

**STAFF SUMMARY
CITY OF MINNETONKA
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2011
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Council Present: Dick Allendorf, Bob Ellingson, Amber Greves, James Hiller, Brad Wiersum, and Mayor Terry Schneider. Tony Wagner was excused.

Staff: John Gunyou, Geralyn Barone, Julie Wischnack, Elise Durbin, David Maeda

Schneider called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. He distributed information he received at the National League of Cities conference.

Barone gave an update on the city's preparation for possible flooding this spring.

1. Strategic Planning

Gunyou reviewed the process that had been used.

Consultant Kathy Graves of Parenteau Graves asked for overall reaction to the document.

Hiller said the revised vision statement provided a clearer purpose. Graves noted Hiller had voiced the most concerns that the vision statement had to be a visionary statement.

Schneider said the mission statement was too generic and applied to every city. He suggested language to include "to maintain the unique character of Minnetonka."

Wiersum said the proposed mission statement indicated the city was going to do its job and do it well and agreed with Schneider that something had to be added to get at the distinctiveness of Minnetonka.

Greves said she liked the delineation between the external and internal for the vision statement. Graves said that was not done for all clients but seemed to work out well in this case. Greves suggested adding language to the external vision statement to include employers and businesses. Schneider said he liked adding the word "employer" to the statement.

Wiersum suggested changing the external vision statement from "Minnetonka will be 'the' community of choice" to "Minnetonka will be 'a' community of choice" because using "the" was too grandiose. He also suggested changing "in a naturally beautiful environment" to "sustaining a naturally beautiful environment." This would indicate the city is taking responsibility for the natural environment rather than just existing in the natural environment.

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Hiller said he preferred using “the community of choice” rather than “a community of choice” because it indicated the city was trying to be something grand and provides a goal bigger than adequacy.

Ellingson noted Allendorf had a good comment at the previous meeting about including “preserving a enhancing the natural beauty of Minnetonka” that got to Wiersum’s suggestion.

Schneider suggested adding “with a positive and helpful attitude” to the internal vision statement to capture the city’s culture. Wiersum suggested removing the word “exceptional.” He agreed with Schneider’s suggestion to put the emphasis on the way services would be delivered rather than on employee behavior. Allendorf noted that currently when somebody calls the city the front desk staff always answers in a helpful and confident manner. This was an example of the quality the city was after. Wiersum said the focus of the internal vision statement should be on the customers and not on the services the city provides.

Graves asked for comments about the proposed guiding principles.

Schneider said the guiding principles were the meat of the document that captured a lot in a limited amount of words.

Wiersum suggested adding “innovative regional and national leadership” to the principles because the city has come up with a lot of innovative ideas. He also suggested adding “promote effective service delivery” noting innovating on the strategy was more important than innovating on the tactics.

Hiller said he did not like the statement “striving to do the right thing at the right time for the right reason.” He suggested ending the statement after “We will focus on excellent customer service.” Schneider said he preferred leaving the “striving to do...” part of the sentence. He said excellent customer service was in the eye of the beholder and the second part of the sentence addressed the situation where a staff person did what was reasonable but still failed to satisfy a difficult customer. Wiersum agreed. He said the city should take the approach of treating all customers as if the customer was right and then do the right thing. Even if that customer remains unsatisfied, staff would know they did their jobs well since they tried to do the right thing at the right time for the right reason.

Schneider suggested adding a section about the city’s fiduciary management to the categories. Graves pointed out that provision was part of the guiding principles. Schneider said the guiding principles were meant to be all encompassing. The goals and strategies specified what would be done in the specific categories. Adding a separate goal related to fiduciary management would focus attention on that responsibility. He suggested the language read, “Manage the city’s assets and resources with a high level of financial

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stewardship.” Allendorf and Wiersum said they agreed with Schneider’s suggestion. Wiersum said he would add language indicating the city would do the things that are needed or necessary to preserve the high quality of the city’s infrastructure. Schneider said he liked that suggestion. Ellingson said the phrase could include “physical assets and financial resources.” Hiller indicated the language needed to include mention of ongoing expenses and taxes. He also said he would support adding the goal and leaving it as a guiding principle. Greves said she would expand the provision as an additional guiding principle. Wiersum said the city’s financial management was what made the city a great place to live.

Graves asked other than managing for the long term what the city did to manage with a high level financial stewardship. Wiersum said unlike other cities, the city did not depend on money that it could not depend on. It relied on its own resources and tax base and did not spend beyond that. Schneider said the city lived within its means and didn’t promise things that raised unrealistic expectations. Wiersum said the city also did not put problems off but dealt with them when they needed to be dealt with.

