

City of Gem Lake
City Council Meeting – February 21, 2023
Meeting Minutes

Mayor Gretchen Artig-Swomley called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Councilmembers Jim Lindner, Laurel Amlee and Ben Johnson were present. Councilmember Len Cacioppo was remote from his home on Labore Road. Also present: City Attorney Kevin Beck, City Treasurer Tom Kelly, City Engineer Justin Gese, Acting City Clerk Melissa Lawrence, Local Initiatives Support Corporation Gretchen Nicholls, Commission Member Don Cummings, Commission Chair Joshua Patrick, and residents Rick Bosak, Tom Bolfing, Steve Varley and Business Owner John Birkeland and Mike Birkeland.

February 21, 2023 Agenda

A motion was introduced by Councilmember Linder to accept the agenda, seconded by Councilmember Johnson. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, agenda accepted.

Minutes

A motion was introduced by Councilmember Lindner, seconded by Councilmember Amlee to approve the January 17, 2023, City Council Meeting Minutes. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, agenda accepted.

Special Presentation

Guest Speakers from Corridor Project – Gretchen Nicholls (LISC Consultant Team), Ben Johnson (Staff Team), Don Cummings (Project Team), Rick Bosak (Community Advisory Group)

LISC Gretchen Nicholls gave an overview of the Corridor Project that involved the Cities of Vadnais Heights, White Bear Lake and Gem Lake. Each City shared places along the corridor that they thought were opportunity areas. The goal of this project is to create a community driven vision that transforms the County Road E corridor into a place that fosters a sense of community & connects people to economic opportunities. The objectives of this project are to gain perspective on community needs and wants along the corridor, improve understanding of what is viable and realistic, attract investment to the corridor to maintain and improve vitality, and to improve quality of life for County Road E Residents & Stakeholders.

There were four workshops held, the first one on September 14, 2022 was to gather information, the second one that was a 3-part block exercise series that took place on September 28, 2022 in Vadnais Heights, September 29, 2022 in White Bear Lake and October 5, 2022 in Gem Lake. The third one was on October 12, 2022 for a developer panel and the final one was held on October 26, 2022 for framing the recommendations. The project team involved many agencies and different members of each City.

Some themes from community input included:

1. Explore ways to create an overall identity and sense of place throughout the corridor to encourage travelers to frequent local shops and businesses
2. Strong desire for more comfortable, safer crossings of County Road E along the corridor
3. Implement traffic calming measures
4. Continuous connections and enhancements to the active transportation network along the corridor that promote walkability, safety, livability, and pedestrian and bicycle access
5. Residential development (a mix of housing formats that meets the needs of the community)
6. Commercial development
7. Mixed-use development
8. Site anchors
9. Compatibility
10. Family-friendly gathering places that help to foster a sense of community
11. A mix of residential and commercial uses that enhance the vitality and market strength of the area
12. Industrial buildings that serve businesses that want to be closer to the metro
13. The partner cities and county to coordinate efforts to attract private and public investments that will benefit the broader community

The near term strategies for this project are fostering a sense of place and purpose:

1. Form a coalition among the three cities (similar to the Rice Larpenteur Alliance) to pursue these recommendations
2. Initiate a working group to build out programmed events and activities that give character or personality to the County Road E corridor
3. Work with developers to incorporate privately owned public spaces into larger project sites
4. Coordinate streetscape elements (e.g., trees, banners, street light designs, flower planters or baskets, etc.) to signify connectivity and individuality among the cities
5. Create family-friendly programming and events in each of the three cities along County Road E corridor
6. Align zoning regulations in each community to match their comprehensive plans and accomplish these recommendations
7. Continue to engage community members to inform and strengthen the County Road E Corridor action plan (especially those who were not able to participate in this series of workshops)

The near term – long term strategies include:

1. Safety – Coordination with Ramsey County and/or MnDOT to study and address potential safety issues along the corridor and consider the traffic calming tool kit options
2. Connectivity – Strengthen and promote convenient, comfortable and safe walking, rolling and biking along, across and near the corridor
3. Activate development sites

Resident Rick Bosak shared some of his takeaways from the action plan. Mr. Bosak feels that there are conflicts between what contractors would like to do and what the residents would like to see. He also stated that at this time there is no safe way for pedestrians to safely get around. He would like to see a cohesive look and feel and some street lights and sidewalks. Mr. Bosak feels that there is a lot of opportunity.

Resident Don Cummings shared some of his takeaways from the action plan. He agrees with what Mr. Bosak had to say. Mr. Cummings also feels that when the time does come that the concept of a corridor needs to be thought of when doing construction and it needs to be designed in a way that gives people the opportunity to stop. He would like to see a common approach.

Mayor Artig-Swomley shared that the exercise with building blocks was a fun way to help realize what could and could not work. The Mayor would like to invite the developer panel to do another block exercise to help envision what could happen in Gem Lake. The Mayor suggested holding a workshop.

Consent Agenda

Resolution #2023-002 February 2023 Donation to White Bear Lake Area Food Shelf

Master Agreement for Professional Services – Short Elliot Hendrickson Inc.

Monthly Financial Report(s)

Claims

All items on the consent agenda were reviewed by the Council. Councilmember Lindner introduced a motion to approve all the items listed on the consent agenda as is, seconded by Councilmember Johnson. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, consent agenda is approved.

