

CITY OF FALCON HEIGHTS
City Council Workshop
City Hall
2077 West Larpenteur Avenue

MINUTES
December 6, 2023
6:30 P.M.

A. CALL TO ORDER: 6:43 PM

B. ROLL CALL: GUSTAFSON_X_ LEEHY_7:00PM_
MEYER___ WASSENBERG_X_ WEHYEE_X_

STAFF PRESENT: LINEHAN_X_ VAN DER WERFF_X_ LYNCH_X_

C. POLICY ITEMS:

1. Amber Flats PUD

Administrator Linehan states Council will continue the discussion as requested at the last City Council meeting on November, 29. Buhl Investors is present as well to participate in the discussion. They want to amend the proposal to include a higher parking ratio and reduce units and want to talk about this amendment with the City Council because amendment of the proposal would potentially require another hearing with the Planning Commission as well as with the City Council.

Harrison Mohagen from Buhl Investors (developer) explains they found a solution to add parking without affecting the impervious surface. They would reduce the number of units by 4 and modify stalls to be compact vehicle stalls. Restriping would add 8 vehicle stalls by having 50% compact vehicle stalls instead. The parking ration would increase to 1.27 with this scenario. This small amendment would allow the plan to be brought forth to the Council, instead of having to go through to the process again.

Administrator Linehan adds he wants to check with the City Attorney and will provide an answer later.

David Miller from Urban Works (architect) believes is it within the 5% administrative variance.

Mohagen, states he also wants to address concerns of Hollywood Court residents. They want to make changes to the Amber Union property by adding a stop sign on the Snelling Drive, pull back fencing between Hollywood Court alley and the Amber Union Parking lot and install speed bumps.

Council agrees those would be great improvements.

Councilmember Wehyee wonders if these proposed changes will be enough to get approval from all of Council to move forward with the proposal.

Mayor Gustafson adds he believes the community would be pleased to see these changes as they are improvements. These changes, would show a move in the right direction.

Councilmember Wassenberg adds these changes show flexibility from the developer. He asks where they would remove the units.

The developers explain they would remove units from the top floor as this would make the least amount of impact on the building design. They then discuss parking stall size differences. 2 stalls would be added below grade and 6 on the surface lot. 50% of the total surface lot is allowed to be compact vehicle stalls according to City Code. Two 2-bedroom units and two 1-bedroom units will be removed. They reiterate that parking utilization is at 90% with full occupancy at Amber Union, and that building has about 30% 3- and 4-bedroom units.

Councilmember Leehy comments that there could be households with more than 1 driver and more than 1 car, there is no guarantee that a 1- or 2-bedroom unit will only have 1 or 2 people living there. She believes families, especially with children, don't tend to utilize public transportation as it is not feasible. They need their vehicles to commute and drive children to school, daycare an after-school activities.

Council discusses that there are not many other ways to change parking, as adding parking would add to the impervious surface and takeaway vegetation.

Councilmember Leehy asks, would Caribou be interested in being added to the building or any other coffee shop as it is zoned for mixed-use and it is a community need.

Mohagen adds Caribou is not interested, neither is Dunn Brothers. They are mostly interested in having drive-through and smaller footprint locations.

Councilmember Wassenberg states he has driven by Amber Union several times at different times during the day and evening and concluded it looks empty, it does not look like it is 90% occupied not even during evening times when you expect everyone to be home.

Mayor Gustafson and Councilmember Leehy are not 100% in favor of the proposal yet. They feel they would still ignore community concerns, even though the PUD concern is regarding parking at the moment.

Councilmember Wehyee asks about procedures on moving forward.

Administrator Linehan answers Council will need to consider the finding of fact and approval or denial of the proposed plan at the next Council Meeting, but would need a majority vote either way.

Councilmember Wassenberg is in favor of the proposed changes.

Councilmember Wehyee would like to keep the number of units to stay as is and not reduce. He does not have a strong opinion on the restriping to allow for more parking stalls.

Councilmember Leehy would like to see the changes being made to Amber Union, specifically adding the stop sign. She questions if there would be a playground added.

Mohagen answers yes, adding a playground is a requirement of all affordable housing projects. There will be another playground added for Amber Flats, mostly geared towards younger children.

Administrator Linehan adds that City Code does not require the measures proposed for Amber Union, but it is favorable to see coming from the developer. Staff will have all documents and materials ready for the next meeting, regardless of how Council will vote. He will also touch base with the City Attorney and discuss with the developers. Once the proposal is approved, we cannot require expansion or reduction of parking at a later point.

2. Community Park Project

Administrator Linehan explains the Parks Commission had a meeting on Monday, December 4 to look at plans, survey results and came up with initial recommendations and feedback for City Council. He adds a lot of time was spend discussing the budget for the renovation and the affordability. He continues with feedback from the survey. A number of people love the park as is, but they want a building with working restrooms. A new playground and a new parking lot are critical components. Administrator Linehan adds that Public Works found the collapse of the sewer line to be under Roselawn and replacement of this is not included in the budget.

The Parks Commission discussed considering a phase approach to the renovation by improving critical areas that need improvements now and renovate other areas later. Based on survey feedback, residents are in favor of a smaller building, with smaller rentable room. People are looking for a smaller community room that fits around 45 people. The majority was in favor of having a flex room that can serve as a warming house.