Graves asked for comments on the natural environment goal/strategy. Allendorf asked for clarification on what the term “green living” meant. Graves said the term referred to recycling, energy conservation, and sustainable operations. Allendorf said those things were already included in the goal. Wiersum said he too did not like using the term “green living.” He suggested adding “environmental stewardship.” Greves said the category captured what the council had previously talked about in an effective and focused manner. Wiersum questioned the use of the term “reasonable growth.” He said what that term meant was in the eye of the beholder. He suggested adding “carefully balancing community growth and development with preservation efforts.” He also suggested listing the city’s other natural amenities to the mention of water and the urban forest. Ellington asked for an example of another natural amenity. Schneider said the city’s unique topography was an example. Ellingson agreed. Wiersum also cited the city’s wetlands as an example.

Schneider said he had a concern about the last bullet in the natural environment goal/strategy that read, “Taking a leadership role in promoting energy and water conservation, sustainable operations and infrastructure, recycling and green living.” He said he struggled with the perception of how people looked at taking a leadership role that implied getting way out ahead of others and doing pioneering work. He said he did not see the city doing that but rather finding out what was working in other communities before implementing those ideas. Greves asked Schneider if his comments indicated he didn’t currently seeing the city taking the leadership role or if he meant that he would like to see that happen. Schneider said to be a true leader in the natural environment area, substantial resources would have to be devoted to it. He said he didn’t see the city playing that role but

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instead playing the role of encouraging and supporting others efforts. Hiller agreed. Greves said using the word “encouraging” wasn’t strong enough. Wiersum suggested using a term such as “being an early adopter.” The city wanted to be on the leading edge rather than the bleeding edge. He agreed the city was not in the position to be a driver but did invest resources noting most cities did not have a natural resources manager or a forester. Graves suggested using the term “actively promoting.” Greves suggested adding “take an active role in promoting.”

Hiller said the reason residents liked the green aspect of the city was because everywhere one went, there was a natural feel. Reading the proposed language made it sound as if the focus was on specific areas in the city. Schneider said the way the city was able to achieve the natural feel throughout the community was by relaxing standards on subdivision development in order to be sensitive to the topography. Hiller said previous versions of the document better captured the point he was getting at by including language about “preserving the character.” Wiersum suggested adding language about the distinctive character of neighborhoods. He noted the city had no cookie cutter neighborhoods.

Graves asked for comments on the public safety goal/strategy. Greves noted it was specific and straightforward.

Graves asked for comments on the transportation goal/strategy. Wiersum said the term “community interests” undersold the city’s goal and suggested using the term “community needs and interests.” Schneider suggested adding the words “we will work” to the main heading.

Graves asked for comments on the community development goal/strategy. Schneider said he had a concern about using the word “partners” in the clause, “Supporting business retention and expansion to help our private sector partners remain economically competitive.” Graves suggested removing the word “partners.” Greves suggested adding language about attracting new businesses to the city. Wiersum said he had a concern about the clause, “Initiating programs and policies that preserve the unique character of existing housing, while broadening choices for a changing population of younger households, empty nesters and seniors.” In reality the city had a dramatically aging population and the clause did not include that. He said the council had discussed attracting younger families to the city but the reality was there was not housing stock available for younger families. What the city needed is housing stock where the older residents could move to open up housing available to the younger families. Hiller said the real issue was the city’s rapidly aging population and somehow reversing that by attracting younger families. Wiersum said his concern was the clause’s emphasis was on housing and housing for younger families was not the issue. The real issues were affordability and other things.

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Graves asked who the council was trying to attract to the city. Schneider said the goal was to meet the needs of its aging population while trying to attract younger families. Greves said the council has said it didn't want to make it seem like it wanted to push older families out but rather wanted to make sure housing was available for them as well. Schneider said this often meant providing a smaller place for seniors to move to. He said the goal was to provide a downsizing option for the empty nesters. Wiersum said the goal was to leverage the distinctive character of the existing housing to meet the needs of the current populace while at the same time having programs that encourage young families to move to the city.

Graves asked for comments on the recreational goal/strategy. Greves suggested adding "and varying ability levels" to the clause, "Offering a full range of programs that meet the needs of all ages, from our youngest residents to our senior citizens." Schneider suggested removing the term "regional" to the clause about trail systems. Wiersum suggested amending it to indicating a connection with the regional trail system. Wiersum suggested adding "trails" to the clause "Responsibly maintaining our parks and recreational facilities, while fairly balancing user fees with general community support" because of their importance to the city.

Schneider called a recess at 7:42 p.m.

He called the meeting back to order at 7:56 p.m.

2. 2010 Minnetonka Transit Study

Community Development Director Julie Wischnack and Community Development Supervisor Elise Durbin gave the staff report.

Allendorf noted the staff report indicated that people are willing to walk a mile to the County Road 73 Park and Ride. He asked if this was because people take then take the bus downtown. Wischnack indicated that was correct.

Ellingson asked for clarification on what the annual ridership number included. The consultant, Jim Lasher from LSA Design, said to calculate the number of people who ride the buses, the number should be divided in half because it included the rides to the destination and the rides back. Ellingson asked if there was information on the number of different people who rode buses rather than a count that includes people who ride buses on multiple occasions. Wischnack indicated that information was not available. Gunyou said that there were questions included in this year's community survey that would help gauge the interest in transit and who currently uses it. Wiersum said if the assumption was made that most of the annual ridership number was comprised of people taking buses downtown, then it appeared there were around 1,000 to 1,200 unique

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riders. Schneider said he would like to see information about how Minnetonka's ridership compared with neighboring communities.

