



Approved: November 13, 2023

**CITY OF ARDEN HILLS, MINNESOTA
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
OCTOBER 9, 2023
5:30 P.M. - ARDEN HILLS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, Mayor Grant called to order the City Council Work Session at 5:00 p.m.

Present: Mayor David Grant; Councilmembers Brenda Holden, Emily Rousseau, Tena Monson and Tom Fabel

Absent: None

Also present: City Administrator Dave Perrault, Community Development Director Jessica Jagoe, and Assistant to the City Administrator/City Clerk Julie Hanson

Mayor Grant declared October 9 as a Non-Holiday to conduct City business. He said they would discuss the Lake Johanna Blvd Speed Display Sign first.

1. PUBLIC INQUIRIES/INFORMATIONAL

Donna Wiemann, 1406 Arden View Drive, explained at the JDA meeting last week a resident said there had been institutional racism in Arden Hills for years by the City discouraging low income housing. However, in 2019 the Met Council said that 40% of the units in Arden Hills are considered affordable to households at 80% of medium income. The TCAAP plan at that time of 1,460 units called for an additional 373 affordable units, which was over 20% of the proposed units in TCAAP. She was not aware of any developers coming to the City, proposing affordable housing and it being denied by the City.

Micah Kiernan, 3280 Lake Johanna Boulevard, thanked the Council for responding to his email. He has lived at his address for 6 ½ years. He stated there are no sidewalks and an unprotected shoulder where they bike and walk. A majority of drivers speed on the road, and many cross over into the shoulder. They are looking for support for any measures that can be taken to help people feel safe between now and when a trail is built.

2. RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INQUIRIES

None.

3. AGENDA ITEMS

A. Lake Johanna Fire Department (LJFD) Fire District Discussion (discussed as Item 3B)

City Administrator Perrault stated the fire board is looking to cities to see if they would support a fire district. The fire board's issues include the effective governance, they think it would be more effective and productive under a fire district, while cities feel they will lose control over items such as taxing.

Councilmember Monson added there is a benefit to the City taking the fire costs off the levy issued by the City. City elected officials would sit on the board, but the makeup hasn't been determined. Full time hires and building a new station are coming at once and there was concern about supporting them and making decisions based on the current governance. The alternative to a fire district is to update the bylaws and contracts to shore up some of the governance concerns. She felt the fire department is due for a new governance model. As the department goes away from a part-time fire fighter model they need to have a governance that matches that. She also found the district to be a big distraction for the fire board because there are things in front of the board that need time to be discussed but aren't such as the fire station funding. She wondered if they should be pursuing a fire district while there are other important topics in front of them. If they cities don't want to levy for those cost, the fire district is a solution as they could decide how to levy for the money. She felt there were good things about it but to her it was more about timing.

Councilmember Holden felt the bylaws and governance that has been in place up until now has worked perfectly. She said there are three firemen that are elected to the board and there is one board member that is bringing up issues. They have had the opportunity to change the bylaws every January and yet the fire department hasn't done it. One of the main issues she saw was if two cities vote for it, the third city is stuck with it. She didn't understand why Shoreview felt they should have more seats on the board because they have more houses. It cost the same amount of money to put a fire out in Arden Hills as is does in Shoreview, and yet Shoreview has a shorter response time than Arden Hills or North Oaks. If Arden Hills gets another 5,000 people do they get another half a vote? She thought changing the bylaws wouldn't be an issue. They didn't know what it would cost to become a fire district on top of the additional fire department personnel, equipment, and lawyers. She didn't know what the rush was.

Councilmember Rousseau said she wasn't able to attend the fire board meeting. She thought if they go to a fire district they can't go back in a few years and roll it back. She wondered if they could make amendments to the bylaws first and see how that went.

City Administrator Perrault said his general impression was that Shoreview was supportive and looking at it as a new, unique governing model. He felt North Oaks was still on the fence and maybe less supportive of it, partly because of the way payment or financing was distributed; on a taxable market value base or a predefined formula. If it was on a taxable market value base North Oaks' share would go up significantly.

Councilmember Rousseau was also uncertain about the votes and if we could have more. She felt the levy was confusing for residents and thought the money should be more specified for what it was going to be used for.

Mayor Grant thought North Oaks was more hesitant than indicated by staff. He noted the Truth in Taxation meeting would come in December when they would go through line items. He thought if it was a fire district they would still have to change the bylaws. He said just because you could have a fire district because the State changed the law, doesn't mean you should do it. The big rub was there was three fire fighters on the fire board. If they don't like the governance model the bylaws can change. If you become a fire district, how do you un-become one? What if State statute changes and limits what you can do? You're subject to the State statute changes that come down the road. They've been successful in the past 20 years with the bylaws. He also has concerns doing this in the midst of going to a full duty crew with six captains, and the cost of the new fire station. If Shoreview has trouble with bonding for the new fire station then each of the three cities could bond on their own. We now have the SAFER Grant. He suggested not moving ahead with the fire district but change the bylaws.

Councilmember Holden wondered if there would be a Truth in Taxation meeting for fire items, her concern was not being able to go to the fire district to make requests like holding off on a fire truck for a year. The other issue she had with the fire district was if they had some left-over money and they want to pay down the fire station or put it aside for staffing they can't just buy down the debt. If they go to franchise fees it would be nice to say they're going to use the money to pay for the fire station, but if they go to a fire district the district has that taxing right, not the City.

Councilmember Fabel said that anytime an issue would come before the fire district that would be the only issue that would be in front of them, they wouldn't have concern about roads or parks, so they could make a compelling case about why a truck or another Captain would be needed. The cases wouldn't be made in the context of what other financial obligations a municipality has. However, he was inclined to agree with the Mayor.

Mayor Grant characterized the feedback as not moving forward with a fire district but to update the bylaws.

B. TCAAP Planning Discussion (discussed as Item 3C)

City Administrator Perrault said this was meant to be a planning discussion to give direction on how the Council would like to move items forward. The Joint Development Authority (JDA) formerly requested the City Council and County consider changes to the TRC and Comprehensive Plan to the 1,960 unit development scenario. His intent is not to discuss the actual density, but how and when the Council would like to review and consider changes.

City Administrator Perrault stated the Council has discussed having a TCAAP visioning session where Council will talk through what is currently going on with TCAAP, what's been proposed and what they would like to see.

City Administrator Perrault said the Council has discussed the possibility of a public engagement event run by the City. The JDA event is scheduled for November 1. Council may want to consider an event in-addition to this event.

Councilmember Fabel explained the JDA had a work session with Alatus and other experts where they brought back a proposal at the request of the JDA with a density range between 1,700 and 2,300. The 1,960 unit number came from Alatus. This was the first time they had something concrete to look at that was different from the 1,460 that had been before the City. The JDA has looked at the new number carefully between the work session and a regular meeting and he was enthusiastic about having it evaluated and considered. He would ask that they direct staff to draft the necessary changes and bring it forward to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval. This is the proposal that will be on the table at the November 1 public event. But in the meanwhile, he thought the administrative work should move forward as swiftly as possible.

Councilmember Holden asked if they were going to get feedback on November 1 but it didn't matter what the feedback was, it would be the 1,960 no matter what?

Councilmember Fabel said it won't be the number until it has been approved by the City, the JDA, the Planning Commission and the comprehensive planning goes before the Met Council.

Councilmember Holden asked if the JDA was open to changing the number from 1,960 to something else? She stated that one of the examples given was The Heights that has 11 entrances/exits to that 1,000 unit area, we have 2 or 2 ½. Thousands of hours were put into deciding on 1,460. Several public safety officers and police chiefs told them that putting 880 units in a three block area was detrimental and they shouldn't be doing it. She was hoping the current JDA has done similar follow-up. The Heights have two major bus lines by them, so she hoped they had in writing that Met Council would guarantee them a bus line. They have so far had no input from citizens and they don't know what the cost will be to the City. The "water feature" is a storm water pond – who would be responsible for it? She said it's never been about affordable housing, it's been about the density and traffic. She asked again if the 1,960 can change.

Councilmember Fabel replied she should bring her concerns to the JDA.

