

MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

ROLL CALL

Present: Member Greenberg, Member Parisian, Mayor Pro Tem Wagner, Mayor Blonigan, Member Murphy

Absent: None

Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Richard McCoy, City Engineer/Public Works Director; Heather Rand, Community Development Director

DISCUSSION

A. Blue Line Light Rail - Municipal Consent

Sandvik introduced the topic and explained that tonight's meeting is for Council to decide what they want to do in regard to municipal consent. He explained that at the September 17th Council meeting, Council decided to table the issue, which gave the project office time to respond to ongoing questions, comments, concerns, and considerations.

He shared that the project office provided materials on September 25. He summarized the 400 pages of materials and explained that the letter contained edited plans, goals, concepts, and commitments. Sandvik highlighted a few key commitments including enhanced design safety, dedication to communication with City staff, a parking structure with no more than 290 spaces, flexibility to move the station north of 40th Avenue, and a Metro Transit Police substation. Sandvik explained that for tonight's Council meeting, a resolution providing consent and a resolution withholding consent are both prepared. Sandvik shared that the Human Rights Commission also wrote a letter of support for the project.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked for City staff's thoughts on elevation. Sandvik explained that it is ultimately up to Council to determine if concerns about east-west travel and elevation have been answered by the project office. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner clarified by asking if there are remaining engineering or planning concerns around the proposed commitments. Sandvik shared that the new materials raised new staff questions, but the new materials are appreciated. Mayor Blonigan discussed which municipal consent vote would be more advantageous for getting the project office to address the City's remaining concerns.

Mayor Blonigan expressed interest in a mechanism that would allow firefighters to preempt traffic while crossing Highway 81 in their personal vehicles during an emergency, and that he would be more inclined to vote "yes" with County support on the issue. Mayor Blonigan also mentioned his concern about loud bells on the train. Sandvik explained that Public Safety had some concerns with using personal traffic preemption devices due to devices accidentally getting left on, as well as interaction with police vehicle devices.

Member Greenberg asked the project office if they could elaborate on their response to the request for elevation. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner also asked if the project office could elaborate on the traffic preemption devices mentioned.

Dan Soler, project office representative, explained that they do not recommend elevation since they believe that

concerns, such as emergency response time and pedestrian crossings across Highway 81, can be addressed in an at-grade plan. Soler elaborated that trains running on Highway 81 will stop at red lights, so there will be a similar chance of encountering a green light when the light rail is running as there is now. Soler explained that traffic preemption emitter devices would need to be approved by the Commissioner of Public Safety. Soler responded to questions on elevation and reconfirmed that the project office does not recommend elevating the track.

Soler shared that the project office explored the idea of the downtown station being moved north of 40th Avenue in the materials, but he explained that the station can also stay south of 40th Avenue if desired. He stated that the station location can be finalized after municipal consent as the project office moves closer to 60% engineered plans.

Member Parisian expressed that elevation was not a deal-breaker for her, and she appreciated the data on emergency response times with an at-grade plan. She added that most of her remaining concerns do not fall into the 30% engineered plans, including questions about cyclist crossings and wayfinding resources.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked for the County's perspective on elevation and the maintenance of pedestrian resources, such as the painted crosswalk. Commissioner Jeff Lunde shared that having a station elevated in front of businesses and apartment buildings is not desirable in his experience working with community members. He emphasized the County's commitment to supporting Robbinsdale's pedestrian infrastructure. Commissioner Irene Fernando expressed her commitment to working with the City on the economics and complexities of a state-aid highway intersection. She shared the idea that cities concerned with emergency response in Hennepin County due to light rail could convene to further discuss solutions together.

McCoy emphasized that there is not enough staff or funding for the Engineering department to maintain bright paint on pedestrian crossings on Highway 81. Commissioner Lunde expressed his understanding and believes something can be written into the agreement.

