

**City of West St. Paul
Neighborhood Meeting
Harmon Park Neighborhood Building
March 11, 2020, 6:00 p.m.**

Mayor Napier opened the Neighborhood Meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Mayor Dave Napier
Councilmembers Wendy Berry, Lisa Eng-Sarne, John Justen and Dick Vitelli

Also Present: City Manager Ryan Schroeder
Fire Chief Mark Juelfs
Police Chief Brian Sturgeon
Parks and Public Works Director/City Engineer Ross Beckwith
Community Development Director Jim Hartshorn
Finance Director Char Stark
Human Resources Director Debra Gieseke
City Clerk Shirley Buecksler
Marketing & Communications Manager Dan Nowicki

Over 60 residents in attendance; 57 participated in the survey

Mayor Napier welcomed everyone and said it's important for everyone to know the typical Town Hall is where you have input and help make our community better. This is important and the City Council values your input. Thank you for being here.

Mayor Napier introduced Councilmembers Berry, Justen, Eng-Sarne and Vitelli. He also introduced City Manager Ryan Schroeder and asked him to introduce his team.

Schroeder first said that there are handouts in the foyer and on the counter and that his intention is to make his talk short. Staff are here for the question and answer portion of the meeting, or at any time when you feel it's important to have a subject area expert respond to your questions.

Staff here tonight include:

Ross Beckwith, Parks & Public Works Director & City Engineer
Brian Sturgeon, Police Chief
Dan Nowicki, Marketing & Communications Manager
Mark Juelfs, Fire Chief
Char Stark, Finance Director
Debra Gieseke, Human Resources Director
Jim Hartshorn, Community Development Director
Shirley Buecksler, City Clerk

Schroeder said we had some problems with tonight's program but, between Dan Nowicki and our IT professional, they got it all worked out.

Schroeder thanked everyone for coming tonight, especially in these times. Thank you for congregating enough to talk with us for a little bit. This is mostly interactive and, in addition to the survey, we will stay as long as needed to respond to your questions. We will only be touching on three topics this evening: infrastructure, accessibility and housing. Those are areas among the Council initiatives that there are some things people might have a lot of interest in, with what is currently happening or in the future.

On infrastructure and facilities, Schroeder said in the Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) and Capital Improvements Plan (CIP), we update our 10 year plan for what facility changes and infrastructure changes, roads we are going to work on, pipe we are going to work on. If you're interested in knowing what may be coming up in your neighborhood, the best way to find that out is to go to the City's website under the Finance Department tab. There you will find the CIP and our budget, amongst other documents. The CIP will give you some indication of what projects might be coming your direction. If you see the plan of 2020 projects, most likely those are happening. They are in the process. The second year of the plan (2021) are those projects that are probably in design or underway in some fashion. The third year or any year after that is projection. We expect that those third, fourth and fifth years to happen, but things change or some projects increase in priority. For those of you that live near Moreland, Crusader, Annapolis or Delaware, over the next five years you are going to see some street construction.

The other thing on facilities and infrastructure, our City Hall was built in 1968. Between 2008 and 2011, the City talked about doing a major expansion or possibly moving City Hall. Ultimately, that was shelved. Through that whole period, and an expectation that there may be something bigger, maintenance stopped on the facility. In 2017, the City Council adopted a four year plan to do major maintenance on the facility. The windows are being replaced starting this month. All of that was intended to make the building last longer than what was originally perceived.

The last piece of that is, this year, we are remodeling the Police Department. We are spending a fair amount of money doing it, but that improvement is just to bring them current, nothing fancy, Schroeder said. It is improving their workspace and improving things that just weren't working for them at all. We thought that would be done by May but now more like June or July. By mid-summer, we should have that all done and they we are kind of finished with that project which, at the end of the day, was about a \$2M series of improvements and a lot less expensive than the alternative.

