

City Council Work Session

September 4, 2007
5:30 PM
Community Center

ATTENDANCE:

Mayor/Council (please check) x Tussing, x Ronquillo, x Gaghen, x Stevens, x Brewster, x Veis, x Ruegamer, x Ulledalen, x Boyer, Jones, x Clark

CM Jones was excused.

ADJOURN TIME: 7:30 p.m.

Agenda

TOPIC #1	<i>Public Comment</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- Wyeth Friday: 3023 Stinson Ave., Commented on MET schedule. Glad that Council is looking into this. Rimrock schedule doesn't work anymore. MET is sacrificing customer service for employee breaks. He said he appreciated Council looking into this and hoping that they can come up with something that will make this work better for everyone.
- Connie Johnson: 1113 Lewis Ave., Petition against bike lanes. The majority of the residents on Lewis Ave. are against these bike lanes. They feel they are very dangerous and people will lose parking. Suggests speed limit signs, stop sign at 12th and Lewis, and law enforcement needs to be greater.
- Herman Rookhausen: 1198 Lewis Ave., Opposed to parking elimination on Lewis. He has lived here for 25 years. Speed limits need to be enforced, even if we have to pay overtime. Ticket revenue would pay for wages. Enforcement will slow people down. If you don't have police officers assigned to this area, people will not slow down.
- Florence Massey: 1141 Lewis Ave. Same comments regarding Lewis. Bike lane should not be installed. She and other residence do not see the benefit of a bike lane. It would take their parking spaces away from the front of their houses. She commented that it would inconvenience everyone living in the area.
- Councilmember Boyer: Is this considered a safe route to school?
- Dave Mumford: It is a school route but don't know if it's a "safe route to school". Three public meetings have been held regarding speeding, restriping, etc. in this area. Sent out notices to owners and notified them they had two weeks to comment. Councilmembers Jones, Veis and Ruegamer attended the meetings. Residents asked for changes to slow the speed on Lewis Ave. Section of Lewis Ave. from 11th to 12th will lose parking. Looking at Federal Regulations that would allow you to do a combined bike lane and parking. If the property owners out there don't want it, we have no issue on not doing it.

It was strictly in response to folks wanting to slow down cars, they felt were driving too fast. There are very limited engineering techniques available and one of these is to make narrower driving lanes which will slow traffic. This is one of the few ways that we can do it. If residents don't want it, we're glad to restripe like it was.

- Councilmember Clark: other sections are too narrow to do this?
- Dave Mumford: yes it's narrow but the lanes meet federal requirements. There would be two houses that would possibly lose parking. Staff reported the issue to me and they are looking at options. School principal asked for changes and we're doing that. Narrow lanes but they're within standards.
- Councilmember Stevens: what is the main concern?
- Audience: loss of parking; narrow lanes; won't solve the speeding problem; unsafe. The audience voted on all three concerns.
- Mayor Tussing: Is it safer for people to bike on Lewis without a bike lane? Why would it be less safe to have a bike lane that it would be to bike there without one.
- Member of Audience: It is very dangerous to bike on Lewis Ave.
- Mayor Tussing: We can't stop people from riding their bikes on Lewis Ave.
- Councilmember Ronquillo: Where does the bike lane run?
- Dave Mumford: Division to 24th Street West.
- Councilmember Ruegamer: Spent all weekend on this. Don't know where bike lane proposal came from. Bike lanes inside the parking lanes will not be used because they're not safe. Side streets can be used. Unsafe to use bike lanes in the inner city. He stated it was crazy to put the bike lanes on Lewis. He said they are very dangerous in the inner city. The residents don't want these bike lanes, so we shouldn't put them in.
- Councilmember Veis: bike lane was never an essential element. Slowing traffic is the issue and narrowing the lanes is the only way that it can be done. I proposed traffic changes in the CIP, but it was voted down.
- City Administrator Volek: We were on the opposite side of the fence when we made a decision on 5th Street and we are going to fight this street to street until we do a plan. We can certainly cease the stripping – go back to what was there before. It will not address the speed. Other measures were discussed, however, were too expensive.
- Art Mulke: Consider putting a stop at 13th Street. Taking away parking from houses that have no other options. Most houses do not have alleys either.
- Mayor Tussing: It is my understanding that Mr. Mumford is saying there are only a couple of house that will be affected. Other than that, the parking will stay the same.
- Bruce Simon: eliminating parking on north side from 17th to 21st. Appreciate the time staff put into this but it's the wrong solution because there isn't a neighborhood consensus. Hold another neighborhood meeting. Room for improvements, such as a striped median to narrow the lanes.
- Lynn Grant: 1128 Lewis Ave. is an at home Mom with a 3 year old child. Speed is an issue, but narrowing the lanes isn't the answer. 8th to 13th Streets needs two more stop signs. Kids at the school can't get across the street. There is no crossing guard there either.
- City Administrator Volek: notices were mailed last week to property owners and should have been received on Saturday.
- Mayor Tussing: Staff says they conducted three public meetings were held but not everyone seems to know about what was going on.

