



SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION
City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE
Tuesday, May 14, 2024
6:00 PM

DRAFT/UNAPPROVED MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Ahmadvand at 6:05 p.m.

Members present: Commissioners Ahmadvand, Evenson, Finkelson, Groseth, Jensen Christen, Johnson, LaPlante, Kurek, Leoni-Helbacka

Staff present: Andrew Boucher, City Planner
Liam Genter, Urban Forestry Specialist
Sulmaan Khan, Interim City Engineer
Matt Markham, Chief of Police
Shelby Thombers, Police Officer

Council Liaison: Connie Buesgens
Mayor Amáda Márquez Simula present

2. Approval of Minutes

Motion by Ahmadvand, seconded by Johnson to approve the minutes of April 9, 2024 as amended to reflect that Commissioner Johnson was in attendance and not absent as well as recognizing that the meeting was not called to order by Chairperson Ahmadvand, but by Vice Chair Jensen Christen as the Chairperson was absent. Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

3. Future Central Avenue Improvements Discussion with MnDOT

Interim City Engineer, Sulmaan Khan, explains Councilmember Buesgens's efforts to engage the Bring Back Main Street group and connect with MnDOT regarding the future of Central Avenue, MnDOT has budgeted \$25 million for the Central Avenue project in 2028.

Khan introduces Chris Bauer, Area Engineer with MnDOT, and discusses Mr. Bauer's work on the PELL study that included Central Avenue and University Avenue over the past four years. Mr. Bauer provides some additional background on himself and introduces the other members of his team including project manager, Beth Burton who will be responsible for the day-to-day work on the project.

Mayor Simula discusses some of the issues surrounding Central Avenue and introduces Chief of Police, Matt Markham. Chief Markham introduces Shelby Thombers, Police Officer, and discusses some of the work the Police Department is doing regarding traffic safety, Towards Zero Deaths and the fully funded officer granted by the program, as well as the daily work on traffic safety.

Commissioner Finkelson describes his presence on the Traffic Commission, the efforts to engage MnDot, and reiterates the positive interactions had with Mr. Bauer on behalf of MnDOT. Columbia Heights resident and businessowner, Ed Higgins, is also in attendance and shared these sentiments.

Ms. Burton goes through the tentative project schedule showing a November-December 2027 letting date, discusses funds, and explains that the project is moving forward. Molly McCarthy is introduced as MnDOT's North Area Manager and articulates the work Mr. Bauer has done coordinating and connecting with other cities, residents, and business owners on the corridor with a focus and emphasis on safety. Mr. Bauer discusses identifying goals, challenges with bringing sustainability to Central and maintenance, and gives a description of the "frustration zone" that will need to be worked through during the process.

Mr. Bauer states that this is the first MnDOT project that is prioritizing safety over mobility and describes the project schedule beginning with presenting project concepts to the public later this summer and having a goal of narrowing down the alternatives to a preferred concept later this year. Mr. Bauer explains municipal consent and that by state statute, MnDOT is required to take the roadway design to a public hearing where City Council will vote to approve or deny the design likely in 2025.

Mr. Bauer, Commissioners Finkelson and Evenson discuss some of the desired features including; multimodal improvements, landscaping, tree canopy, streetscape amenities, and how these features have significant overlap with sustainability and the safety purpose of the project. Commissioner LaPlante explained her experience walking down Central Avenue. Mr. Bauer reiterates that MnDOT wants to get the road built as quickly as possible, but recognizes that there will be disruptions to businesses and there needs to be engagement to minimize those disturbances as well as describing the traffic modeling showing that the traffic should not be at a level that is deemed unacceptable or causing gridlock.

Mayor Simula described a section of Central Avenue that has a lower elevation and is subject to flash flooding during heavy rain events, carbon reduction and how that could improve pedestrian safety and traffic to businesses on Central Avenue; Commissioner LaPlante notes issues maintaining clear sidewalks during winter and the hazards faced walking along Central Avenue.

Mr. Bauer describes different examples of what Central Avenue could look like and discusses limitations as well as constraints caused by maintenance, specifically in relation to green infrastructure; some of the examples discussed are Hwy 3 (Robert Street in West Saint Paul), Hwy 169 (Saint Peter's), and Central Avenue (Minneapolis).

4. Round Robin

The Parks and Recreation Commission and the Parks Development draft plan were discussed and a desire to have a joint meeting between the Sustainability Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission in the future. Commissioner Leoni-Helbacka provides an update on the Invasive Species Subcommittee meeting at Silver Lake boat launch tomorrow to clean up garlic mustard.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Ahmadvand, seconded by LaPlante to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Boucher,
City Planner