

West St. Paul Environmental Committee
Environmental Committee December 2, 2020
West St. Paul Municipal Center-City Council Chambers/Virtual Meeting

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm.

Committee members in attendance: Kristy Otte, Rebecca McCarty, Polly Saatzer, Jade Pennig, Samantha Green, Laura Zanmiller, Lisa Eng-Sarne, Jonathan Wagner

2. NEW BUSINESS

a. **Minutes**- The October 7, 2020 minutes were approved.

b. **Site Plan Review-1365 Robert Street**

The first site plan Schletty reviewed was the plan to redevelop 1365 Robert Street, the former Perkins restaurant. The site will soon become a Tumble Fresh laundromat. Linn Investments LLC has submitted multiple applications for the redevelopment of the site. The submitted plans call for the removal of one apple tree, (6 caliper inches), 2 green ash trees (22 and 23 caliper inches), one white pine tree (15 caliper inches) and one Siberian elm tree (16 caliper inches). Schletty inspected the site personally; the trees are in a weird position on the north property line. The trees are under power lines. Schletty and the City Planner agreed that only the apple tree and one of the ash trees were quality trees, (28 caliper inches). With the thirty percent replacement ordinance, this equates to 8 caliper inches. The applicant is suggesting quite a number of replacement trees: 2 Autumn Blaze Maple trees, 2 Hackberry, 2 Skyline Honey Locust, 2 Oak trees, 2 Norway Spruce, one Black Hills Spruce, one White Pine and some Service Berry ornamentals. Schletty said that the 11 quality trees and 4 ornamentals fall short of the requirement, (one tree per feet of property line). However, upon inspection of the site, Schletty determined there was no way to plant 41 trees on the site. The north property line is a hill going up to Emerson that has power lines; the south side drops straight down to the next door restaurant. This would leave only the front and the rear yards for planting new trees. The applicant has done a nice job of cleaning up the site and reducing impervious pavement. They are making the parking lot a little bit smaller. Schletty is pretty happy with what the site will look like afterwards. He said that city staff believes that the proposed landscape plan is reasonable considering the limited availability of subject property, and will ultimately be a big improvement for the site. Schletty said that the new building will have a slightly smaller footprint than the present building. Most of the landscaping will happen in the rear yard.

Committee members commented on the plan. Otte remarked that the site is on a steep slope, and asked if the site would have a rain garden for water collection. Schletty said that they will collect capture water in the front area and then funnel it into the current filtration system. It will not be a "huge rain garden"; it will only collect water from the hillside. They will be doing grading in the back; there will be a gradual hill slope and there will be a catch basin. There will not be any collection on site. Pennig said likes the variety of trees. She talked about the ordinance in having 2 over-story trees for every 5 parking stalls to reduce heating effect. She wondered if there were potential for one more tree in the parking area. Schletty said there is one oak tree in the location that is

being saved; two more oaks will be planted there, (for total of three oaks in this space.) Pennig said that would be enough. Green asked if there were a variance request to reduce the number of parking stalls; Schletty said that he had only been given the landscaping plans; he does not know if the number of parking spaces would be reduced. Wagner asked if this would be a concrete slab building or if it would have a basement; and how would the water be dealt with from the washing machines. Schletty said this was a good question; he is pretty sure that it is a concrete slab structure and a single-story building. The water handling is calculated by Met Council and SAC charges. Schletty said that laundry businesses are highly regulated. They have strict guidelines they need to follow with wastewater. It is regulated more by the State and by the EPA. The City does not need to be too involved with it.

A motion was made by Pennig to approve the site plan with the additional recommendation for the applicant to purchase plants from a neonicotinoid-free supplier. McCarty seconded the motion. The motion carried. All Ayes

c. Site Plan Review 1820 Robert Street

The next site plan was for the reconstruction of 1820 Robert Street South, Bobby and Steve's Auto. The plan is for a complete tear-down and reconstruction of the auto repair, carwash, and convenience store. The plan calls for removal of 6 trees for a total of 48 caliper inches. The 30 percent replacement would be 14.4 caliper inches. Because of the constraints of the lot and the construction of the new two-story building, the applicant is trying to plant trees on the adjacent Target lot. However, Target does not want to have the trees planted on their lot. Target does not want to maintain the trees; and the proposed planting area is in the easement Target has with St Paul Regional Water Services. There is a water main line in the planting area. The City Attorney has advised that the applicant not to plant the 15 trees. Otte asked if it were possible to plant shrubs instead of trees, and if it were possible to do any planting on the east side of the lot. Schletty said that the area is too tight on the eastern side to do any planting; there is a drop off in between the Bobby and Steve's property. The area in question is only 4-5 feet wide. The first row of trees on the north is still on the Bobby & Steve's property. There are low-growing Spring snow crab. They will be maintained by Bobby and Steve's. The Robert Street side of the site will have river rock and have ash leaf spireas. It may not be the best area for a new tree. McCarty asked about the possibility of pervious pavement. Schletty said that it may be possible to ask for pervious pavement on the east side. The parking stalls may also be done with pervious pavement. Schletty said that this is fair request. Wagner asked if single stem arborvitae is a possible substitute for the tight space. Schletty said that the species is not considered a tree; it could be an additional planting to enhance the site. Wagner suggested placing them to the east where Culvers is. Saatzer suggested said tall grasses would work as well in that area. Zanmiller commented that perhaps native shrubs in the easement area could be planted. She suggested native dogwood shrubs and native blue stem for the tall grasses. Schletty said that St. Paul Regional Water does not even want anything even with a shallow root planted over the water main. If there were any