Allendorf asked how many people used the Transit Link service. Durbin said it was estimated that Transit Link would provide around 10,500 trips a year. She noted an estimate was used because the service had only been up and running for one year. Allendorf said it was likely that the 10,500 trips included people who used the service more than once rather than unique riders.

Schneider said ultimately what was needed was information to indicate how many residents were using the transit services and if the services were adequately meeting the needs. He said this would be more useful than the ridership numbers that were included in the study.

Hiller asked if the community route services would be available during the evening hours. Durbin said the running time would be 10 ½ to 11 hours a day and would allow for evening routes.

Allendorf noted the estimate was for around 30,000 to 40,000 rides a year. This would average around 100 rides per day. If round trips are calculated in, this would mean around 50 people would use the service. Wiersum noted it would cost around \$8-\$10 per ride.

Gunyou indicated staff and the consultants had preliminary discussions with representatives from Metro Transit, Plymouth Metro Link, and Southwest Transit. He said Metro Transit was much more amenable to talking with the city than in the past. Plymouth Metro Link also was eager to talk at the direction of the Plymouth city council. He said Southwest Transit was less receptive. Schneider indicated the Southwest Transit policy board had contacted him numerous times. Gunyou said what was being discussed was unique and driven by the fact that Minnetonka is not an opt out end of the line city but was located in the middle. The location means residents will always have excellent service and keeps the city viewed as important because it enforces the integrity of the regional system. Metro Transit views the city as an asset. The idea is also for staff to look at all options and work with neighboring cities to see if a collaboration would lead to improvements. He said staff would not recommend the city run a transit system unless otherwise directed by the council. He added the overall process would likely take some time to complete.

Ellingson asked if it was possible to have an arrangement with all three entities. Wischnack said that was a possibility. Gunyou noted Plymouth Metro Link and Southwest Transit were very different operations. Plymouth Metro Link was more of a local circulator service while Southwest Transit was an express service to downtown.

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Allendorf said he agreed with the recommendations. He said he was looking to quantify what was the real transit need for residents. Before the city embarked on an effort in establishing an interior route or a north south route, he would like to see there was a need in the community.

Schneider said the number of residents who are transit dependent or semi-transit dependent was likely a small subset of the overall community. If nothing was changing and the light rail does not happen then the current system was probably sufficient. He said the advent of the Southwest Light Rail line had the potential to change the dynamics and lead to people wanting to use the transit system.

Wiersum said he agreed with Allendorf that it was important to determine the number of people who use transit. Given the \$4 million available funding from the Met Council, if 2,000 people were using transit this would mean each individual was being given a \$2,000 subsidy per year. This might be the right policy decision, but it still was a lot of money. He said running full buses back and forth to downtown likely was an effective service but running buses north and south was prohibitively expensive. Looking for cost effective options to provide the north south service was important. He said he supported option two to find some out of the box way to lower the costs while still getting the service that is needed.

Hiller said if the light rail is built then the Met Council will likely want to work with Metro Transit to make the interconnections. He said he would like to see information about the economic benefit of the transit service. Would the businesses in the Ridgedale and village centers see enough benefit from a circular route to make it viable? Another concern is what level of partnership the city would have to be involved in to provide adequate services in the city. Lasher said there would need to be a companion program to integrate transit cities within the community. A variety of connections would have to work together and the city would have to have a role in that partnership. Gunyou said if the city opted out, the \$4 million would still need to be used to provide a comparable service. Hiller said his point was the decision had to include what the city needed to do in addition to make the city a bus friendly city with routes that are actually used. Wischnack noted Commuter Services already provided some of what Hiller was talking about and they were the inroads for marketing the services.

Schneider suggested identifying the transit dependent areas of the city through an in depth survey that identified resident's needs. One option would be to contract with Southwest Transit to use vans to serve as shuttle buses for specific areas. After the costs are identified, the Met Council funding could be used for that service. The service could be used for a year to determine its viability. This would provide valuable information going forward. Gunyou said Met Transit could see some value out of that alternative because some of the least profitable routes that run all the way downtown could be discontinued. He said one thing to

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keep in mind was the city is not in the transit business but its role was to make sure residents were getting the service. The city does not have to come up with a business plan that would determine what fares would be generated. Rather, the available \$4 million funding provided the city the option of determining how the funds are allocated to best serve residents.

Wiersum said one way to look at it was that the city was buying transit for its residents in as cost effective a way as possible. He said the city's location gave it more leverage in negotiations.

Wischnack said she would recommend a two year contract. This would allow the city to adjust to the changing circumstances.

3. Adjournment

The study session adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David Maeda
City Clerk