Committee Reports

Planning Commission

Commission Chair Joshua Patrick shared with the Council that the Commission has begun reviewing the Nuisance Ordinance and will continue to work on it over the next couple of months. There are many Ordinances to use as examples and will be enlisting the help of City Attorney Kevin Beck and City Planner Evan Monson.

Old Business

Newsletter

The next copy of the Newsletter will include topics such as the work the City is doing on its Nuisance Ordinance, water system finance prep, clean-up day, corridor project recommendations, how charitable gambling works, and an article on railroad crossings, written by Jim Lindner.

Nuisance Ordinance Discussion

Over a dozen complaints have been received at Heritage Hall regarding several properties in Gem Lake. Neighbors have expressed numerous concerns about excessive junk, excessive numbers of parked cars, the appearance of industrial or business activity, etc. These concerns have pointed out the need to revisit the city's nuisance ordinance and see if improvement is possible. At this time these problem properties are not breaking any code that can be identified, however, the properties look distasteful to neighbors. The Planning Commission is working on improving the Ordinance.

New Business

Gem Lake Water System Planning

Mayor Artig-Swomley expressed interest in starting to apply for funding due to the long approval period. While nothing has been decided on in terms of putting in a water system, the Mayor thinks the City should apply for the funds that the City can either accept or deny if approved. The Mayor would like SEH to begin the process of applying. City Engineer Justin Gese stated that most of these grants are match based at 20% and state bonds typically match at 50%.

Councilmember Lindner introduced a motion to allow SEH to explore and start applying for financial assistance, seconded by Councilmember Amlee. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, SEH will begin the lengthy process of applying for grants and bonds.

Gem Lake Clean-Up Day Discussion

The Mayor and Acting City Clerk have been in communication with White Bear Township about joining the towns clean-up day scheduled for Saturday, May 20, 2023. At this time the Utilities Commission seems to be in favor of letting us join, and will have a definitive answer after the next meeting on March 20, 2023. The City would pay an agreed upon fee to the Township based on the amount of Gem Lake residents that take part. This should allow for free disposal of certain items such as mattresses and appliances.

New Business Inquiries/Code Concern

Over the past two weeks the Acting City Clerk has gotten several new business inquiries. One inquiry was about a used car dealership, which according to our code would not be allowed, and the applicant was informed. The other inquiry was about a tobacco/vape shop. After checking with the City Planner this type of business would be zoned for the area they are requesting. The applicants are in the process of filling out the required Gem Lake paperwork and working with the building owner.

Charitable Gambling Donations

Request for Charitable Gambling Donation Northern Fusion Synchronized Skating Program

The City received a request for a donation to support the NFSSP. There is one resident of Gem Lake that belongs to the program. At this time they are requesting a donation in the amount of \$500.00. Councilmember Amlee believes that is too large an amount for having only one resident on the team and suggested the City donate \$250.00. Councilmember Amlee introduced a motion to authorize a \$250.00 donation to the NFSSP, seconded by Councilmember Lindner. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, Acting City clerk will request a donation for \$250.00 to be approved at the March City Council meeting.

White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf

Mayor Artig-Swomley suggested that the Council make a donation in March in the amount of \$1500.00 to the White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf. Councilmember Amlee suggested that because the City is donating \$250.00 to another program that for the month of March a donation in the amount of \$1250.00 is given to the White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf. Mayor Artig-Swomley agreed. Councilmember Amlee introduced a motion to request a donation in the amount of \$1250.00 for the White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf, seconded by Councilmember Johnson. Voice vote taken, all voted yes, motion passes, Acting City Clerk will request a donation to be approved at the March City Council meeting.

Community Outreach to Other Cities and Government Bodies

Former City Attorney Patrick Kelly sent Vadnais Heights a letter regarding the Villas water billing based on Vadnais Heights recommendation. At this time Gem Lake is still waiting for a reply. This is one of the last items that Patrick Kelly needs to fulfil before he retires for the City.

Councilmember Lindner shared that he still plans and expects to be the chair for VLAWMO. The meeting scheduled for tomorrow, Wednesday, February 22, 2023 will most likely be rescheduled.

Presentation from the Public, 2 minutes maximum

Resident Tom Bolfing had a question regarding the corridor and if there is a ratio of commercial to residential property for the area. Mayor Artig-Swomley stated that there is no on standard ratio and that it is all based on the parcel.

Open Items for Council Members to Bring Up

Mayor Artig-Swomley stated that the Acting City Clerk shared with her that schools have closed both Wednesday and Thursday this week due to the forecasted weather. With that information the Mayor suggested that the office be closed on Wednesday and Thursday and the Acting City Clerk work from home both days. The Council agreed that would be the best plan.

Mayor Artig-Swomley shared that Karen from White Bear Township is doing a “Bridging for Blankets” event and is requesting donations. Blankets can be brought to White Bear Township until the event ends on March 18th.

Future Council Meetings

City Council, Tuesday, March 21, 2023, Workshop, Monday, March 13, 2023 is CANCELED.

Attendance Inquiry

Councilmember Cacioppo is unsure if he will be able to attend in person, most likely will remotely.

Adjournment

Being there no further business, following a motion from Councilmember Lindner, seconded by Councilmember Johnson, the meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Melissa Lawrence