Councilmember Holden stated she didn't have to, she was bringing them to him as he was on the JDA. She said there were hundreds of things that they looked at in thousands of hours that haven't been touched by producing this number.

Councilmember Rousseau wondered if Councilmember Fabel was asking that a document would be put together for the open house with that number so people could see it in plain writing and provide feedback? Was he thinking of a redline of the previous term sheet or something completely new?

Councilmember Fabel said he didn't know if there would be a term sheet, but more like a graphic demonstration of what it would look like.

Councilmember Rousseau imagined it would be some of what the developer had shown them.

Mayor Grant stated his understanding of the 1,960 units is that they couldn't really get there without taking 31 acres out of the southwest corner of the development, which would lose a lot of jobs. He felt simply building a bunch of housing without providing jobs in the area isn't a good choice. One of the things they looked at was what would they do if they lost one of the big employers in the city, and TCAAP had the ability to bring in other major companies. The whole

swath along the western edge was to bring in good jobs. The County and City both put forward 4,000 jobs but if you jettison 30 acres worth of jobs he found it to be an unwise thing to do. In terms of what happens on November 1, it seems they have put the cart before the horse. He wouldn't want Alatus to show up with pretty pictures of 1,960 and everybody was supposed to nod and say yes, it looks very pretty. He felt it would be telling residents the decision had already been made but wouldn't you like to provide your input? He would like to all three options presented and let people weigh in. He didn't know if people understand who pays for affordability. Do they realize they will be paying for it? He didn't know that the County would be paying for the full cost of that.

Councilmember Monson said the County has said they will fully financially support affordable housing.

Mayor Grant stated the he hadn't heard the County will shoulder the whole cost. So what does that mean to the community? TIF, tax abatement? Are they taking away from the schools? What he would like to see at the November 1 community engagement is the information presented and written forms that people can provide written comments on, and they can gather feedback from the community. He found it strange that the JDA has approved 1,960 and wondered if it could change. If it can't change then the decisions have already been made without any public input.

Councilmember Monson said she wasn't there to talk about the 1,960, she felt the topic needed to have its own meeting. She would like a special work session that includes a response and questions to the 1,960 that ties in visioning. She would like to have that meeting as soon as they can after the open house.

Councilmember Rousseau thought November 2 would be great to talk about density and affordability. And possibly set up a second meeting to talk about the water way area and some items that are less attached to density.

Councilmember Holden asked if the 1,960 wasn't going to change, why should residents go to the open house and provide input? She wanted to know if it was already decided or not. She would love to say it wasn't, that they were going to take the feedback and maybe rethink it, but she wasn't hearing that. It's nice that the County will take care of the affordable housing, but the last time the County told them everything was taken care of Alatus and the County met and came up with an agreement asking for an additional \$1 million to help with a financing gap – Alatus got a better deal, the County got a better deal, and then they wanted to charge the City. Her concern was all the other factors involved in the 1,960. How big were the lots going to be with all the little houses? If the 1,960 was set in stone, why don't they just say it out loud.

Councilmember Fabel stated the 1,960 is a concrete proposal that has come forward from the developer in conjunction with the JDA that was elected by respective bodies to work on coming up with a concrete development. He fully expects former members of the JDA to be critical of what they are doing. During the election campaign the question of housing density and affordability was essentially on referendum; all of their candidate material brought to the public's attention exactly what they disagreed with, and roughly 60% of the voting residents in Arden Hills elected three of them, which gave them the ability to put members on the JDA who were in disfavor of what the former JDA had done. They feel what they are bring forth is a concrete proposal, brought together by a responsible developer, working together with a responsible JDA

which will be considering all the factors. They are looking forward to receiving a response from the Planning Commission, review by the residents on November 1, and input from experts. They know there are a number of steps that have to be gone through before they come up with a final number and final master development agreement. He was sure there would be taxpayer opposition to them, housing advocates that will be favorable of them, those that don't like affordable housing will be against them. For purposes of moving towards a solution, it is important to get staff working on those things that need to be done in terms of moving forward with what the JDA has asked for; examining the Comprehensive Plan, zoning requirements among other things to they are in a position to move forward. He felt it was important that get started as soon as possible.

