

CITY OF EXCELSIOR
Hennepin County, Minnesota

MINUTES

City Council Work Session

Monday, September 24, 2012

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Mayor Ruehl called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Councilmembers present: Caron, Fulkerson, Olson, Miller (arrived at 7:00 p.m.), and Mayor Ruehl

Park and Recreation Commissioners present: Filippi, Mullenbach, Norman, Schmidt, Wolfe, and Chair Beattie

Also Present: City Manager Luger, City Attorney Staunton (arrived at 7:30 p.m.), and City Clerk Johnson

2. Agenda Approval

Caron moved, Miller seconded, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried 4/0.

3. Joint Meeting with Park and Recreation Commission

Chair Beattie introduced the members of the Park and Recreation Commission. He said that the City Manager's memo did a good job outlining some the questions and issues. The powers and duties of the Park and Recreation Commission that are listed in the City ordinance are basically what the Commission has been doing. He asked some of the Commissioners to provide an update on projects that they have been working on.

Schmidt said that when the Commission forwarded the recommendation to the City Council that a dog park be established in Excelsior Studer Park, the Commission was told that the City Council wanted to wait on any improvements pending the results from the Sandall Marketing Study. He's excited that the Sandall Marketing Study is getting everyone to think what should be done with the park. The Commission attempted to improve the area above the ballpark, but he is disappointed that the plants have not been watered. He noted that the Commission requested that staff secure estimates for an irrigation system for specific areas in The Commons.

Schmidt said that Excelsior has a small tax base, so it is difficult to maintain The Commons in the manner it should be maintained. The Commission has a lot of ideas for improvements, but the City doesn't have money to do the improvements. The refuse area in the Port needs to be cleaned up, concerts in the park should be improved and promoted, there should be signage to promote venues, an area should be created where weddings can be held, the

3. Joint Meeting with Park and Recreation Commission – (Continued)

concession stand should be used more, etc. He said there have been events in the park and no one, including the Commission, was aware that the events were being held.

Chair Beattie said that Schmidt also initiated the Adopt-a-Flower Bed Program. Another idea and addition was the canoe racks. The canoe racks are modestly priced and have gotten great reviews.

Wolfe said it is the Commission's intention to have volunteers and citizen involvement with the Adopt-a-Flower Bed Program. The program got started too late this year to get a formal project in place.

Wolfe said one area that needs improvement is the Port. This is a focal point for the City. The Port was improved but never really finished. Two meetings ago the Commission forwarded the recommendation to the Council that the bricks in the Port be finished and the recommendation was never forwarded. He said communications between the Council and the Commission is a concern and needs to be addressed.

Wolfe said that the question was raised whether the music in the park should continue. He said if the City is going to have the concerts, more needs to be put into it to be successful. He is chairing a subcommittee to assist with this. He has talked with Shorewood and they may be willing to put money towards the concerts. It might be beneficial to check with the other neighboring communities to see if they want to participate. Another option is corporate sponsorships. The concerts need to be more of an event. Maybe there should be food trucks in conjunction with the concerts.

Mullenbach said the Commission doesn't know how much the City has in its budget for the concerts. There definitely should be signage to promote the concerts and more of an event for everyone. Everyone is willing to volunteer their time, but they don't know how to make these things happen.

Wolfe said that there used to always be ball tournaments in The Commons, now there is nothing. It's bothered him to see the ball field deteriorate and not be used. He met with a representative from the South Tonka Little League and the League is very interested in using the ball field. They are looking at a joint user-ship with the softball league. They are willing to put money into improving the ball field and volunteers to help maintain it. They discussed spending up to \$15,000 to improve the outfield, add an irrigation system, and help with the maintenance. There is a shortage of baseball facilities in the area and one advantage of the City's field is that it has lights.

Mullenbach said this group also has people who can write grants and they've been successful in securing grant funds for building facilities and making improvements.

3. Joint Meeting with Park and Recreation Commission – (Continued)

Norman said everyone has an agenda. Her agenda when she joined the Park and Recreation Commission was the beautification of The Commons. If there are not funds or plans for a sprinkler system, the Public Works can't be expected to properly maintain the park.

Beattie said that the City has a good framework that outlines the responsibilities of the Commission. One of the items is discretionary and the other four items are things that the Commission should be doing. The Commission has been frustrated as there seems to have been blockages in the system. What the Commission is looking for tonight is to see if the Council is validating what is in the ordinance, and if not, what is the Council looking for from them. The Commission understands that they need approval from the Council for money or to implement something. The Commission is looking for confirmation from the Council whether they are on the right track.

Mayor Ruehl said that one thing that has been frustrating for the Council as well is The Commons. This has been on the Council's radar for years. There was a long range park plan that was done as part of the Comprehensive Plan. The park plan referenced things but it wasn't very specific. As ideas become specific, you get a better idea if there is support from the community. The Finance Advisory Commission had looked at possible revenue sources for the park and that received very mixed reviews. Most recently the City undertook the Sandall Marketing Study. The hope was that the Sandall Marketing Study would force the discussion. There has not been consensus on what to do, so nobody does anything while the City grapples with what to do.