Councilmember Wassenberg adds that other ways to save on the budget would be to resurface the basketball court rather than moving the court from its current location.

Councilmember Leehy asks if there is like a shelter or safety room for inclement weather.

Administrator Linehan and Councilmember Wassenberg add, it most likely will be the lobby or the bathrooms. The mech/electrical room would not have glass. But this would be included. At the moment the Parks Commission is looking for direction from the Council in regards to the budget. The current proposal with building, play area, parking lot and site electrical is budgeted to cost around \$3 million. The City can provide \$1.5 to \$2 million from reserves and the fund balance would still have over 70% of fund balance left. The City would have to borrow for the remainder. Administrator Linehan explains the Council would have to determine how much they are comfortable with borrowing. Borrowing for the entire project would mean the City would have to increase property taxes. If Falcon Heights would pay more from reserves, it would mean there would be a lower balance left in reserves.

The Park commission and consultants recommend going for the base bid for the critical components and then do alternate bids for some of the items that are not critical

Councilmember Wassenberg adds there is also flexibility in how high-end we complete the project. There is the possibility to size down on items. He continues, completing the project in phases like suggested will also be helpful. By doing it in phases, the City would not have to borrow and levy. But if the whole project is done at the same time, there is a potential for having to increase property taxes overtime.

Mayor Gustafson comments it would be beneficial to lay out the infrastructure for some of the outdoor amenities and complete it at a later date.

Councilmember Wassenberg agrees, it would be easier to add an outdoor amenity than it is to add an entire room to a building.

Council agrees that for the play area it would be nice to make it for upper elementary children and not solely focused on the youngest children. They discussed including space for lawn game and the possibility for a flex splash pad that can be converted to a skating rink in the winter.

Administrator Linehan stated the playground specs would need to be determined still, so it is unclear how much to budget for that.

Council discusses environmental aspects of the building.

Administrator Linehan states the question remains how much does the City wants to invest. It is a long-term investment into the community that should last for decades.

Councilmember Wassenberg does not feel entirely comfortable with a 2-million-dollar bond. He believes \$3.5 million would be sufficient, specifically if the building is the base bid and the amenities are added as alternate bids.

Mayor Gustafson agrees, in the long run renovations and maintenance is also needed. The City could use Sanitary sewer funds to replace the collapsed sanitary sewer line under Roselawn.

Councilmember Weyhee asks about grants availability.

Administrator Linehan answers that staff will apply for grants available. He adds that there is a pretty tight timeline. Everything needs to be in order by February, to be able to break ground and to have the building be done by the end of 2024. It's beneficial to do it in phases to allow for applying for grants. The City would not need to apply for bonds right away as it can use its cash reserves to start off. Ehlers recommends the City applying for an abatement bond to fund the project. The consultant will help guide this process as it is more complex than a general obligation bond. There are different bonds that can be used. Administrator Linehan states that Ehlers will provide a presentation at a future meeting to explain the abatement bond process.

Council agrees \$3.5 million is a good budget. \$2 million will be paid for by the City, any grants and funding that the City can get would not have to be borrowed. But Council is willing to apply for bonds as well.

Council then discusses the timeline of the renovation. They have the budget to provide to the Parks commission. Council looks at the concept plans of the park layout and they are in agreeance with the Parks Commission. It would keep a lot of the amenities at the same position as it currently is.

Administrator Linehan adds that the consultant is looking for final budget direction by early January.

Council discusses the future timeline for meetings.

3. Law Enforcement Services Update

Administrator Linehan explains he and Councilmember Wassenberg will meet with the Sherriff's office to work towards a contract agreement at the end of this week. He adds that the city is continuing efforts to find a new partner to provide law enforcement services for Falcon Heights in the future.

4. Sister Cities

Council would like to discuss where to target and what the scope of it should be. They believe it would be a good project for the Community Engagement Commission to work on and lead. The Council will look at the CEC to provide direction and reconvene at a later date to further discuss.

5. Employee Personnel Policy Update

Administrator Linehan describes that the sick and safe time needs to be added to the policy and adopted by the end of 2023. Random drug testing will be scratched from the personnel policy. He continues that more benefits for part-timers will be added to the as well. Now the City is looking at new health benefits as Ramsey County no longer will be providing those benefits at minimal cost. The new policy will be on the next City Council agenda for Council to approve.

Council agrees with the changes that are being proposed.

6. 2024 Budget & Levy Update

Administrator Linehan states that the biggest update in the budget is that police contract will was anticipated in the preliminary levy / budget. The City will be receiving funds from the State's Public Safety Aid grant that should be allocated towards public safety in 2024. Staff hopes to use these funds for the increased cost of the 2024 police contract.

D. ADJOURNMENT: 9:40 PM

discuss policy topics in greater detail prior to a formal meeting where a public hearing may be held and/or action may be taken. Members of the public that would like to make a comment or ask questions about an item on the agenda for an upcoming workshop should send them to mail@falconheights.org prior to the meeting. Alternatively, time is regularly allotted for public comment during Regular City Council Meetings (typically 2nd and 4th Wednesdays) during the Community Forum.



Randall C. Gustafson, Mayor

Dated this 6th day of December, 2023



Jack Linehan, City Administrator