- Dave Mumford: neighborhood organized the meetings and staff attended as resources. City has done what can be done under the MUTCD.
- Councilmember Boyer: mailed to whom?
- Dave Mumford: Notices were mailed to all property owners on Lewis Avenue. Weekend and the holiday probably interfered with delivery. The street markings are temporary and striping will not take place for a couple of weeks in order to give residents a chance to comment on the plan.
- City Administrator Volek: Will bring back Aragon’s plan and the Heritage Trail plan and ask Council to endorse something. We need to devise a notice to every different neighborhood and say: This is the proposed plan, and maybe hold a single public hearing and talk about what it is. Staff getting conflicting messages from Council and neighborhoods. We cannot put stop signs in without warrants under State Law. We don’t make them on Lewis Avenue. We want to get it right. This is the best plan we can offer tonight.
- Mayor Tussing: We need a better way to get neighborhood input and consensus.
- Dave Mumford: A lot of people came to meetings but until they see what is on the ground, many people won’t become engaged.
- Councilmember Stevens: I agree with Dave. We have to have meetings, but door to door notification is probably the only way we get to conclusion.
- Councilmember Clark: Only part of the street got meeting notices and mail is slower than planned.
- Councilmember Ruegamer: Can no parking signs be removed?
- Dave Mumford: Yes, we can go back and restripe the street exactly like it was. Won’t solve the speeding problem.
- Councilmember Boyer: Narrowing the lanes will slow the traffic.
- Mayor Tussing: the other side will complain if we don’t do the changes.
- Councilmember Veis: Agree, I’ve been getting consistent messages from people who are eager to get the changes made. It’s a no win situation.
- Councilmember Gaghan: Maybe Grand Ave. construction and opening it will remove traffic and maybe slow traffic? Suggest more meetings.
- Dave Mumford: Meetings were held over a year ago, before Grand was under construction.
- City Administrator Volek: Have to get the striping done soon, because of the weather. We could have another meeting but it will have to be done quickly. No guarantee of a consensus.
- Mayor Tussing: Do you want another meeting?
- Councilmembers Veis and Ruegamer: a meeting won’t hurt. Consensus is to have one more meeting. There will be a notice sent out with the date and time of the meeting.

TOPIC #2	<i>Board & Commission Reports</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- None

TOPIC #3	<i>Prosecuting Transients</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- Removed from agenda and postponed until October 1, 2007.

TOPIC #4	<i>Billings Urban Area 2008 Planning Work Program (2008 UPWP)</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- Scott Walker: Council sees this every year. Budgets staff time on projects. Three items have changed from prior years. 1 – Add a traffic tech to County public works, hopefully with no local money involved. 2 – data base management and traffic counts, making it more accessible, and 3 – update Transportation Plan to comply with new federal highway bill. This will involve lots of public input and will probably revise the street improvement priorities. On Council meeting agenda for Sept. 24 and Sept. 26 to the PCC.
- Councilmember Ronquillo: Traffic counts – can accident data be captured? A traffic signal is needed at Hallowell. Would like to know the criteria of the State Department.
- Scott Walker: Police Department has accurate information and what we produce locally is probably a little more accurate than what is reported to State.

TOPIC#5	<i>MET Bus Schedule</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- Tom Binford: Presented a slide program and handouts regarding the 2004 Teamsters agreement established breaks. “Operational requirements” should have prevented having to give scheduled breaks. Usually took breaks, but unscheduled, when the half - hour stops happen. Looked at seven different options and could not get to a consensus decision with union reps. Went to arbitration and arbitrator decided for Teamsters on breaks, but did not pay them for breaks they did not receive from 2004 to 2007. System operations and driver schedules were described. Budget uses \$240,000 in reserves for O&M costs.

- City Administrator Volek: We did at one time offer the union to postpone implementing this new schedule until we move to the new transit center, which will affect our schedule process. They declined.
- Ron Wenger: This was unlike any previous schedule change because of many difficult issues that had to be addressed simultaneously. No extra money, school routes, breaks as soon as possible, breaks at 2 hour intervals don't necessarily coincide with route schedules, etc. The School year is very important to consider, as well. Decided to deal only with time changes, not shifting service from one part of town to another or using more money. More buses leave at 5:10 a.m., than used to leave at 5:15 a.m. and this is the segment that we hear most complaints. They usually are picked up ½ hour earlier and leave a little earlier. Every adjustment we make has consequences, so that's why we didn't move routes or service, only time changes. Will be hiring consultant to assess the system and recommend how to better operate. Will use passenger surveys, GPS, transfer center effects, etc. Changes will be implemented when the center goes into operation. Want to capitalize on the new transfer center, so will be addressing as many of the downtown worker issues as we can.
- Councilmember Ulledalen: Used to ride Rimrock route and did it again two weeks ago. Drivers talking about any ridership changes? Leaving downtown is the issue, especially the 8:00 a.m. -5:00 p.m. workers.
- Ron Wenger: Haven't asked on that route but based on other communication, ridership has probably declined. Any other changes to schedules would have more dramatic effects.
- Mayor Tussing: Could more employees have allowed you to keep the previous schedule?
- Ron Wegner: Yes, if money isn't an object, we can keep the previous schedule. Main issue is equipment and buses cost \$300,000 each.
- Councilmember Veis: Is there disruption on school routes?
- Ron Wegner: Lewis and Clark students may need to walk a little farther in order to get to school on time. Working with school administration to point out options. Had a 1st day issue at Will James due to construction. Moved bus pickup to another location and it seems to be solved.
- Councilmember Ulledalen: Reduce less used routes (middle of the day routes) in order to improve others?
- Ron Wegner: Yes, will ask a consultant to look at that. Didn't have the time to analyze all of that in order to meet arbitrator's order.
- Councilmember Boyer: Consultant cost?
- Ron Wegner: Negotiating a scope of work and costs. This is a 5 year planning contract. Will present the first year plan and cost to Council. It's allocated in the budget.
- Councilmember Gaghen: What percentage of cost increase is due to fuel or other cost inflation?
- Ron Wegner: Fuel and lube is 3rd highest cost item. Tried to anticipate the cost increase last year but we busted it. 30% to 40% increase over 2-3 years. Mill levy capped, federal grant is constant and state grant is declining.

- Councilmember Clark: How much do fares contribute?
- Tom Binford: 6%. 1/3 from federal and most of the rest is from mill levy, advertising, etc. All systems are extensively subsidized.
- Councilmember Veis: Will be underway in 45 – 60 days, when will recommendations come?
- Ron Wegner: within six months because we have to have time for public input and Council consideration. Routes will stay the same until then.
- Councilmember Veis: Have you talked to the Union?
- Tom Binford: Talked with union president and union steward and thought he made progress. Negotiations went well for most of the session. Don't know why, but communications broke down and we couldn't agree on a plan to either delay arbitrator's order or to modify the contract.
- Ron Wegner: There are a number of drivers who don't think there needs to be formal breaks, however, there is a division in the group and union president thinks he needs unanimity.
- Councilmember Stevens: Comment from a constituent: "public employees are going to break this state." What can Council and management staff do to reduce entitlement mentality?
- City Administrator Volek: Re-forging relationships that had not been as good in the past. New bargaining team has been more support. We have added an attorney to every team. Having labor attorney look at contract changes before Council approval. Many of these issues go back years.
- Councilmember Stevens: Gradual changes or something dramatic?
- City Administrator Volek: Gradual.
- Mayor Tussing: Union may not have been party, it's largely individuals.
- Councilmember Ulledalen: good employees are at a premium with our low unemployment rate. Have to decide if we're going hire and retain quality employees.
- Councilmember Gaghen: Many costs can't directly control, such as medical costs.
- Councilmember Boyer: School district presentation that tax dollars won't continue to increase and we will have to change how we do business.
- City Administrator Volek: working toward cost of services and will incorporate public dialogue. Prioritizing services and how we pay for them may be part of it.
- Mayor Tussing: Strategic plan needs to go on the road.
- Councilmember Boyer: Will you publish the vision statement?
- City Administrator Volek: Yes, it will be published on the website.
- Councilmember Stevens: When do we get the new website?
- Bruce McCandless: After contract is approved, 60-90 days. If I'm way off, I'll let you know and correct it.