Fulkerson said that there are times when programs have gotten started but then no one takes care of them. If the general maintenance issues are handled, then these other things can begin to get looked at.

Mayor Ruehl said that the bandshell was never designed properly so it's never been utilized. The bandshell is one of the biggest disappointments for him. The City did work on the Port, but the City has not maintained it or put money or emphasis into it.

Wolfe asked if the City should begin to take all of this information and start putting together a hardcore plan.

Beattie said there needs to be a conversation at the higher level on what to do with The Commons, and at the same time keep working on the initiatives. The beautification of The Commons does not need to be neglected while those discussions are going on. Look at the values and the things that the City would be satisfied with, and identify what the consequences are for doing those things. He thinks those discussions could be handled by the Park and Recreation Commission.

3. Joint Meeting with Park and Recreation Commission – (Continued)

Fulkerson said she agrees. She knows that there is no promotion for the concerts in the park. She said another thing to consider is whether the concerts should be weekly.

Luger said that the City published the schedule for the concerts in the park in the City newsletter and the City has done poster boards on occasion. There has been discussion about doing a sign for the concerts.

Luger said she thinks it might be helpful if the Commission starts putting together a work plan. Then staff, the Commission, and the Council can plug the items into the work plan. She noted that the work plan that Edina has is very extensive, but that could be adjusted so it works for Excelsior. Beattie asked whether the initiative should come from the Commission or the Council.

Mayor Ruehl says that the ordinance suggests that the initiative comes from the Commission. The issue comes down to money. The City has never had the money to do things. Are there any other ways of generating revenues that help the City with its budget? The City does not have the money to install an irrigation system. There can be all sorts of good ideas, but where does the City get the money to fund them. That is really the key question.

Filippi asked if the Commission has a budget. Caron said there needs to be an overall plan for spending the money and how to replenish the funding. There are everyday things that need to happen, but how does the City get to the big picture. The discussion on the big picture and community input on this is what needs to happen.

Filippi said that every time the Commission has come up with a solution it gets shut down until the City has a master park plan, so it holds up everything. Maybe the City needs to start doing little things. The City has plans for a refuse facility that are great, but that has been put on hold.

Caron said she is not thinking everything is on hold. To her the question is how does the Commission want to spend the money that is available and what is the plan for replenishing the money. She would like to see this before things are approved. The Commission should prioritize how it would like to spend the money. The dumpsters at the Port was a huge discussion when the pavilion came up. Everyone said that the dumpsters needed to be handled, so this project would be supported by the community.

Miller said he has been on the Council for 8½ years, so he has quite a history with regard to the dumpster issue at the Port. There was a big push to get rid of the dumpsters and the City has a nice plan for a better structure. Then the pavilion came up and the project got sidetracked. Now there are thoughts that maybe the dumpsters can be handled in conjunction with the

3. Joint Meeting with Park and Recreation Commission – (Continued)

hotel project. There have been a number of great ideas that have come from the Park and Recreation Commission. There are a lot of things that the City has spent money on, but they have been smaller items. The issue is always money. There needs to be a discussion and decision on the use of The Commons. There are a lot of plans that generate revenue, but there has never been the discussion on whether the City wants to do these things. A very important role of the Commission will be to answer some of these questions.

Commissioners Filippi and Schmidt said that the Commission is not being kept informed of events that are happening in The Commons. Mayor Ruehl said let's figure out what is happening and change it.

Beattie said having a Council liaison at the meeting would be helpful. Mayor Ruehl said that the Council used to assign a liaison to attend the advisory commission meetings, but that had been discontinued because the Council has too many other meetings that they had to attend. He suggested that if the Commission has something for the Council, a liaison from the Commission should come to a Council meeting.

Mayor Ruehl asked what is the best way for the Council and Commission to communicate so we avoid this issue in the future.

Caron suggested that there be more communication at Work Sessions, these meetings are more informal and easier to debate and discuss things. Beattie agreed.

Caron said the City needs to develop standards or framework to look at when considering whether to do events in The Commons. Beattie said this would be a good task for the Commission to work on.

4. Sandall Marketing Study

Olson gave an overview of where the City started with this study. The City tried to pull people together to work on this and come up with a scheme. The idea was to take the City's assets, dream big, and see how to improve the quality of life and infrastructure. A small group of people agreed to work on this initiative. He noted that there is a disparity between the vision and execution, but this is now at a point where the group can recommend going to a second phase. There are so many great ideas that have come from this, but it comes down to money. Excelsior has a small budget. Through this process, instead of having a full vision the City has a set of serious tactics. The City didn't get exactly what it wanted, but it did get enough to move this forward into a second phase.

Caron said that the group has a draft report that is quite long. She reviewed the report which provided background information, an inventory of venues

4. Sandall Marketing Study – (Continued)

and spaces in the City, information on the community, and data from other of the City's studies and documents. There was also a list of current events that are held in the City. There was also a comparison of case studies done with other cities on how those cities use their parks and generate revenue.

The cities that were looked at included Edina, Plymouth, Minneapolis, and St. Louis Park. These cities plan and handle their own events. The City of Chicago, Illinois was also looked at along with corporate sponsorships and partnerships.

After all of the data was pulled together, the Sandall Marketing Study Group had a brainstorming session. The Group was asked a number of questions and a lot of good ideas were generated from the discussion. Those items were listed and then categorized. A couple more meetings were held with a smaller group of the Sandall Marketing Study Group to come up with potential recommendations.

Caron reviewed the recommendations listed in the report. She noted that the top priority was the bandshell. The thought was that the bandshell could be developed and used year around. There are a lot of questions that will need to be answered regarding parking, funding, design, etc.

Caron said another top priority that was identified was working with a sponsorship consultant. The City events are currently managed by other organizations. This person would be responsible for going out to look for events for the City. This person would work on a commission basis. In conjunction with this priority would be an event executor/manager, which would be a paid position. This position could possibly do the work of the sponsorship consultant. She noted that this doesn't necessarily need to be a long term position. Olson said he thinks these two positions would be combined. Miller asked if there are third parties who do this type of thing. Caron said yes.

Caron said that the study also identified park programming as another priority. She said the City doesn't do a good job of promoting things. For example, the City could have sponsorships, food trucks, etc. in conjunction with the concerts.

Another priority was a restaurant in The Commons. Everyone was excited about this idea and there was discussion about phasing it in. Food trucks are working well in large urban areas, but the market is different in Excelsior. There are still a lot of questions on how to approach this.

Caron said that dock fees/permits are another priority. Should the City expand the docks, invests in a marina, etc. There was also a discussion regarding the swimming beaches and whether there should be a monetary

4. Sandall Marketing Study – (Continued)

investment to attract people. Also, should the City look at a way to charge a fee for the beach without gating the beach area. Olson said this was more controversial than the other priorities.

Caron said it was determined that there is a lot more work that needs to be done, but first the Council needs to provide input on the priorities. The Council will also need to engage the advisory commissions and get more public input. Most of the priorities are focused on The Commons. Any other opportunities are fairly limited in the City. Sandall Marketing was asked to put the lodging and entertainment tax into the draft report. She noted that the lodging tax could be used for a visitor center or to hire an event organizer.

Olson said the good news is that these priorities are manageable and things that other groups can take on. Now that the City knows the top priorities let's find a way to manage them.

Caron said that she would hate to have the study pushed aside and nothing happen with it. She is curious to hear from the Council on what they think the next step should be.

Miller said that the City needs to somehow get to the point of deciding whether to say yes or no to each of the priority items.

Luger said that there is one available work session in December where the Council can discuss this.

Miller said maybe the Council should set up a schedule to flush out the details and work out a process. The Council will need public input before it says yes or no to any of the priorities.

Caron said each of the priorities needs to be discussed and vetted in the public. Each of the priorities will have pros and cons and people in support and against each one. The Council will need to make a decision after vetting each of these priorities.

Miller said it appears that there is a demand for a bandshell and also for either a restaurant or food trucks in The Commons.

Olson asked how about having someone to manage events. Miller said if you have someone to manage events you also need to have someone manage that person.

Luger asked the Council if they wanted the consultant to give a final report at a regular Council meeting. Mayor Ruehl said yes. He said all of these ideas are worth a discussion and need to get out in the public.

4. Sandall Marketing Study – (Continued)

Caron asked how the City gets this to the next level. When this is presented to the public, what does the Council say is the next step.

Luger said that the Council can use the Park and Recreation Commission, Heritage Preservation Commission, and the Sandall Marketing Study Group to help with this. Mayor Ruehl said but then there still needs to be someone to spearhead this. Luger said the Council could assign the tasks and then have the group report back to the Council.

Staunton suggested that the Council put together a subcommittee to work on this like it did with the library and then that group can vet and sort through the priorities.

Caron said she doesn't see how anything can happen without spending some money on financial analysis, design work, etc. Staunton said maybe there is grant funding available.

Miller said that a subcommittee could be used to vet through some of the issues, like whether an idea is applicable, the size it should be, etc.

The Council requested that the final study be scheduled for the November 19 or December 3, 2012 Council meeting.

5. Charter Information Document

Staunton updated the Council on the schedule for the adoption of the charter amendment that was forwarded to the Council by the Charter Commission.

Staunton reviewed the one page document that had drafted that has a comparison between the charter amendment that is on the ballot and the charter amendment that the Charter Commission forwarded to the City Council for adoption. He said that staff also has a summary with the differences between the two charter amendments.

The Council reviewed the documents and provided input on some changes they wanted to have incorporated into the document. The Council requested that staff make the changes and provide an updated version for the Council to review at the October 1, 2012 Council meeting.

Bob Bolles, 229 George Street, stated that when the Charter Commission was discussing the two amendments there was a lot of confusion, so it would be helpful to have labels that would distinguish between the two amendments.

6. Other

None

7. Adjournment

Fulkerson moved, Olson seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 p.m.
Motion carried 5/0.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheri Johnson
City Clerk