

CLEARWATER CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING
FEBRUARY 27, 2023

1. Call to Order: 6:00 p.m. at City Hall

- Mayor Lawrence called the Clearwater City Council to order Monday, February 27, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers. Members present were Mayor Lawrence, Council Members Luhmann, Winkelman, and Vazquez. Member Schwinghammer was absent. Also present were EDA Members Crandall and Scott, members of the staff and guests.

2. MnDOT Overview – Thomas Nixon

a. I94 Bridge Proposal and T.H. 24 Corridor Plan

b. Discussion

- Thomas Nixon from MnDOT District 3 (Baxter office) provided a history of the I94 bridge replacement project. He noted that the proposed project has changed several times over the last few years and requests from various other parties, including the Clearwater EDA's request for a corridor traffic study, have had an impact on the current project design. He acknowledged previous discussions with the city and agreement to provide a safe I94 crossing for pedestrians.
- Mr. Nixon further explained the process used to obtain a grant, which provided funding for a consultant to study the corridor and recommend alternative design options to address traffic flows and safety of users of the corridor from County Road 7 to County Road 75. WSB was selected to conduct the study. Their report was included in the agenda materials.
- Alternative #2 is MnDOT's preferred option. This includes a "diverging diamond" design over the bridge with roundabouts at County Road 7 and County Road 75. Mr. Nixon provided a more detailed version of alternative #2 and spoke in detail about the reasons why this is the preferred option. These include addressing the most issues with traffic flows, being cost effective, and being a design that users can easily navigate. This design also includes a pedestrian crossing over I94.
- Mr. Nixon advised that MnDOT has received grant funding under the federal IIJA program for the bridge portion of the project, which will run approximately \$10 million. The remainder of the corridor is estimated to cost about another \$16 million. MnDOT is interested in working with local city and county partners to work towards locating additional funding for the remainder of the project.
- Mayor Lawrence provided background for new members, indicating the Park Commission stopped working on a pedestrian crossing when MnDOT agreed to include it in the new bridge project. The city still needs to work on the trail connections to the bridge.
- EDA Member Scott asked about the impact of a roundabout at County Road 7 to the resident just south of Kwik Trip on T.H. 24. Mr. Nixon stated that the roundabout will slow traffic, which should result in a safer situation for the resident accessing/exiting his driveway. MnDOT designers will also work with him on the final design if it turns out to be too close to the driveway, possibly moving the driveway or adding room on the shoulder.
- EDA President Crandall noted that the bridge project alone will not address the traffic issues at 179th Street. Mr. Nixon agreed. He stated that MnDOT will try to stretch the bridge funding as far as they can to encompass the two intersections nearest the bridge, but that more funding is needed to make the new corridor function as planned.
- Members noted that the preferred design requires Kwik Trip users to turn right and access the roundabout at County Road 7 to come back to I94 or to cross the bridge. Mr. Nixon explained that this is the safest option that keeps traffic moving. He believes the users will quickly adapt. There have also been outside conversations with Kwik Trip about the proposal and impact. MnDOT has suggested a

frontage road or back road through the Kwik Trip property so that the exit onto T.H. 24 moves south to County Road 7. Those discussions are ongoing.

- There was additional discussion about what the city's local share of costs may be. One probable cost for the city to consider would be the type of street lighting desired for the bridge. This likely will be a city cost.
- Mr. Nixon noted that getting input from the City Council on the preferred corridor/bridge design option is the first step and that additional open house meetings will occur to get public feedback on the preferred design. He also stated that he is available if further questions arise. Council Members were supportive of the proposed design alternative #2.
- Discussion was closed.

Break at 7:07 p.m. Meeting reconvened at 7:14 p.m.

3. Consider Letter of Support for Wright County Broadband Program

- Smythe explained that Wright County is seeking a letter of support for a grant application on behalf of Frontier Communications, who is the county's selected local internet service provider to expand broadband under the Border-to-Border program. Members' consensus was to proceed with supplying a letter of support.

4. Goals and Plans Discussion

a. Brainstorming Session

- i. Mission, Vision, and Values**
- ii. Strengths and Weaknesses**
- iii. Needs Assessment**
- iv. Project Goals**

b. Next Steps

- A high level overview was provided of the goals and plans process, along with examples of mission and value statements from other cities. Members were interested in having a more focused discussion on specific values and priorities.
- Members suggested reaching out again to Lynden Township to discuss an annexation agreement. With St. Cloud's continued expansion, it's possible that Lynden's earlier reluctance may have changed. Members had questions about current utility capacity. Staff responded we are at about 50% capacity for sewer but are at full capacity for water. Staff are actively seeking a location to add a new well.
- Members also suggested reaching out to Clear Lake Township to discuss annexation. Mayor Lawrence explained the more recent interactions following the city's extension of subdivision regulations. Members believe that things can change and that St. Cloud's expansion may be viewed less favorably by the town board. There was also discussion about what happens to the neighborhood across the river if their septic systems start failing. It is not economically feasible to connect all the way to Clear Lake for sewer.
- Members are generally in support of continued commercial and residential growth. Members recognize that a lack of commercial growth is detrimental to local residential property taxes. Members would like further discussion to outline parameters of growth and would also like to review the Comprehensive Plan. Members also expressed interest in discussing the types of commercial growth to be sought.
- Members expressed interest in seeking additional access points to I94 for local business growth. As an example, another ramp near the Industrial areas of Lynden Township.

- Members recognized the city’s current parks and green spaces as a positive for the community. Mayor Lawrence suggested that the city could make better use of the opportunities associated with having two rivers in town. Members would like to have further discussion about expansion of recreational opportunities near the river, e.g., trail connections, benches, patios, possibly even restaurant opportunities, a municipal brew pub was suggested. Also, additional opportunities for fishing/after-hours fishing.
- Members believe more investment in trails is needed.
- Members discussed shortage of space with existing facilities; city hall, fire hall, public works, library. Staff suggested some alternatives. Members would like to discuss further and want to put on hold the current facilities in the capital plan until a more comprehensive plan can be determined.
- Smythe summarized the goals and plans discussion:
 - Members generally support continued commercial and residential opportunities but would like to further discuss the Comprehensive Plan to consider where growth should occur.
 - Members support continued efforts to negotiate annexation agreements with Lynden and Clear Lake Townships, and noted that St. Cloud is expanding closer to all of our borders every year.
 - Members support continued discussions of opportunities for traffic improvements, including continuing work with MnDOT on the T.H. 24 corridor/bridge project.
 - Members support continued discussions about recreational opportunities in the city and utilizing the two rivers in some way.
 - Members agree to put on hold any construction/facility items in the current Capital Improvement Plan until further discussions can be held.
- Accountant Johnson stated that the Community Center survey was ready for distribution. Staff believe we there will be results to share near the end of March.
- Members decided to hold another workshop to discuss the Community Center survey results and further discuss park and recreational opportunities. They suggested inviting the Park Commission members to that meeting.
- Special Workshop Meeting to be held Wednesday, March 29, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.

5. Adjournment

- **MOTION** to adjourn by Luhmann, seconded by Winkelman, all voted aye. **MOTION CARRIED 4-0.**
- Meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

ATTEST



 Annita M. Smythe, City Administrator

APPROVED



 Andrea Lawrence Wheeler, Mayor