Councilmember Holden said she wasn't being critical, she wanted to have all the ducks in a row. Did she want whoever is on the City Council 20 years from now to get phone calls from hundreds of people saying they can't get out of their driveway or onto the street or Highway 96? She felt Councilmember Fabel was wanting to be the hero but if it was going to be two years for the Spine Road to even start, why couldn't he wait to do the TRC? They gave up a million dollars by not putting in the Spine Road but the County cries they don't have any money. MnDOT had funded them for that. The bottom line is what do you want future City Councils to have to deal with? Every time she makes a decision that's what she thinks about. She thought they should think about the community as a whole and what the effects are on future residents. She wasn't being critical when asking if there was going to be a bus line.

Mayor Grant said Councilmember Fabel kept saying it was a concrete development proposal, he thought Councilmember Holden was wondering if that concrete was fully set.

Councilmember Fabel said it was a proposal, was a proposal a final decision?

Mayor Grant replied if there was only one. He asked Councilmember Fabel to not confuse wanting to discuss issues as being critical. He wants to make sure that all of the factors are considered. He thought he heard Councilmember Monson say at one point if problems come up they'll just design their way out of them. You can end up with situations that you can't design your way out of them. He realizes that what is important to him, like jobs, may not be important to others.

Councilmember Rousseau said two people had said November 2 would be a great day to have a conversation to talk about density and key visioning areas. She wondered if anyone else was interested in doing that.

After discussion Council agreed to meet on November 2.

Councilmember Fabel stated they could still direct staff to move forward with drafting the necessary changes and bringing updates to the Council and Planning Commission.

Councilmember Rousseau said they could do that and bring it to the meeting on November 2, and if Council liked it then it could be brought to the Planning Commission on November 8.

Community Development Director Jagoe said that wouldn't be enough time to put it on the Planning Commission agenda. The earliest would be December 6, due to needing 10 days' notice for ordinance changes.

With the exception of Councilmember Fabel, it was generally agreed to wait until after the November 2 meeting to give staff direction.

C. Lake Johanna Blvd Speed Display Sign (discussed as Item 3A)

City Administrator Perrault stated there are neighborhood concerns about Lake Johanna Boulevard. Staff is focusing on a permanent mounted speed display sign similar to the ones on Highway 96 and Highway 51. Ramsey County is willing to work with the City to have a permanent sign. The City would be responsible for the cost of the sign, installation and maintenance.

Councilmember Fabel wondered if they could ask the County to reduce the speed limit.

Councilmember Holden said they have asked the County to reduce speed limits on New Brighton Road and they have said no. If there is no money in 2028 the trail may not happen. This is a problem on County roads. It took four years to get no turn on red from Highway 96 onto Hamline. The County's job is to move traffic so they really don't care about City roads. Last year a letter was sent from the City with 14 different proposals to help reduce speed in the meantime but the County rejected all of it. She felt they had to do the speed sign.

Councilmember Rousseau would like to see the letter and was in favor of a speed sign.

Councilmember Holden noted they had a meeting with the County stakeholders; traffic engineer, public works people, recreation people and the neighborhood, but the City never heard back from the County.

Mayor Grant would support a speed sign to remind drivers of the speed limit.

Councilmember Monson supported it and would also like to see the letter. She was concerned that a sign only works short term as people get used to seeing it. She felt they need to have a better solution between this and when the trail eventually goes in. She would like more information before the meeting with them on November 20th.

Mayor Grant asked staff to work with the County and bring the item back to a future meeting.

Councilmember Holden would like to ask the neighbors where they thought would be the best place for the sign.

4. OPTIONAL ITEMS

A. Food Donations Discussion (discussed before Item 3B)

Mayor Grant asked if anyone had objections to having a food box at City Hall.

Councilmember Holden wanted to have a button battery drop off also.

Council was supportive of a food donation box in the lobby of City Hall.

B. Council Tracker

Not discussed.


5. COUNCIL/STAFF COMMENTS

None

ADJOURN

Mayor Grant adjourned the Special City Council Work Session meeting at 6:44 p.m.


Jolene Trauba
Deputy City Clerk


David Grant
Mayor