

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a Council Work Session of the North Mankato City Council was held in the Council Chambers on June 14, 2021. Mayor Dehen called the meeting to order at 10:30 am. The following were present for roll call: Council Members Oachs, Whitlock, Steiner, Norland, and Mayor Dehen, City Administrator Harrenstein, Community Development Director Fischer, City Planner Lassonde, and City Clerk Van Genderen.

**Receive Community Response to the Webster Avenue Area Plan.**

City Administrator Harrenstein reported the City Council has received the draft plan and requested staff continue public engagement. Today, Council will receive the public comments, and staff will receive recommendations for the plan, and the plan can be brought back to Council for adoption.

City Planner Lassonde appeared before Council and reported that the City hosted two virtual open house meetings on May 18, 2021 and May 19, 2021 with 35 attendees, including City staff and Council Members. Plan materials and a questionnaire were made available to the public two weeks before the meeting, and the City received 18 comments.

City Planner Lassonde presented a summary of the meeting discussion broken out by plan focus areas. The first area discussed in the presentation was Park and Recreation use. Mr. Lassonde reported that participants expressed interest in including the Public Works Yard and the Norwood Inn Property as parks and adding a trail on Webster Avenue that connects to N. River Drive crossing Highway 169. He reported staff recommendations included incorporating an explanation of how a park use at the Public Works Yard and Norwood Inn properties is not the highest and best use of those properties. City Planner Lassonde noted a trail is being considered with the 169 Corridor Study. Mayor Dehen commented the City has 27 acres of parks which exceeds recommendations for a City the size of North Mankato to have between 18 and 20 acres.

City Planner Lassonde reported the next focus area is Commercial and Light Industrial. The focus area is broken down into Area Aesthetics, Existing Business Environment, Residential Use Potential, Public Works Yard Redevelopment, and General Redevelopment. Residents' comments concerning the Area Aesthetics included a lack of aesthetic appeal, a request for "Form-Based Codes and design guidelines, concern about the unappealing debris on the Public Works Yard and improvement of street lighting and streetscaping enhancements. Staff recommendations concerning the Area Aesthetics would be to consider Design Guidelines for the area included in the plan, provide a better description of proposed streetscaping enhancements. Comments concerning the Existing Business Environment included questions about forced relocation or property rehabilitation. Staff recommendations include better explaining how businesses are not being forced to relocate or rehabilitate their properties. Mayor Dehen commented that the City could consider creating a grant program similar to the one established for Belgrade Avenue, including design guidelines for those accepting a grant. Citizen comments concerning residential use potential included opposition to multi-family residential use and a request to convert the area to solely single-family residential use. There was also the desire for the Norwood Inn to continue as a hospitality property. City Planner Lassonde stated recommendations include developing concepts illustrating ideas for potential future development of the Norwood Property, including possible hospitality use, mixed-use development, and multi-family residential development. He stated comments could also be added to distinguish between the Rental Density Ordinance and potential multi-family development. Mr. Lassonde said some discussion was held concerning the idea that the rental density ordinance explicitly addresses the conversion of single-family homes into rentals, preserving available lower-income housing for homeowners. City Planner Lassonde also recommended incorporating an explanation of how single-family residential conversion of commercial/industrial properties is not the best use of those properties. Citizens expressed opposition to considering the development of a multi-family residential site on the

Public Works Yard. City Planner Lassonde stated the plan would contain a confirmation that the Public Works Yard will remain a public use for the Public Works Department for the long-term, along with plans to screen the unsightly debris from public viewing. City Administrator Harrenstein commented that the City would be open to ideas concerning the site's redevelopment, but specific criteria would need to be met.

The third focus area is Hospitality and Destinations. City Planner Lassonde noted there was dismay by several participants concerning the decision of Hy-Life foods to house migrant workers at the Norwood Inn. Mayor Dehen commented that it was a difficult decision, but the City's long-term goal is to control the redevelopment property. City Planner Lassonde noted a desire for enhanced connections with Mankato Amenities, specifically the trail between Spring Lake Park and Hiniker Pond. He recommended the incorporation of improved connections with Mankato amenities into the plan narrative and strategies.

The final focus area is Transportation Improvements. Concerns from residents included potential increased traffic and safety issues on Webster Avenue and Lake Street and support for the roundabout concept at Highway 169/Webster Avenue. City Planner Lassonde stated recommendations for adding to the plan include streetscaping options that could calm traffic, and the Lind Street options will be considered with Highway 14/Highway 169 interchange improvements.

City Planner Lassonde reviewed the questions and staff recommended plan revisions. The first question was "What issues do you encounter on Webster Avenue?" Responses included lack of parking on the west side and concerns about the swim facility, lack of recreation facilities, truck traffic problems, and traffic congestion. Plan recommendations include a discussion of parking availability for the swim facility. Mayor Dehen commented there is parking for the swim facility, but it may be an excellent recommendation to increase parking for the ball fields. City Planner Lassonde also started discussing the importance of truck traffic on Webster Avenue to serve commercial and industrial uses best. Truck traffic will always be a part of Webster Avenue, similar to other commercial/industrial locations in the City. A discussion was held concerning the addition of a trail on the South Side of the street and to work with the 169 corridors to connect with the trail/connection to the N. River Drive.

The second question was "What types of development do you envision surrounding Webster Avenue in the next 5, 10, and/or 20 years." Answers included only retail; no multi-family or mixed-use, not investment; leave it as it is; increase/enhance retail attractions, expansion of parks/nature areas and better/safer recreational trails, the addition of multi-family housing, revitalization of Norwood as a hospitality use, and incorporate environmentally sound construction methods. City Planner Lassonde stated staff recommended strengthening the plan that "do nothing" is not in the community's best interest and the incorporation of new ideas for the Norwood into the plan.

The final question was, Do you have any general comments about the plan or its recommendations? Responses included the reuse of buildings but no new construction, new businesses would threaten pool success, divert traffic from Lake Street, increase single-family homes, support a roundabout option at Webster Avenue/Highway 169, and add a sidewalk to Range Street from Webster Avenue to Lind Street. City Planner Lassonde stated staff recommendations into the plan include adding a sidewalk addition to Range Street north of Webster Avenue. Mayor Dehen commented he would like to see a trail and not just a sidewalk.

Council Member Oachs requested the addition of a tree or natural screening in front of the Public Works Department. Mayor Dehen commented that a large yard in front of the Public Works could be used to park for the ball fields. A discussion was held that a Master Plan should be completed for the Public Works Yard.

The comments and suggestions discussed will be incorporated into the plan, and the final plan will be brought before Council for adoption.

Council Member Steiner moved, seconded by Council Member Norland, to adjourn the meeting at 11:15 am.

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Mayor

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City Clerk