

Meeting of: COLUMBIA HEIGHTS CITY COUNCIL
Date of Meeting: June 29, 2020
Time of Meeting: 3:00 pm
Location of Meeting: Public Safety Training Room
Purpose of Meeting: Special Work Session

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL - The meeting was called to order at 3:00 pm

Present: Mayor Schmitt, Councilmembers Murzyn Jr, Novitsky, Williams, and Buesgens

Staff Present: Kelli Bourgeois- City Manager, Lenny Austin- Police Chief, Aaron Chirpich- Community Development Director, Renee Dougherty- Library Director, Kevin Hansen- Public Works Director, Joe Kloiber- Finance Director, Ben Sandell- Communications Coordinator, Charlie Thompson- Fire Chief, Nicole Tingley- City Clerk, Keith Windschitl- Recreation Director.

Also Present: Phil Kern- Facilitator

1. Fencing on University Ave from 37th to 53rd

Public Works Director Hansen stated that the chain link fencing on University Ave from 37th to 53rd is in poor condition. Hansen stated that the City has been in communication with MnDOT about removing and replacing the fencing. Hansen stated that MnDOT's criteria is to not install fencing if it is adjacent to a non-residential area. Hansen noted that Columbia Heights has more of a residential use along University Ave particularly north of 45th so the plan would be to remove and replace. Hansen asked the City Council if fencing would be desired from 37th to 40th which is more commercial. Hansen noted that one thought would remove fencing on both the west and east sides and eventually continue the ornamental fencing by the multi-family residential to Sarna's or 40th Avenue.

Hansen explained that if the area is abutted by a frontage road, fencing would not be required. Hansen added that over time the City also ends up maintaining the fence.

Councilmember Buesgens asked about the purpose of the fencing. Hansen responded that it is not a safety feature, but rather a deterrent for pedestrians and wildlife.

Buesgens asked about the placement of the ornamental fencing on the west side so it would not interfere with redevelopment. Hansen clarified that ornamental fencing would only be for the east side.

Mayor Schmitt shared her concern for people walking along University Avenue trying to get to the next opening in the fence to reach bus stops.

Hansen responded that the west side has elevated slopes, is heavily wooded, and also has the sound wall from 44th to 53rd. On the east side, there are bus stops along the frontage road where fencing is proposed. It is proposed to not put in any fencing between 37th and 40th and there are bus stops at 40th and 37th.

Councilmember Murzyn, Jr. asked if there was any cost to the City. Hansen stated there would not be.

Buesgens asked for a map of the areas proposed to have and not have fencing to better visualize it.

Hansen stated that this will need to be decided on at the July 13th City Council meeting and that a map can be sent out by email.

Councilmember Murzyn Jr. asked about the warranty on the fence. Hansen explained that the warranty from the contractor would be one year, but stated it is MnDOT's fence and would be their responsibility to fix it. Hansen explained that the issue is that MnDOT is not always timely which is why the City sometimes fixes it.

2. Police Department Office Remodel and Taser Purchase

Police Chief Austin stated that he has two purchases for the July 13th, 2020 City Council meeting agenda. These purchases would come out of the 2020 Police operating budget.

Austin explained that the inventory of tasers are in need of replacement. The current tasers were purchased used and there are several tasers sent in for repair and other tasers showing signs of need for replacement. Austin stated that to replace the tasers in order to equipment all officers and CSOs and to have spares will cost just under \$39,000. The tasers would be replaced with the exact same model as the current ones. It is estimated the tasers will last 5 years. It is an unbudgeted expense, but there is room in the 2020 Police operating budget.

The next purchase is a police department office remodel. Austin explained that there are currently 2 sergeant offices for 4 sergeants. Austin stated that the police department would like to remodel the 2 current sergeant offices and convert them to captain offices. This would allow for additional privacy for the captains due to the location. Furthermore, the remodel would allow each sergeant to have their own individual office. The remodel which would also include technology upgrades would cost approximately \$30,000.

Mayor Schmitt asked if it would be a COVID related expense. City Manager Bourgeois responded that it potentially could be.

Austin also updated the City Council regarding a carjacking that occurred on 40th and University on June 28. He stated he believed 6 people were taken into custody and there is 1 person police are still looking for. There was a gun displayed in that incident. He does not know if the gun was recovered and they are still working on search warrants for the vehicles as well. Austin mentioned that the vehicle the suspects showed up was suspected to be stolen which has been a common trend. Incidents like these have been occurring in the metro, but this is the first in Columbia Heights.

Austin also noted cameras installed as part of the façade improvement program were able to capture the incident which will be valuable in court.

Councilmember Murzyn, Jr. stated that it was the car stolen belonged to a good friend of his wife and that her friend wanted to thank and compliment the officers for their response.

3. Goal Setting Session

Facilitator Phil Kern gave an introduction to the session explaining that the format would be a large group format instead of his traditional small group work like the last session in 2017 due to COVID-19.