maintenance, the shrubs would need to be dug up. That is why the attorney said do not even bother. Green said that there may be a variance for a reduction in parking for this site. This discussion is in the future however. The Planning Commission has made requests to City Council for a 50 percent reduction in parking minimums.

A motion was made by Otte to approve the site which includes recommendations to look at pervious surfaces, additional grasses on the east side of the lot and purchasing from supplier that is neonicotinoid-free. Pennig seconded the motion. The motion carried. All Ayes

3. Old Business

a. Pond and Wetland Update

Schletty presented to City Council on at the November 9 meeting some of the recommendations from the Environmental Committee and the Parks and Recreation Committee concerning the city's ponds and wetlands. Schletty described the inventory of the lakes and ponds and wetlands of West St. Paul. He gave a history of what the City has been doing with the wetlands. The biggest recommendation was to pursue educating the public, especially residents who have ponds and wetlands as part of their property. The important thing for the public to know is that grass clippings and use of fertilizer affects the wetlands as a whole. The recommendations also included cost sharing with residents for the chemical treatment for the wetlands, (that are not completely private.) Council liked all of the recommendations. Schletty will be sending letters to people living next to the ponds, (4-5 wetlands) to see if they are still interested in the treatment program. Zanmiller reached out to Joe Barton of SWCD, an urban planning specialist. He talked about programs available with cost sharing. Other ideas included landscaping with clear water, rain gardens, native prairie planting. Schletty added that the City will also be pursuing how to get more control over Mud Lake with the DNR.

b. Zoning Code Updates

Otte said that there are three areas that she would like to focus and have a work session. The first area is trees, [and planting in new developments.] Schletty agreed and said that the City already has a very detailed boulevard tree ordinance. It would make sense to have the ordinance for zoning and development to be similar to the tree boulevard ordinance. At the staff level, the City would like to see an ordinance for tree replacement and park dedication funding. The second area that Otte spoke about was the recommendation of solar, geothermal, or wind or alternate energy sources in our landscaping ordinance. The City probably cannot require these things, but can recommend these things. Pennig said perhaps there could be some incentives for these initiatives. Otte said there are some ways to partner with Xcel Energy or other solar companies. The City partnered with one of these companies. The third area is the Dark Sky ordinance. Other cities have language about the timing of lights, and requiring lights to be off at certain times. It may be something to follow up with Schletty and the City Planner.

Green said she would like to support the Committee and the GreenSteps Initiative. Green says that she has a laundry list of items she would like to accomplish on the Planning Commission as well. Schletty said that it may be a good exercise for the Environmental Committee to come up with their own list. The list could then be prioritized and brought to Council. Wagner mentioned a program called Letsgosolar.com that helps cities develop solar programs and policies. Green would like to have the things that the Committee recommends to have “meat and bones,” and to be meaningful. The Planning Commission is going to work on these priorities for as long as it takes. Schletty will get together with the City Planner and maybe have a work session meeting to figure out how to move forward with the focus areas.

4. UPDATES

a. Subcommittee updates-NA

b. City Council Update- Eng-Sarne said that they City is starting to search for a new City Manager. The search will involve the City Council members. The Mercer Group is also working with the City on the search. Eng-Sarne has been pushing Council on getting some money for 1010 Dodd; it is on the EDA agenda. There are some changes in Town Center I; the dog park has moved closer to Robert Street. There is now someone interested in the commercial space, potentially a restaurant. Eng-Sarne is meeting with the Citizens Climate Lobby in preparation for their meeting with Angie Craig. Eng-Sarne was asked to meet because of the Committees’ climate change resolution.

c. Staff Update- Schletty said there is not too much. City Hall and other facilities did close to the public again at least to December 18. Business can still be done in the lobby.

d. Parks and Recreation Committee- The Committee has done an inventory of all the parks during the last year and what types of improvements they would like to see. The list will be refined and forwarded to Council. Council will use this for Capital Improvements.

e. Planning Commission- Green said that they are working hard to greatly reduce [environmental] footprints as far as parking goes. The parking ordinances the City has are currently 20-30 years out of date. The Commission is working with Council on this. She feels that the Environmental Committee’s recommendations should have teeth; she feels passionately about this. She thanked the Committee for their hard work.

5. OTHER

a. Membership Continuation- Schletty said that a number of the members’ terms will be over in March. He will contact members separately to see if they wish to continue on the Committee.

6. ADJOURN

With no other business before the Committee and no objections, the Environmental Committee meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon G. Hatfield