

**City of West St. Paul
Open Council Work Session Minutes
December 14, 2020**

1. Roll Call

Mayor Napier called the meeting to order at 5:45 p.m.

Present: Mayor Dave Napier
Councilmembers Wendy Berry, Lisa Eng-Sarne,
Anthony Fernandez (arrived at 6:28 p.m.), John Justen,
Bob Pace and Dick Vitelli

Absent: None

Also Present: City Manager Ryan Schroeder
City Attorney Kori Land
Police Chief Brian Sturgeon
Finance Director Char Stark
Parks & Public Works Director/City Engineer Ross Beckwith
Marketing & Communications Manager Dan Nowicki
City Clerk Shirley Buecksler

2. Review and Approve the OCWS Agenda

Motion was made by Councilmember Berry and seconded by Councilmember Vitelli to add Item 4C Liquor License Rebate Program, and approve the OCWS agenda, as amended.

Vote: 5 ayes / 0 nays. Motion carried.

3. Review the Regular Meeting Consent Agenda

From Chief Sturgeon's request, Council removed Advanced Disposal Services from Consent Agenda Item 9G and approved the Consent Agenda, as amended.

4. Agenda Item(s)

A. Thompson County Park Project Update

City Engineer Beckwith said Dakota County has been updating their master plan for Thompson County Park and is moving some of the improvements forward. County and consultant staff presented the improvements that are currently under design and scheduled for 2021 construction.

Beckwith introduced Dakota County Project Manager Josh Kinney and Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects Consultant CJ Fernandez.

Mr. Kinney provided a brief outline of the project to provide some background for Council. The County Board approved the master plan on January 21, 2020 that identified priority improvements and opportunities. The County Board authorized a contract with Landscape Architects. There have been two virtual open houses for the project, which were presented in both English and Spanish translation. The project has a great partnership with St. Croix Lutheran High School, who is not only part of the project on their property but we are also partnering with them for some boat access and water monitoring throughout the season at the park.

Mr. Fernandez provided drawings and details of the Thompson County Park master plan improvements project. The County is still working on the final playground design, including a pollinator area. The lake plaza will have game tables for chess and cribbage, as well as fishing access. The welcome wall and photos of fish will be written in several languages, and the lake loop will have interpretive stories along the way.

Councilmember Berry said the Park and Recreation Committee were all on board.

When asked about the timeline, Mr. Kinney said they expect to bid late March, with construction in May and completion by November 2021.

Mayor Napier said we are very fortunate to have Thompson County Park in our city. He thanked Mr. Kinney and Mr. Fernandez for all their work and said we appreciate Dakota County's work on this.

B. Branding and Logo Discussion

For the better part of a decade, Marketing & Communications Manager Nowicki said the City Council has discussed rebranding the City of West St. Paul in some capacity. Most of the conversations and efforts have focused around a logo redesign. West St. Paul's "WSP Star" logo has been in place for around 25 years. It was designed during a time when much pride came with being designated a Star City.

In 2014, a West St. Paul Logo Committee was created and comprised of Councilmembers, community members, and staff. This committee attempted to design a new logo via an online design contest. While the contest was held and the "winner" awarded a cash prize of around \$1,000, the logo was not accepted or implemented by the committee or Council. Staff believes the failure of the contest strategy was due to lack of focus and research, as well as not having a dedicated designer invested in the project. Essentially, there were too many cooks in the kitchen and no one person in charge of the design. Logo design efforts dissolved after new leadership took over and fiscal concerns were reexamined.

Along with the logo, the legacy tagline "West St. Paul: Close to it All" had been used as a way to promote the City. However, this tagline has not been actively used in recent years, due to the impression that it is conveying the message that West St. Paul's

best asset is its geographic location in regards to other cities. While location is a great selling point for the city, we know that West St. Paul has much more to offer than being in close proximity to other cities.

After researching costs and consulting Cities that have redesigned their logos recently, Staff believes the design and implementation of a new City logo at this time could be in opposition to the fiscal direction the City is currently headed. Staff roughly estimates a newly designed logo would cost around \$400,000 - \$500,000 to design professionally and change over the artwork around the city. The bulk of that cost coming from implementation, not design – i.e., artwork on: water tower, squad cars and city vehicles, park and trail signs, facility buildings and monument signs, apparel and patches, paper products, etc.