Over the last 10 years or so, Schroeder said the City has realized about \$100M worth of infrastructure and facility improvements within the community, a portion of which was paid for by the County. About \$75M over the last 10 years has been out of the local checkbook, cash or debt issued to pay for all of those. That created a bit of a strain on the budget and future fiscal issues. This Council and the last one have had a focus on changing that course, and so a lot of the conversation the Council has had in the last couple of years has focused on reducing that debt. If we accumulate enough cash to do a project, we do it. If we don't, we don't do it. There are lots of important projects. We have \$66M in streets that are top priority projects and we have about \$3M

a year to do the streets. Even with a lot of work that Ross Beckwith and his department have done, we are way short of where we'd like to be. With the sale tax implemented this year, we have resources to go into some of the street improvements. This will help us do a lot of that infrastructure without issuing additional debt. If that works, we will be able to pay off debt at about \$2.5M per year. In about 20 years it will be all gone, minus any levies in the meantime. We anticipate issuing a bit of debt to do lift station and forcemain work, but the plan is to avoid that to the extent possible.

One thing you've heard me say before, Schroeder continued, is we have \$4M in trail and walkway improvements in town. That is a huge number and some of it was coincident. Grants came together at the same time, Federal grants to help pay for it, and Wentworth that had trails included. The \$4M happened, which was a big win for us. Also, Council made a couple policy changes, one of which that, in the prior assessment policy, we addressed for sidewalk improvements. Council eliminated that, which means we will have to use other sources to pay for sidewalk and trail. As part of that, Council also said when we update our next CIP for the 2021 budget, they want a levy specific for sidewalks and trails. They do want to have a concerted effort to close some of the trail gaps that currently exist.

Schroeder said there has been a lot of multi-family housing activity on the boards lately. The Rooftop 252 project on Marie just opened last year and is fully occupied. They have first floor commercial space still available. The Winslow apartment building by Darts on Marthaler and Wentworth will be open for occupancy in June. The Oppidan Thompson Oaks building will start construction in June. There is a memory care and assisted living project at Haskell that has been approved. We think that will start construction this year, as well. Two others have been proposed, one by the CDA for a two phase 108-unit affordable housing project, with the first building this year with 54 units and the second phase later. It will be on the Planning Commission meeting next week. And an affordable housing project by Dominion at Signal Hills.

Mayor Napier thanked City Manager Schroeder for updating everyone on what's happening.

As you know, Mayor Napier said there is a hot topic of COVID-19. He will be participating tomorrow in a League of Minnesota Cities webinar to go out to all Mayors, talking about how to handle this in our city. If there is impactful information, we will do that through the City Manager and get information out to everyone right away. We are talking about how to handle this in a city of 20,000 people. We want to be sure we are paying attention to it. People are taking this serious and we need to be on top of it and ready to go. He will keep the community informed through public safety and our City Manager. Mayor Napier said he has also been to Dakota County where we talked about crises in our city and how to prepare for them. This is something a little different that we don't always deal with and he said he wants to be ready. Our City Manager and Council want to be ready and proactive, as well. Mayor Napier said there will be a question and answer period afterwards but he wants to get started on the presentation and the survey. Please be responsive and up front and honest in your answers. We want your feedback so we can take this information to our Strategic Planning Meeting.

Marketing & Communications Manager Nowicki informed everyone that the clickers being used for the survey this evening were disinfected before the meeting and will be disinfected after the meeting, as well. Nowicki showed a short video on the Census and said, this week, letters should

be in your mail to ask you to fill out the Census. There are certain areas in the state where some will need to call in or use a paper ballot, but you should all be able to complete the Census online.

Nowicki provided instructions and started the survey. He said we are hoping for comments and questions from the audience about the results.

Interactive Survey – Questions, Answers and Comments

Survey Question #1

My age is:

- A. 17 or under
- B. Between 18-24
- C. Between 25-34
- D. Between 35-44
- E. Between 45-54
- F. Between 55-64
- G. 65 or over

Result: The majority of the audience said they are 65 or over (G), followed by a tie of those between the ages of 35-44 (D) and 45-54 (E).