TOPIC#6	<i>Miller Crossing Development Agreement</i>
PRESENTER	

NOTES/OUTCOME	
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- City Administrator Volek: Staff continuing to work on this agreement. It will be on your Sept. 10th agenda. Council may not get the final agreement until Friday or over the weekend.
- Candi Beaudry: Map of the proposed TID. Development agreement is a condition of annexation. Agreement references the TID. Have to demonstrate blight and that there are redevelopment opportunities. Feel strongly that we can demonstrate blight and there are development opportunities that far exceed this specific property. Map: cannot include county property. SW Corridor task force endorses the concept. Future public meetings are Sept. 13 and Oct. 11, at Ponderosa School; will let you know exact time. Resolutions on blight will be in Nov. and urban renewal plan will be on Nov. and December agendas. Plan will show bonding capacity from this project and others.
- Councilmember Clark: How long can we continue to create TIDs and live with frozen property taxes?
- City Administrator Volek: Question is whether this property will develop without the incentive?
- Councilmember Brewster: TID districts are a chicken and egg issue.
- Councilmember Ulledalen: In this area, where will taxes increase unless we entice development? City can use the increment all over the area, not just for the growth area.
- Councilmember Clark: Was getting a lot of questions from others and I thought it was worth asking.
- Councilmember Ulledalen: Alternative is to let them rot.
- Councilmember Boyer: I don't think that downtown would have increased the tax base we have right now without TID. But I am concerned about using incentives that suck development out of the downtown area. We need to stay focused. Don't divert our attention from other development possibilities, such as Stockman Bank.
- Dave Mumford: This is a standard development agreement but is moving quickly because developer wants to start site preparation within the next few weeks to beat the weather and to allow for public process. Changes will be; remove references to retailers that may locate there and focus on the improvements that are needed and what City will do; explains that TID will reduce the City's costs of improvements in this area and will fund improvements in other areas; if TID not approved, SID is the alternative but City will be one of the assessed entities; if City does not participate, developer will only build 3/4 of the road because that's his only responsibility.
- Councilmember Clark: TID won't have an increment right away so how will it pay for improvements?
- Councilmember Mumford: Bonds will be sold.
- Discussion about TID and bonds.
- Councilmember Ulledalen: Project as originally cast would have been off King Avenue and Zoo Drive. This property is closer to the city center and answers some of the concerns about suburban development.

- Mayor Tussing: Development will spur additional development. Will make the area more desirable place to live and do business.
- City Administrator Volek: It's a large enough area that it will incorporate other potential commercial development.
- Rick Leuthold: Represents Engineering Inc., They have discussed some of the changes with staff. Don't think that Foursquare will have a problem with the changes. They recognize that the agreement has to work for both parties. Will have fast turnaround on the agreements. Need it on the Sept. 10th agenda.
- City Administrator Volek: SW Corridor hasn't formally voted on the TID. Leon Pattyn has same concerns as expressed by Councilman Clark.
- Candi Beaudry: SW corridor thinks this will help entire neighborhood.
- Councilmember Brewster: Guys at work say that if Cabelas doesn't come, Council will be blamed.
- Councilmember Gaghen: Neighborhood sees improvements and better opportunities are developing already.

Additional Information:

- City Administrator Volek: Questions about baseball field item that was on last agenda; item #7 was recommended to be tabled and some Councilmembers think that this means that #7 is in the contract as is, since it was not deleted or changed. Staff thinks that the motion was to bring it back to Council when it's timely. Discussion from Council: it's in the contract as it was awarded (22' concourse). We will not redesign, we'll take it off the September 10th agenda and will not ask Council to take action to change any of this design.
- Councilmember Boyer: Money is coming in and how much?
- City Administrator Volek: Will report on this Monday.
- City Administrator Volek: PRPL has worked on a map and brochure about where we can walk our dogs, and passed them out to all.
- Councilmember Stevens: Got a call from someone from Hawaii that is outraged that we don't have a dog park. Will try to put this person in touch with Mike.
- Mayor Tussing: Would anyone like to volunteer to be the City's representative for the Boy Scout's Eagle Scout event? Councilmember Brewster volunteered.