

**BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL  
WORKSHOP MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 10, 2021**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Knier called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Council Members present: Ken Halverson, Sam Hanson, Paul Knier, and Paul Seefeld. Also present: City Administrator Clay Wilfahrt, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Finance Director Deb Wegeleben, Community Development Director Hanna Klimmek, City Engineer Layne Otteson, Deputy Police Chief Matt Hayen, Streets/Parks/Fleet Superintendent Norm Michels, and Big Lake Student Liaison Ella Dotzler.

**3. PROPOSED AGENDA**

Council Member Hanson motioned to adopt the proposed Agenda as presented. Seconded by Council Member Halverson, unanimous ayes, Agenda adopted.

**4. BUSINESS**

**4A. 2021 Street and Utility Improvement Project No. ST2021-1 Update**

Council Member Halverson stated that some Council Members have previously been opposed to bonding and questioned if we are for sure moving ahead with this street project. Mayor Knier clarified that he has never said he wouldn't bond, but that his goal is to pay down the City's debt. Mayor Knier also clarified that the Council's previous action indicates that we are prepared to move forward with the project.

Layne Otteson provided an update on the 2021 Street and Utility Improvement Project. The scope of the project focuses on street rehabilitation and drainage improvements for 22 street segments that have been found to be in need of resurfacing or reconstruction. Otteson reviewed that in 2020, the project made it through design and bid-out, but the bid was not awarded. Otteson reviewed the three open houses that were held, and noted that Staff received feedback through the open house discussion, questionnaires, telephone calls, and emails. The feedback received has mostly been regarding driveway access and drainage issues. A few comments regarded sidewalk installation with a couple indicating in favor of, and a couple indicating against sidewalk installation. Unlike a year ago, these comments did not indicate a neighborhood preference for or against sidewalk installation. Otteson reviewed sidewalk costs for each area and 2020 Council direction on whether the sidewalk area should be included in the final design.

Otteson also discussed a recent application the City received for a lot split at the end of Red Oak Drive and asked for Council feedback on how they would like Red Oak Drive to look and be incorporated into the street project. Otteson also reviewed construction design options and potential costs for each option.

Council Member Halverson stated we need to hold the City to the same standard that we require from new developments, which is to install sidewalks. If a sidewalk is required in our Comprehensive Plan then we should be installing it. Halverson also stated he feels eliminating sidewalks from projects is a safety issue and doesn't see what the problem is with installing sidewalks. Halverson also discussed that if a developer coming into town sees that the City isn't installing sidewalks, they will ask for the same standards in their development.

Council Member Seefeld stated that he is fine with a developer coming in and not wanting to put in a sidewalk. Seefeld noted that the Complete Streets Policy is a one-size fits all and feels that we aren't a one-size fits all City and we should be looking at these developments on a case-by-case basis and that we should look at what the residents want. Seefeld stated that with the debt level we are in, he would like to save ourselves that money.

Council Member Hanson feels our sidewalk requirement could be scaring developers away. Hanson discussed that he has walked these streets during high traffic hours, had minimal traffic going by him, and he felt safe the entire time, noting that he feels sidewalks are not needed in these areas. Hanson clarified that he sees the need for sidewalks on certain roads, just not on these roads.

Mayor Knier stated that he wants to lift the burden on taxpayers as much as we can. We've had a tough year due to government mandates that have affected property owners and he is looking to save taxpayers money. By eliminating these three sidewalks, it would save taxpayers approximately \$374,000.00 which equates to 8% of our entire levy. Let's get our financial house in order, noting that we need to gain more financial independence for Big Lake and become less dependent on St. Paul. Knier also clarified that there are currently no sidewalks in these areas, and he has confidence that Big Lake parents will continue to do a great job of teaching their children safe habits. We cannot protect everyone from everything, and it does come down to personal responsibility, and he trusts that parents will do a good job with that.

Halverson asked if officials were able to walk Tarrytown Road. Seefeld stated that we did agree that some areas will need sidewalks. Halverson stressed that he feels we would be building our community down to save a dollar. We need to build our community up, and make our neighborhoods more respectable. Having a nice community will attract people to Big Lake, and we need to build our community above the neighboring communities to bring people and businesses in. Council Member Seefeld stated that personally speaking, he would prefer not to have a sidewalk in front of his yard. Halverson stated he doesn't need other officials to debate with him stating that each of them are entitled to their own thought process on if kids will have to dodge cars. Council Member Hanson reiterated that new developments should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Mayor Knier discussed a response made by Police Chief Scharf last year to a question regarding sidewalks, with Scharf stating that to his knowledge there has never

been an incident. Halverson stated that a resident approached him about an incident with her son being hit trying to get on the school bus, but it's a matter of how we document it, and are we being truthful.

Mayor Knier stated that we need to be fiscally prudent. By removing the three sidewalks, it would have paid for almost our entire street project the years in between. Otteson reviewed potential costs for the three sidewalk sections.

Mayor Knier preferred to remove sidewalks from the plans now and finalize the design before the public hearing.

