

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

September 21, 2021

5:30 p.m.

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a study session at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Executive Conference Room on the 21st day of September, 2021, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT:

Councilmembers Foreman, Hall,
Holman, Schueler, Peacock,
Tortorello, Mayor Clark

ABSENT:

Councilmembers Lynn and Studley

Item 1, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021 (ARPA) STORMWATER PROJECTS.

Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, said Stormwater Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) generally consist of improvements to the stormwater conveyance system through infrastructure repairs (replacing culverts, pipes, channel liners), stream stabilization (repairing damage to streambanks caused by stormwater flows), and property acquisition/buyouts (acquiring properties within the floodway or floodplain). He said projects can be placed on the list through citizen, organization, or Council requests based on complaints from residents experiencing flooding of their property. There are also special studies as a result of public or Staff identified problem areas, such as the lower Imhoff Creek Study. He said Staff identifies problems through routine maintenance/inspections or in response to flooding events.

There is a method detailed in the Stormwater Master Plan (SWMP) that helps determine project prioritization that includes factors such as public safety, sustainability, funding advantages, positive impacts on neighborhoods and the environment, relationship to other infrastructure issues, and costs versus benefits. Ms. Carrie Evenson, Stormwater Program Manager, said factors are weighted based on importance and each factor is then rated from most relevant to no relevance to obtain a factor score and each project's score is ranked accordingly. There are approximately 60 projects identified and new projects are ranked and added as necessary. The City has completed six projects to date and the total estimated cost of the remaining projects is \$106 million.

In 2019, a Stormwater Citizen Committee met for two years to discuss a Stormwater Utility (SWU) and they recommended a SWU rate and Stormwater General Obligation (G.O.) Bond. Mr. O'Leary said the proposed G.O. Bond was \$60 million, which would be a \$5.25 per month property tax increase based on property's market value of \$150,000. At that time, 33 projects were selected within the eight wards that included streambank stabilization, infrastructure replacement, capacity improvements, and detention pond expansion. The proposition for the G.O. Bond and SWU went to a vote of the people and failed.

Ms. Evenson said potential projects using ARPA funds would be improvements to Lower Imhoff Creek that has significant bank erosion for an overall cost of \$7,500,000. He said the project would be phased to make it easier to fund and Phase I will consist of the area south of Imhoff Road Bridge for an estimated cost of \$3,500,000. This project is currently under design (funds encumbered) and is the highest ranking SWMP project that is “shovel ready.” Phase II will consist of the area north of Imhoff Road Bridge at an estimated cost of \$4,500,000 to be completed at a later date. He said property owners are losing their backyards at an alarming rate and one property owner’s sewer infrastructure will be put into jeopardy if this project is not completed as soon as possible.

Mr. O’Leary said criteria for using ARPA funds is making sure natural materials (reverse gabion, typical gabion, rock toe, etc.) are used for projects so no concrete retaining walls will be constructed.

Another potential stormwater project for ARPA funds is Norman Nature Park, which is located at South Carter Avenue and Alameda Street at an estimated cost of \$1,500,000. The goal is to provide additional floodplain storage capacity (retention basin), serve as an outdoor classroom with access to Bishop Creek, and provide a location for green infrastructure installation and demonstration projects. This project was originally envisioned as a stormwater remediation project, but the City has the added benefit of being able to add park amenities and ecosystem education to the project.

Another potential stormwater project for ARPA funds is Imhoff Bridge repairs, which was given the highest priority for maintenance in the FYE 2022 Bridge Maintenance Program. On July 29, 2021, stormwater maintenance Staff notified the City of failure of the southeast wing wall with enough significant damage to require closure of Imhoff Road at the bridge. On August 11, 2021, the contractor identified spalling on the northwest wing wall that had dangerously separated from the bridge structure. The bridge needs emergency repairs at an estimated cost of \$1 million or be replaced at a cost of \$4 to \$5 million.

Councilmembers supported Staff’s recommendations, but wanted to continue to explore other funding sources for lower ranked stormwater projects, such as Norman Nature Park.

Councilmembers questioned whether Cleveland County would be interested in helping fund some of the stormwater/bridge projects. Mr. O’Leary said there is State and Federal funding available for bridges and Staff has looked into that, but Norman’s bridges do not rank as well as road projects. He said the City has accomplished more stormwater projects through G.O. Bonds by combining road infrastructure with stormwater infrastructure improvements. He encouraged Council to consider a Bridge Maintenance Bond Program and Councilmembers agreed and felt a bridge maintenance bond package would have a very good chance of receiving approval from voters.

Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager, said there is statewide recognition of aging bridge conditions and how susceptible every community can be to loss from flooding. He said there is a lot of chatter in Washington D.C. regarding bridges so this is a nationwide issue and there could be more funding for bridges available through the proposed Federal Infrastructure Package (approximately 1.2 to 3.5 trillion dollars).

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Councilmembers said although they support the stormwater infrastructure projects discussed tonight, they would like to use some of the ARPA Funds to help citizens, businesses, or organizations within the community impacted by COVID before committing anymore ARPA Funds to other projects.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor