

COUNCIL WORK SESSION December 12, 2022

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a Council Work Session of the North Mankato City Council was held in the Council Chambers on December 12, 2022. Mayor Dehen called the meeting to order at 12:00 pm. The following were present for roll call: Council Members Norland, Whitlock, Steiner, Mayor Dehen, City Administrator McCann, Community Development Director Fischer, and City Clerk Van Genderen. Absent: Council Member Oachs.

Market Study

City Administrator McCann stated that a Market Study was initiated to determine how the City compares to the market. He introduced Dr. Tessia Melvin from DDA Human Resources, Inc. to review the study.

Dr. Melvin provided background information on the firm, coworkers involved in the study, and herself. She indicated that in 2022, the firm was completing a Market Analysis, Pay Grid Calibration, and Budget Implementation. In 2023, 2024, and 2025, the firm will assist with the ongoing maintenance of the plan, including reviewing and rewriting job descriptions and current classifications.

Dr. Melvin reviewed the process, including working committee meetings which included staff from various departments. The working committee met and created a list of comparable cities, which the Council Members reviewed for approval.

Dr. Melvin reviewed the market analysis noting they compared the minimum and maximum wages to the comparables minimum and maximum wages. The guidelines held that +/-5% is highly aligned with the market, +/- 10% aligned with the market, +/-11-15% possible misalignment with the market, and >15% significant misalignment with the market. The question is, what is the pay philosophy for the City? She noted that with the labor shortage, some cities are changing to be above the market. The Council must decide the City's pay philosophy. The examination revealed that the City was, on average, 4% below minimum and 4% below maximum. She noted that several positions below the market might need to be reclassified. Dr. Melvin presented two options to consider in realigning with the market. Option 1 is an increase of the current grid by 5%. In this option, several positions remain below the market by up to 15%. She noted the budget impact is \$132,744.56, or a 4.44% increase from 2022. Option 2 is a market adjustment bringing the minimum to 106% above market and the maximum to 111% above maximum. Dr. Melvin noted the plan does not include a COLA for 2023; other cities would be adjusting to the market, probably a 3%, and would balance the rate increases. This option would push competitiveness in the market. Dr. Melvin stated that the working group also requested consideration for longevity. She noted that 20 of the 47 non-union employees have ten years or more experience with the City. She said to recognize those with tenure for pay Option 1 would have an impact of \$40,804.26; Option 2 would have an impact of \$36,834.98.

Mayor Dehen requested clarification on what the ongoing maintenance would include. Dr. Melvin indicated it would consist of a review of job descriptions to determine if the positions are misaligned. City Administrator McCann stated that several positions had increased responsibilities in the past year, and a review of those positions would be included in the first year. Council Member Norland said she would like to consider Option 2 and longevity. Mayor Dehen requested feedback from Council Members concerning which option to consider. Council asked staff to consider Option 2 with longevity at the next Council Meeting. City Administrator McCann noted that Option 2 is just slightly above the proposed budget for personnel costs.

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200 Block Belgrade Avenue

City Engineer Sarff reported that the City prepared a Belgrade Avenue Corridor Study in 2017, which provided several options for future improvements in the 200 block of Belgrade Avenue. The study considered maintaining the 4-lane section or converting it to a 3-lane section, with two alternatives for the Range Street intersection. Issues identified during the study included traffic speeds, pedestrian crossing safety, and opportunities for additional streetscape space. Other factors to consider when looking at the project include existing streetlight and event power systems in poor condition, and existing sidewalks in poor condition. The current 4-lane street does not allow for ADA compliance of the sidewalks. MnDOT is planning improvements to the TH169/Belgrade Avenue interchange in 2027 which will likely require the closure of the 200 block of Belgrade. This project would allow the City to consider modifications to the geometric layout in the 200 block. Federal funding may be available for improvements to the 200 block of Belgrade Avenue and/or the City's share of TH 169/Belgrade Avenue interchange improvements. City Engineer Sarff reviewed possible variations for the reconstruction of the block. Options 1.1 and 2.1 were very similar to each other; option 1.1 included a 4-way stop and dedicated left turn lane at Range Street, and 2.1 included a 4-way stop and combined left/thru lane at Range Street. Options 1.2 and 2.2 were the same options as Options 1.1 and 2.1 with the addition of a mid-block crossing. Option 3.1 was a 3-lane section with a mini-roundabout at Range Street, and 3.2 included a mid-block crossing. City Engineer Sarff provided pictures of a mini-roundabout. He reported that the estimated expenditures for layouts 1 & 2 were similarly priced at \$1,788,000, and the mini-roundabout was estimated at \$1,979,000. Funding for the project included Federal Funding, Municipal State Aid Funding, and City Funds.

Council discussion included eliminating the mid-block crossing due to the lack of use noted in other locations. It was pointed out that often the crossing would be ignored for jaywalking. It was determined not to move forward with a roundabout but instead proceed with either option 1.1 or 2.1, working to coordinate the timing with MnDOT's work on the TH169/Belgrade Avenue interchange in 2027. City Engineer Sarff noted that to move forward with the timing, the City will need to apply for Federal Funding within the next month. He suggested bringing the project forward at the last meeting in December or the first meeting in January. After meeting with businesses along the route. Council agreed to look at the project in the next few meetings.

Managed Natural Lawn Area

City Planner Lassonde reported he was requested to provide a side-by-side comparison to the City of North Mankato City Code Section 90.112, "Managed Natural Lawn Area" (MNLA) and Mankato City Code Section 6.18, "Maintenance of Vegetation" to help determine if revisions to Section 90.112, "Managed Natural Lawn Area" are desirable.

City Planner Lassonde reviewed the establishment of the City of North Mankato's ordinance to manage natural lawns. He noted that research began in 2020 with staff researching existing regulations and guidance from nine other Minnesota cities. In January 2021, the City of North Mankato adopted City Code Section 90.112, which permitted the installation of MNLAs on residential properties to an extent determined to be acceptable based on the research. The ordinance intends to ensure the conversion of portions of conventional, residential turfgrass lawns to a natural state, or MNLA, is guided and managed.

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City Planner Lassonde reported five areas reviewed between the City of North Mankato's and Mankato's codes. Intent: both cities recognized the citizens' desires to have native vegetation and that it is good for the environment, and that installation needs to be managed to avoid nuisance. Applicability, North Mankato targets residential neighborhoods, while Mankato's applies to all properties with exempt property types listed. Requirements: North Mankato has more significant provisions for limiting the extent of MNLA lot coverage and includes more significant setbacks than Mankato does. The cities have similar language regarding eliminating turf grass and other vegetation. Both towns also require the annual cutting of the MNLA to be no greater than 12 inches in height. Failure to Maintain: North Mankato monitors MNLAs that don't meet City Code primarily through observations by the Weed Inspector triggered by neighbor complaints. The City of Mankato monitors all properties through a permitting process. Permitting: North Mankato doesn't require a permit to install an MNLA, while Mankato does.

City Planner Lassonde noted that the North Mankato City Council planned on reviewing the Ordinance after it had been in place to see if changes needed to be made to maintain or improve the ordinance.

A discussion was held concerning residential implementation with Community Development Director Fischer noting that the City does not track those participating. Attorney Chris Kennedy suggested Council monitor the use of the Ordinance through the summer and gauge interest from the community for changes to the Ordinance. Attorney Kennedy suggested the City Council may want to consider expanding the opportunity to commercial or industrial properties as they may be interested in adding natural lawn areas.

Attorney Kennedy addressed the consideration of a formal apology to the Borchardts concerning the City's determination that they were not in compliance with the former City Code concerning weed and grass control. Attorney Kennedy did not support an apology because the Council had all the information before moving forward with the abatement process. He stated that the Court of Appeals' two main issues should be considered to be addressed by changing the ordinance. The two main topics included what determined reasonable numbers of citizen complaints and a vague definition of rank vegetation. He noted that the best way to address the issue would be to address the ordinance.

Council discussed extending the natural lawn area to commercial properties and starting the consideration by polling local businesses to gauge their interest. Council also discussed waiting until the end of 2023 to review the ordinance.

Private Development Discussion

City staff presented a map showing all of the city's private developments. The City does not maintain private developments.

Attorney Kennedy reported that a Home Owner's Association maintains private developments, roads, and infrastructure. This occurs because the developer chooses to manage the development without public funding and does not meet the City's more restrictive development requirements. The development is private and responsible for maintaining those streets and utilities. The City designates those areas by naming the streets "trails".

A discussion was held concerning the idea that many of those living on these trails are unaware that their HOA dues should also be used to pay for street and utility repairs. City Council directed staff to look at other communities to determine how those areas can be designated and new owners informed of the requirements.

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City Administrator McCann reported that RW Carlstrom updated the estimated costs for the proposed indoor recreation facility. Between April and December, the anticipated cost for the facility increased from \$21,135,100 to \$23,172,914. A discussion was held concerning funding and increasing the bonding request at the legislature and the sales tax extension.

Mayor Dehen requested that staff reach out to the user groups to see about continued interest and support due to the reduced courts being discussed to minimize costs. Moving forward may be challenging if the user groups are no longer interested.

Council Member Norland moved, seconded by Council Member Steiner, to adjourn the Council Work Session at 1:26 pm.

Mayor

City Clerk