Council Members Hanson and Seefeld preferred to wait until the next workshop to decide if we are pulling the sidewalks from the plans.

The general consensus of the Council was to wait until after the public hearing to decide on sidewalks.

Otteson presented three options for road and curb design on the project. Option 1 is estimated to cost \$3,650,000 and includes everything listed in the PER which includes storm sewer, curbs, sidewalk, and drainage improvements, Option 2 is estimated to cost \$3,375,000 and includes everything besides the three sidewalk areas, and Option 3 is estimated to cost \$2,100,000 and only includes resurfacing with no expansion, and a pipe extension for flooding. Otteson reviewed flooding issues in specific areas.

Mayor Knier reviewed that option 3 could affect lake quality, which is something we need to be mindful of. Otteson reviewed curbing styles that guide the flow of stormwater to catch basins during rain events.

Mayor Knier, and Council Members Hanson and Seefeld were in favor of Option 2, and Council Member Halverson was in favor of Option 1.

Otteson reviewed that a recent lot split application was submitted to the City for a parcel located at the western edge of Red Oak Drive and asked for Council feedback on design of the street when the street project is finalized. Otteson explained that Red Oak Drive is currently 20 feet wide and does not have curbing. The property owner would like it to go through, but it is not identified on the Comprehensive Plan as a through-street, unlike Highland Avenue. Halverson asked if Red Oak Drive is considered a future through-street based on a conversation with City Administrator Wilfahrt. Otteson explained that it is common to extend a street to the next development if it is not a cul-de-sac, similar to Golf Street and Isanti Street. As a through-street it would increase traffic circulation and we would see increased traffic on that street. Otteson noted that key Staff supports Red Oak Drive being designed as a through-street as the property to the west is expected to develop in the near future. Otteson also reviewed street width size and asked for Council feedback on if the street should be designed as a future through-street with a 26 foot width, or with a cul-de-sac with no future plans as a through-street.

Council Member Seefeld discussed a recent citizen complaint regarding that accesses to the large parcel should be accessed from CR 81 instead of putting more traffic on Lakeshore Drive and these stub streets. Otteson reviewed that Highland Avenue is designed to be an east/west route to go from Lakeshore Drive to CR 81, and in order to do that the street would need to be 32 feet wide with the portion of the existing road slightly more narrow.

Halverson stated that he feels the flow of traffic when the land is developed will gravitate towards CR 81. Halverson also discussed that having Red Oak Drive as a through-street would provide 2 accesses.

Otteson noted that he is recommending the City hold an open house for citizens in the Red Oak Drive area an opportunity to provide feedback. Council directed Staff to proceed with scheduling an open house for residents near Red Oak Drive and Highland Avenue.

#### **4B. Special Assessment Policy Discussion**

Layne Otteson reviewed the City's Special Assessment Policy which is used as a tool to assess a portion of the construction cost to adjacent properties that benefit from the work being done. There is some flexibility in the Policy that allows Staff and Council to make adjustments when it is warranted. Otteson asked for feedback from Council on the assessment, interest rates, and the maximum assessment amount as it relates to street resurfacing and street reconstruction projects. Deb Wegeleben reviewed that a 10-year term versus a 15-year term would provide a quarter of a percent reduction in the interest rate for the residents. Wegeleben reviewed how the difference in the interest rate will affect the over-all amount paid by the property owner, and how costs are distributed to each assessed parcel.

Council Member Halverson asked what the average assessment amount is. Otteson reviewed that depending on the need for storm sewer, the assessments for this project ranges from \$52 to \$87 per front foot, noting that each project is different.

Mayor Knier stated that he doesn't see a reason to change the policy. Wegeleben discussed that the terms of the assessment will need to be set at the time we move forward with the project. Knier also asked what the 1.5% interest rate is for. Wegeleben explained that it ensures we have the cash flow to cover our yearly debt payments.

The general consensus of the Council was to revisit this item at a later date.

#### **4C. Sherburne County Street Project Update – CR 43 Reconstruction**

Layne Otteson provided an update on the Sherburne County initiated reconstruction of County Road 43 from US Highway 10 to the Elk River Bridge. Otteson noted that the project is in its early stages focusing on developing concepts and alternatives.

Mayor Knier discussed the proposed location of the crosswalk areas in regards to the roundabout. Otteson reviewed the “mini” roundabout design and how they impact the flow of traffic. Otteson discussed that the preliminary design is in the early stages.

**4D. New Ideas Discussion**

Council Member Seefeld stated that he wants to have the opportunity for longer discussion times during Workshops and suggested we recess the Workshops by 5:50 p.m. and reconvene after adjournment of the regularly scheduled Council Meeting. Council Members discussed various options and Mayor Knier encouraged that we be mindful and try to get our business done within the normal timeframe, and acknowledged that it is on him to keep the workshop moving forward.

5. **OTHER** - No other.

6. **ADJOURN**

Council Member Seefeld motioned to adjourn at 5:51 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Hanson unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck  
City Clerk

02/24/21  
Date Approved By Council