Survey Question #2

I have lived in West St. Paul for:

- A. Less than 5 years
- B. 5-10 years
- C. 11-15 years
- D. 16-20 years
- E. 21-25 years
- F. 26-30 years
- G. Over 30 years

Result: The majority of the audience said they have lived in West St. Paul for over 30 years (G), followed by 26-30 years (F) and less than 5 years (A).

When asked why residents have stayed in West St. Paul for so long or what has kept them here, responses included:

- The restaurants
- Snow removal
- Too much stuff to move
- Jobs
- It's had its ups and downs over the years but it's a great place to live
- Our neighbors

Nowicki said we do like to say that we have the best snow plow drivers in the state.

Survey Question #3

I live in Ward:

- A. 1
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. Don't know

Result: The majority of the audience said they live in Ward 3 (C), with Ward 2 (B) being a close second. A handful answered that they do not know which ward they live in.

Mayor Napier said it is important to know which ward you live in because our Councilmembers are your ward specific representatives. It is important for you to know who that is so you can contact them directly to work through an issue. Mayor Napier asked each Councilmember to stand up and state their ward.

Ward 1 Councilmembers: Bob Pace and Dick Vitelli (present)
Ward 2 Councilmembers: Anthony Fernandez and John Justen (present)
Ward 3 Councilmembers: Wendy Berry (present) and Lisa Eng-Sarne (present)

Knowing your ward is also important for voting purposes. The ballot for your ward will include any candidates running for election in that ward. The Secretary of State's website at www.mnvotes.org or the City Clerk can provide this information for you, based on your address.

Survey Question #4

How would you rate the overall quality of life in your neighborhood?

- A. Excellent
- B. Very good
- C. Good
- D. Average
- E. Fair
- F. Poor

Result: The majority of the audience rated the overall quality of life in their neighborhood as very good (B), followed by excellent (A) and good (C).

A resident commented that the house next to theirs on Ohio Street has been vacant for over 10 years.

Mayor Napier said he has pushed Staff hard but it is something that cannot be resolved quickly. He asked Community Development Director Hartshorn to work on this one again.

Hartshorn added that everything we can legally do, we have done. It's a slow process. The County, Police Department and Community Development are working on it, as well as

people driving by it every day. There are several things that happen, including whether it's an out of state owner.

A resident asked if the taxes on this property are current and if the heat is on.

Hartshorn said the heat and water are on, they cut the grass once every three months, but doesn't think the taxes are current.

A resident commented that we need continued code enforcement because people aren't keeping up with things. They also said Code Enforcement Staff are great to work with.

Mayor Napier said it's important to maintain our properties. You can up your game and push people to take care of properties but then it comes back that we've pushed too hard. We are seeking grants and opportunities to help homeowners and offer assistance for some who cannot afford to do repairs. We just passed one. Anything we can do to help that, it's a priority for Council, he said.

A resident commented that it's of just cleaning up your yard that doesn't cost any money. Just keeping it tidy without trash and rotted pumpkins on the front step. It's not necessary, and it annoys me when I'm out there every week pulling weeds.

Mayor Napier said there is a way to notify the City anonymously. We don't know about it unless we are contacted. Contacting us helps us deal with it.

A resident commented that, at the same time, we should be accountable for our property.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said we had one call this winter for someone vetting for leniency but we received a call asking us to stop doing that. Keep opinions coming our way. We appreciate all feedback from both directions.

A resident commented that anonymous tips should not be used as a weapon if I have to drive three miles from my house to a dead end street and report someone's house because I don't like them. How are we managing that?

Mayor Napier said it's either a violation of the City Code or it's not. We don't care who turns it in. Bottom line, we want to use our code enforcement effectively throughout the city. West St. Paul was rated number one in the Star Tribune because our Council years ago made this a priority to make our neighbors and community proud. Code enforcement is a thorn in our side because no one wants to enforce someone to pick up a squashed pumpkin.