Perhaps a branding initiative that would better complement the City's current fiscal direction would be to focus on creating a tagline and identity that better showcases the assets that fall within the city's borders. A focus on our parks, rich community, business districts, etc. could be done for a fraction of the cost of a new logo and may even have a bigger impact on public perception.

Mayor Napier said we learned a lot the first time we looked at the logo.

Councilmember Justen said he is uncomfortable with the cost of changing the logo and agreed that he would like to change the slogan.

Councilmember Pace agreed with option B. He likes the logo and said there is no need to change just for the sake of changing it and the cost of doing so. He believes Nowicki can market our city much better than it has been.

Councilmember Vitelli said he likes the current logo.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said she doesn't mind the current logo and validated that it does actually cost that much for a new logo. We know our mission is "Promoting and preserving a community of excellence by ethical, responsive, efficient and innovative provision of services." And our vision is "The city of West St. Paul is friendly, evolving, walkable and a well-connected community. We value our robust partnership with our property owners and businesses. We are recognized for fostering community engagement, encouraging citizen involvement, preserving green spaces, we take pride in having the highest quality infrastructure and park facilities." From there, she said, we can create our unique value proposition. She said we are well on our way but would be happy to keep working on this.

Councilmember Berry said she likes the current logo.

Mayor Napier said rebranding reflects more of who we are as a community. We faced that when we were going through some of the renditions last time, which reflected

more of who we are as a community, but we couldn't agree at that time. He thinks we should keep looking at it further down the road a bit.

Nowicki said he will bring this back for a more detailed robust discussion.

C. Liquor License Rebate Program

With COVID-19 in 2020, City Manager Schroeder said Council made a lot of actions to help businesses that were impacted by the pandemic, and there has been an interest to plan for 2021 if COVID closures continue. Staff has been talking about what happens in 2021 and has surveyed other Cities in Dakota County regarding rebates and waivers. Of the ten surveyed, six of those Cities surveyed are taking a wait and see approach and four have granted waivers: two for three months of Liquor License fees in 2021 and the other two for six months of Liquor License fees. He and Mayor Napier discussed today that we could proactively suggest that, if business closures for licensed businesses continue into 2021, we would perhaps grant rebates for paid On-Sale Liquor License fees for whatever length of time those closures occur. If they were closed for one month, it would be a one month rebate. If six months, it would be six months. We are suggesting that, rather than pick an amount of time, we would just pick the circumstance and rebate for the length of time closed.

Councilmember Justen said he fully supports this plan and thinks it's the best way to deal with it.

Councilmember Pace supports it and reminded everyone that these businesses have never been allowed to be open 100% and just because they might open one day, doesn't mean their business is 100% back. That being said, a few hundred dollars here or there won't make or break a business, but those few hundred dollars add up. He noted to the future Council that business doesn't just come back all of a sudden and it probably won't for a very long time.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said she would like to push further and look to three months or six months rebate. Waiting month by month may be more challenging for businesses than being able to plan out three months. If we give people a little bit more space, that will be helpful. She has heard from three of our top notch restaurants and wanted to pass along that the businesses we are really proud of are asking for this.

Councilmember Vitelli would like to give them a three month rebate for 2020 and also give a break for 2021. He would also like to see their fees paid monthly in 2021.

Councilmember Berry agreed and said businesses cannot wait and see. We need to be more proactive.

Mayor Napier said we need to push the State to do something. The State has forced these places to close and now the taxpayers of West St. Paul are stepping in to help

them. He wants to support it but we need to do what we can to push the State and help our businesses.

Councilmember Justen understands all of this. Part of his reason for the rebate is because we can predict three or six months. But we don't know. He would like to give the answer of "you will not pay for any period of time that you are not open" and codify that right now. And also look at doing a period of time in addition to that. What he is trying to get across, he said, is that he wants to guarantee to these businesses that they will not pay any portion of their Liquor License for any period of time that they are shut down.

Mayor Napier said he thinks that's fair. We are going to do everything we can to help these businesses, but we are trying to be fiscally responsible for the taxpayers. Mayor Napier added this item to the Regular Council agenda, along with the statement from Councilmember Justen that, as businesses are closed, the City is going to step in to help.

5. Adjourn

Motion was made by Councilmember Justen and seconded by Councilmember Berry to adjourn the meeting at 6:36 p.m.

All members present voted aye. Motion carried.

David J. Napier
Mayor
City of West St. Paul