Mayor Blonigan shared that he is open to the downtown station being either north or south of 40th Avenue. He shared that elevation was a personal dealbreaker for a time, but he has accepted that it will not be done. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner agreed and expressed that many of the reasons why he initially wanted elevation have been accounted for in the at-grade plans.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner expressed that he does not think the City would gain more leverage by saying no tonight since many of Council's concerns have been addressed within the last month. Member Greenberg disagreed, and expressed that he still has questions and that only some of the new commitments are concrete. He asked if there would be any way to extend the municipal consent deadline past October 10th. Soler and Sandvik explained that the deadline date is constrained to what is in state statute. Soler recognized that there is a lot of work to be done and hundreds of details to continue to work on after the municipal consent vote.

Member Murphy expressed frustration that Council was unified and in agreement to withhold municipal consent, and only then did Council receive a lengthy response from the project office. He favored withholding consent to maintain leverage.

Member Murphy asked for an staff update on utilities concerns with an at-grade plan. McCoy explained that the Joint Water Commission's pipe would be affected, and that solutions could be engineered to protect the pipe if an at-grade plan goes through. He emphasized that the City does not have much say on the Commission's pipe. He stated that an at-grade light rail would add complications for Robbinsdale's piping, but it would be manageable since staff are familiar with working under the railroad already. Member Murphy shared that he is not stuck on elevation if City staff are okay with at-grade.

Member Murphy continued by expressing concerns about the park and ride location, especially with the potential development on the US Bank site. Sandvik shared that there is speculation of development at the US Bank site, and that it conflicts with plans from the project office that have shown the site as a location for a parking structure. Council and staff asked for more clarity from the project office about what happens if the US Bank site is no longer available.

Soler explained that the intention of the project is to install a parking structure on the US Bank site, and that they are looking into an agreement where US Bank can go forward with development while the parking structure is incorporated on the site too. He explained that if there is a change in the design, like a parking structure location being moved, then that change would need to be approved by the municipality. He summarized that the intent is to place a parking structure at US Bank, and they will explore all options to fulfill that plan.

Member Parisian shared that she is optimistic that the project office will be communicative going forward due to the new improved commitments, and she disagreed that withholding consent would gain leverage for the City. She added that the letter that Council received on September 25 already showed what a response to a “no” vote would be, and she does not believe the response would change by withholding consent tonight.

Member Greenberg emphasized that he still has questions and concerns on aspects included in the 30% engineered plan, such as elevation, station location, traffic location, and more. Nick Landwer, project office representative, addressed a concern about removing five right turn lanes in Robbinsdale by emphasizing how greatly it would improve pedestrian safety, even though traffic may be slowed. Soler added that removing turn lanes in the plan helped to minimize property acquisition.

Sandvik and the project office staff discussed how there has been consistent conversation between the project office and the City so far, but this is the first time this level of detail has been provided, which is where frustration stems from.

Mayor Blonigan asked for confirmation from the County that they will work with the City on public safety concerns, especially with an at-grade plan. The County confirmed.

Mayor Blonigan asked to go over the draft resolution that provides consent. Sandvik explained that the draft resolution providing consent is largely similar to the resolution withholding consent, since both outline Council’s concerns.

Member Murphy expressed that he still has issues with items that were responded to but not addressed, such as turnstiles, payment in lieu of taxes, and communication with North Memorial about their concerns. Soler explained that the project office has been working with North Memorial Hospital on station design and environmental impacts on the hospital, such as noise, vibration, and traffic.

Member Greenberg asked about the traffic flow around 40th Avenue and questioned how people would easily access the park and ride site. Soler explained that these design details to manage traffic flow can still be changed in future conversations.

The Council and project office representatives discussed what design changes would require another vote, and Sandvik concluded that it will likely be a case by case basis.

STAFF UPDATES

None.

COUNCIL UPDATES

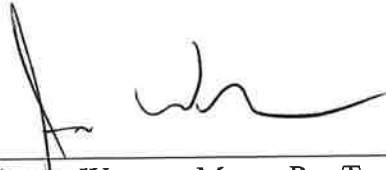
None.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner adjourned the meeting at 6:56 PM.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Leen', written over a horizontal line.

Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Wagner', written over a horizontal line.

Aaron Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem