

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORK SESSION
MINUTES OF JULY 13, 2021**

Mayor Patricia Randall called the Committee of the Whole Meeting to order at 5:00 PM. Mayor Patricia M. Randall, Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson, and Councilmembers Chris Burns, Lori Knapp, Vic Ledbetter, Claudette Reid, and Terry Urban were present. Also in attendance were City Manager Joe La Margo, City Attorney Catherine Kaufman, Deputy City Manager Adam Herringa, Deputy City Manager Mike Carroll, and City Clerk Erica Eklov.

Mayor Randall asked City Manager Joe La Margo to introduce the purpose of the meeting. City Manager La Margo relayed that four members of the City Council desired to hold a Committee of the Whole to answer additional questions regarding the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study in light of the public hearing scheduled for the Regular Meeting later that evening. Mayor Randall then turned the meeting over to City Councilmembers for questions.

Councilmember Urban noted the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study featured right-of-way rebalancing and inquired about estimated costs. He further inquired whether the City Administration had identified sufficient funding for the project and requested a cost-benefit analysis to determine the proposal's viability. Councilmember Urban also asked for the cost to estimate engineering.

City Manager La Margo stated that the city won't have a cost estimate until the actual road engineering process begins and is also contingent upon the scenario chosen by City Council from the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study. He asked Transportation & Utilities Director Kendra Gwin if she could further respond. Director Gwin stated that engineering is typically fifteen percent of the cost of construction and is based on similar prior projects. She warned that costs in future years may fluctuate dependent upon supply and demand but noted that general quotes had been included for the projects in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

Councilmember Urban inquired whether the CIP quotes were developed to include the curb relocation concept. Director Gwin confirmed it was included. Councilmember Urban then asked whether the funds budgeted would cover the CIP quotes. Director Gwin confirmed the funds would be sufficient and explained the projects and action plan.

Mayor Randall asked Director Gwin to clarify which Portage Road segments were included in the rebalancing proposal. Director Gwin confirmed segments three, four, and five were included.

Councilmember Reid questioned the proposal regarding the Portage Road "isthmus" and suggested completing the southern-most segments of Portage Road first seemed more reasonable. Director Gwin responded, noting prior accidents at the intersections of Stanley Avenue and Woodbine Avenue created a priority and stated the Portage Road isthmus improvement could proceed as a stand-alone project. Councilmember Reid asked for clarification regarding which Portage Road segments the City Council was being asked to approve at the Regular Meeting. City Manager La Margo responded the three segments were

part of the Action Recommended in order to provide the City Administration an overall idea of how to treat the corridor.

Mayor Randall inquired about the project timeline. Director Gwin responded that she expected the project to take ten years with the traffic signal installation at the intersection of Portage Road and Forest Drive to take two years. Director Gwin further explained the anticipated funding opportunities and adjacent project expectations as well.

Councilmember Knapp noted City Council approval would focus on the concepts presented while individual engineering reviews would still require subsequent Council approval.

Councilmember Reid noted Portage Road entailed four lanes of heavy, fast-moving traffic and asked about the traffic impacts with Scenario No. 3. Director Gwin replied that studies show southbound afternoon traffic is heavier than northbound morning traffic and stated traffic will be prevented from speeding during peak travel hours. City Manager La Margo stated commuters may also choose alternate routes. There was additional discussion regarding traffic calming by narrowing the feel of the road with landscaping.

Mayor Randall inquired whether all Portage Road projects would be initiated together to limit construction time and improve costs. Director Gwin noted such an approach would minimize alternate route options and negatively affect local business traffic.

Councilmember Burns noted the current speed limit on Portage Road between Bacon Avenue and Lakeview Avenue is 45 MPH and asked what speed the city desired for that area. Director Gwin responded the city would need to perform a speed study once the Portage Road "isthmus" construction was completed. Councilmember Burns asked why the city couldn't simply lower the speed in that area. Director Gwin stated that such an action would be considered a speed trap.

Councilmember Reid inquired regarding the need for city easements under proposed Scenarios 1 and 2. City Manager La Margo responded that easements would require the city to negotiate with property owners to achieve Fair Market Value and would take additional time and money. Councilmember Reid asked Director Gwin for an estimate on time. Director Gwin noted a similar project has taken three years and negotiations remain ongoing. There was then additional discussion clarifying acceptance of the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study by the City Council and next steps.

Councilmember Urban inquired about undergrounding utilities as part of the Scenario No. 3 proposal. Director Gwin responded that pairing utility relocations with road projects was preferred in order to run the conduit at the same time but stated the Portage Road area would potentially be a hybrid model with some utilities underground and others relocated to the side streets for clear sight.

Councilmember Burns inquired whether the city planned to increase property taxes to fund the various Lake Center area improvements. City Manager La Margo stated the project would not be funded through property tax increases and was the reason the City Administration sought various alternate funding options with the scheduled projects. City Attorney Kaufman provided clarification regarding the proposed Corridor Improvement Authority and improvement plan funding logistics as well. Councilmember Burns then inquired about the traffic flow impact on Lovers Lane following the road diet project. Director Gwin responded

that, following implementation, there have been no complaints and Lovers Lane traffic is flowing well.

Councilmember Urban stated that the proposal to approve a city plan, such as the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study, without a cost-benefit analysis is rare and expressed concern at the prospect. He noted the continued city efforts to revitalize the Lake Center District area over his twenty-four years on City Council. Councilmember Urban questioned whether the proposals in this particular plan were the best direction for the area, noting the degree of change and level of investment proposed but stated that this particular revitalization effort was the closest the city had come to enhancing the Lake Center District. City Manager La Margo responded, noting that change in the Lake Center District area is inevitable, either good or bad, and encouraged City Council to support the area with positive change.

STATEMENTS OF CITIZENS:

Michael Cartier (1127 Lakeview Drive) expressed three concerns; first, confusion with the removal of certain items in the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study; the appearance that the City Council had already decided on the proposal, and, the timing of responses to his two Freedom of Information Act requests by the City Administration.

Fred Welch (1724 Forest Drive) inquired about the Planning Commission's involvement in the development of the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study. City Manager La Margo responded that this type of project is not part of the scope for the Planning Commission and noted the creation of the Steering Committee. Mr. Welch asked whether the Planning Commission would be included at a later date. City Attorney Kaufman responded that the Planning Commission would only be involved if the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study was part of the city's Master Plan. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson clarified that the Planning Commission focused on the review of private entity projects.

Mary Lager (2008 Ames Drive) expressed appreciation for the subsequent inclusion of the Lake Center area resident petitions in the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study and requested the removal of several additional items from the Study before the vote by City Council. She noted the proposals to raise Portage Road, river walk/canal improvements, and the installation of docks on West Lake.

Mary Zoeller (2024 Ames Drive) expressed concern with a rendering in the Study showing Ames Drive connected to Forest Drive and asked for clarification regarding the location as it does not currently connect. She also expressed concern about the potential for increased boat traffic on West Lake. Community Development Director Kelly Peterson stated the rendering would be corrected, citing no proposal to connect the streets.

Tom Wheatley (1510 Forest Drive) noted Portage Road was five lanes wide north of Forest Drive and expressed concern with managing the existing traffic volume should Portage Road be narrowed. Director Peterson responded that the Study anticipated Portage Road traffic would taper off alongside streets when heading south. Mr. Wheatley expressed additional concern regarding the approval of a plan without reviewing cost estimates.

Tricia Lutz (9103 West End Drive) requested clarification regarding the “opportunity to enhance the canal” noted on page 51 of the Lake Center District Placemaking and Feasibility Study and asked that the city correct the reference to the canal to “drain.” City Manager La Margo responded that drain improvement would include cleaning, landscaping, removal of any invasive species, and potentially construction of a boardwalk on the city-owned side. Ms. Lutz then asked about the proposed placemaking and dining improvements in light of the West Lake Drive-In location amendment. Director Peterson responded that road balancing will help with placemaking and gathering spaces.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 06:28 PM.

Erica Eklov, City Clerk