The first exercise was to discuss 2017-2020 accomplishments. All present shared their thoughts. Some of the noted accomplishments included:

- Developing a communications plan and staff position
- Evaluation of city services and staffing including staffing levels, recruitment, training, and succession planning
- Volunteerism including expanding the library volunteer program, board and commission recruitment, the Census committee, and the 100 year anniversary committee.
- Planning for a new City Hall
- Financial incentives including rebates, grants, and the façade improvement program
- Development of a Park Master Plan
- Collaboration for Public Works projects and Recreation with the school district

The next exercise was to discuss items from 2017-2020 yet to achieve. Facilitator Kern asked for feedback. Items shared included:

- Doing more for the pride of home ownership plan
- Establishing a farmers market for the City
- Establish programs to expand interactions with art in the community
- Examining the code enforcement process and structure including mechanisms for property/home maintenance and education
- Evaluating city services and staffing levels specifically in regards how technology relates to it
- Engage in multicultural communities, multiple languages in communications

Next, the group discussed the vision statement and mission statement. The group consensus supported leaving the vision statement unchanged. Modifications and clarifying changes were made to the core strategies. These included:

- Under “Safe Community” proactive policing was changed to community-based policing
- Under “Safe Community” strong, skilled public safety staff was changed to highly-skilled public safety staff
- Under “Economic Strength” developing branding for 47th-49th area and Central Avenue – “Uptown” feel were removed and replaced with Positive marketing for the City and Central Avenue – vibrant destination
- The core strategy “Affordability” was changed to “Equity and Affordability”
- Under “Affordability” maintain equal access to services was changed to maintain equitable access to service
- Under “Affordability” Housing, service options for all was removed
- Under “Opportunities for Play and Learning” pet-friendly community and vibrant community events were added
- Under “Diverse, Welcoming “Small-Town” Feel Embrace diverse community and Positive, Can-Do Attitude were removed
- Under “Diverse, Welcoming “Small-Town” Feel” Forward-thinking organization and Progressive, positive, connected energy, and Integrated community were added
- Under “Excellent Housing/Neighborhoods” Balanced approach to housing was added
- Under “Strong Infrastructure/Public Services” Embrace technology was added

- The core strategy “Engaged, Multi-Generational Population” was changed to “Engaged, Multi-Generation, Multi-Cultural Population”

In regards to the Mission Statement, the group reaffirmed the Mission Statement and no changes were made.

Finally, the group completed multiple exercises in order to work towards identifying short-term goals. The first exercise was to answer the question “What is going well?” Participants shared answers that included:

- Team approach
- More acceptance to change
- Open communication
- Great City services
- Creative/Innovative/Resourceful
- Strong mid-level management (skilled workforce)
- Training and mentoring
- Murzyn Hall as community center
- Continuing to look for opportunities to collaborate
- Investment in the community- public and private
- The people in the community- involved, engaged
- Autonomy for staff
- Transparency improving
- Partnerships
- Financial stability

Next, the question “What opportunities are available?” was discussed. Participants shared answers that included:

- Sustainability Commission
- Traffic Commission transformed into Transportation Commission
- Expanding engagement to younger audiences- Youth Advisory Commission, Youth on Commissions, shadow opportunities
- Citizens Academy
- Trades program in Savers Building
- Geographic Location
- Continue Fire Cadet Program
- Technology

Next, the question “What Challenges Does the City Face In the Coming Years?” Participants shared answers that included:

- Funding and maintaining infrastructure
- Grocery store
- Technology
- Police-community relations
- Parks
- SACA facility on public land
- Historic low interest rates

- Translation services, ADA, and funding of that
- Alternative funding sources for cable franchise
- Emerald Ash Bore
- Moving to electronic records and getting rid of paper

To conclude, the group worked on establishing short-term objectives. Facilitator Kern provided direction to the group to think of ideas that would be able to be accomplished in 1-3 years and that can be controlled. Participants discussed goals and were asked to prioritize them. The following goals were created:

1. Expand and promote events, activities, and organizational behaviors that encourage engagements and interaction of multicultural populations
 - a. Develop a Citizen Academy
 - b. Encourage involvement from all
 - c. Incorporate changes in hiring to be reflective of community
 - d. Conduct a structural bias review in areas of City business
2. Enhance and strengthen community/police relations
3. Strengthen housing options throughout the City
 - a. Improve rental property options through code enforcement, promotion of programs to assist renters, training and education opportunities for landlords, and review investor-based purchasing practices
 - b. Improve owner-occupied housing through revitalization programs, increased code enforcement, and consideration of a point-of-sale inspection program
4. Complete construction of new City Hall at corner of 40th and Central
5. Develop funding mechanisms and take action on key capital projects, specifically alley improvements and park projects
6. Develop a Master Plan for Murzyn Hall and the Public Works Building.
7. Drive redevelopment of key sites in town, including the Hyvee site, Public Safety facility, and City Hall site.
8. Implement and complete projects identified in Parks Master Plan
9. Schedule regular reviews of goals, including department updates and status sharing with the Council
10. Implement technological innovations into organizational processes
 - a. Expanding e-government offerings
 - b. Online recruitment
 - c. Improved/expanded IT services
 - d. Website redesign
 - e. Council/Commission alternatives for broadcast
 - f. Supporting hybrid/distance learning through library programs for students
11. Expand training and development for staff
12. Develop a Central Avenue Right-of-Way and Streetscape Plan
13. Explore and promote emotional community infrastructure, including art interactions
14. Expand collaborations with other public entities, specifically the school district
15. Develop a phased plan for municipal code updates
16. Review and amend policies and procedures for Commissions, including terms and types of Commissions
17. Implement the 40th Avenue Parkway Plan
18. Develop Sister City Exchange

The Special Work Session ended at 6:20 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicole Tingley, City Clerk/Council Secretary