much time he had to give to serve on a board or

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commission. Kobs said attending a meeting once a month would be an ideal amount of time.

Ryan Maxwell

Maxwell said volunteerism is an important part of government.

Schneider asked Maxwell to elaborate on one of his application responses that said he is concerned about the future of Minnetonka. Maxwell said he has lived in the city for 18 years and he wants his civic involvement to increase from voting and calling elected officials to serving in a voluntary capacity.

Allendorf said Maxwell's application indicated that the Park Board might be a good place for him to serve. Maxwell said he had a general idea of the board's responsibilities because he served on a park board while attending the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. The major issue facing that board was a riverbank stabilization project. He weighed his decision on the issue based on if what was being proposed was a want or a need and decided it was a need for the overall health of the community.

Schneider asked Maxwell for an answer on his question about balancing property rights versus vocal opposition to a project. Maxwell said the issue is about balancing economic viability and improvements to the city with resident concerns. He said often people get involved only when an issue impacts them personally and by volunteering it was a way to get involved proactively in the process.

Wagner what specific issues are of concern to Maxwell. Maxwell said he wants the city to continue to grow and be a great place to live. He is concerned about where the city goes from here.

Marie Moilanen

Moilanen said she is a graduate of the Citizenship Academy and that experience made her more curious about serving on a board or commission. She retired from teaching two years ago and immediately began work at the Marsh as a personal trainer for seniors. She said serving on a board would give her a feeling of patriotism.

Ellingson asked Moilanen what her favorite park in the city is and what some of her favorite activities are. Moilanen said she enjoyed watching her children learn how to canoe and shoot archery at Jidana Park. She also enjoys walking around Jidana Park.

Allendorf said he has heard the Senior Board needs younger seniors to help keep the community it serves vital.

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Patrick Robben

Robben said he is a commercial litigator, and wants to become more involved in the community. He enjoys his job because he is paid to learn what his clients do for a living and he enjoys learning.

Schneider asked Robben to respond to his question about property rights versus vocal opposition to a project. Robben said balancing a situation is important and he would look at each project on a case by case basis. It's important to discuss any precedence that may be set as well as the spirit and letter of an ordinance.

Callison asked if Robben had ever appeared before the Planning Commission in a professional capacity. Robben said he never appeared before the Minnetonka Planning Commission but did work on an issue that was discussed at the St. Paul Planning Commission.

Allendorf asked Robben to elaborate on a response indicating the city needs to do a better job communicating with its residents. Robben said it's important with development and redevelopment issues and with the preservation of open space, that residents know about all the issues that are out there.

Wiersum asked Robben for suggestions for improving communication. Robben said the city needs to continue to use different forms of communication, ranging from the web site and newsletter to notices on specific projects.

Ron Timm

Timm said he is interested in serving the city. He teaches photography part-time.

Schneider noted Timm's application indicated natural resource issues are his number one concern. He asked Timm to respond to the question about balancing property rights with a vocal opposition especially for a project that might impact open space. Timm said the city's ordinances have been established for a reason and would play a major part of his decision making process.

Callison asked Timm what prompted him to apply to serve on a board or commission. Timm said now that he is retired he has time to devote to volunteer work. Callison said with Timm's current work teaching photography, he might be a good candidate to serve on the Senior Board. Timm said he only knew about that board from what he has read in the city's newsletter. He indicated serving on the board might be a possibility.

Aimee Blatz

Blatz said she currently is a government contracts counsel for Thomson West. She wants to become involved with the city to help keep the city's quality of life high.

Hiller asked why serving on the Planning Commission interested Blatz. She said

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land use issues interest her and she has been active with issues in her Sherwood Forest neighborhood. She wants to learn more about the city's planning process.

Schneider asked Blatz to answer his question about balancing property rights and the concerns of a vocal opposition. Blatz said it is important to listen to both sides to determine what the real issues are. It is important to determine historical precedence as well as long term implications to the community.

Wagner noted a response in Blatz's application that said the role of the Planning Commission is balancing competing needs while maintaining integrity to the city's plan and strategic vision. Blatz said the guide plan should be looked to in evaluating and potentially improving a proposal. She said the city should use a variety of methods to communicate to residents such as the web site, a blog, and email. She said education is vital to the process.

Kenneth Schindler

Schindler said he submitted his application because he wants to become more involved in the community. He works as a building contractor and his degree is in landscape architecture.

Callison asked Schindler to elaborate on a response in his application about the planning commission needing to fairly and consistently enforce the city's ordinances. Schindler said as the city continues to grow and redevelop it is important to maintain the natural resources. He said he understands the Planning Commission's role is to make consistent interpretation of ordinances.

Callison said that Schindler's background might make him a good fit for the Park Board.

Wiersum asked Schindler what he likes best about living in Minnetonka. Schindler said he enjoys the city's natural resources and living in a large city that doesn't feel like a large city.

3. Adjournment

The study session adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David E. Maeda
City Clerk