A resident said, if you're getting bogus notices, it's not always a violation.

Mayor Napier said then they won't be written up or dealt with. We want to be sure we are paying attention to it. We don't want it taking other property values down.

A resident said he called Code Enforcement Officer Terrie Sauer last year for snow removal. She thanked him for calling and took care of it. He didn't think the City knew that the homeowner is responsible for bus stops in front of their property.

City Engineer Beckwith said we have an active Volunteer Coordinator who gets a volunteer to take care of bus shelters.

A resident commented that it's hard to get to a bus at Thompson Avenue and Robert Street. At Cub, the bus driver said she would talk to Cub about it because we had a hard time getting to it because of the snow.

A resident commented on the snowbanks at Delaware across from Sibley.

A resident commented that they sent in an anonymous tip and it works well because, within a week, the City sent a notice.

A resident asked why homeowners have to clean up after someone else's dog? She walks her puppy and is finding a lot of people are not cleaning up after their dogs. In other places, the lawn is torn up because some dog marked and scratched the grass. They watched their dog do that but just left it there. We need to do some kind of public announcement or a push to tell pet owners to clean up after your dogs and be respectful of your neighbors.

Mayor Napier said we can announce it at a couple of Council meeting in the springs.

A resident asked if there is a code violation for excessive dog waste in a yard?

Police Chief Sturgeon said yes, this falls under the public health nuisance.

A resident said walkability is getting better but there are still areas where businesses have to go put in cutouts for sidewalks. We make roads good for driving but the shoulders are still chewed up.

Mayor Napier said it's a priority for the City Council, which became a priority for the City. We have made great strides. Everywhere that there is road work, sidewalks are being added.

A resident commented that they did an excellent job at Marie Avenue and Robert Street.

A resident asked about the status of a house where there has been arson three times on Charlton Street.

Mayor Napier said there is a process in place to take care of it. It is in foreclosure and they are working to get control of it.

Beckwith said it will likely take some time because of redemption periods. If it's a quick reaction, that's unique.

The resident said the previous owner seems to keep going back.

Mayor Napier said he thinks that is done now for good. We are on it and even dealt with it today.

Survey Question #5

How would you rate the overall quality of life in West St. Paul (outside of your neighborhood)?

- A. Excellent
- B. Very good
- C. Good
- D. Average
- E. Fair
- F. Poor

Result: The majority of residents responding said they would rate the overall quality of life in West St. Paul as very good (B), followed by good (C) and excellent (A).

Mayor Napier asked if anyone would like to comment on why they voted the way they did.

A resident said because of the YMCA closing and we don't have a community center, or we lost it. What can we do differently? We need a way for different generations to interact. Eagan has an amazing community center. We lost something with the Y.

Councilmember Vitelli agreed that it was a big loss. From his perspective, he said the Y had multiple opportunities to reinvest in this community. We met with the YMCA, Mendota Heights and ISD 197 to try and get a conglomerate. The School District has lots of land at Sibley but the Y took their money and went home. We had nothing to do with that.

A resident said that they work with Thompson Oaks Park. Could that be something for a community center, more art classes, more breakfast and bagels? Our kids miss working with the older folks. It's a gem in a small community and, when you lose that type of environment, people start to scatter. If the City could do something with Thompson Park Activity Center, that would be a valuable asset.

Mayor Napier said it's my hope to have some type of community center. We have tried partnerships and it has to financially make sense for every partner, but it hasn't happened yet. We are hopeful we can get that space somewhere. Thompson Lodge is a great partnership. Maybe that could be tied into more of a community center. But we are a fully developed community and a first ring community. We have the need and, as Council, we want to do it. It's just we need to try and make that happen. We still talk with the Y about partnering somewhere, but it's challenging in the city.

A resident said their biggest concern is the pool. In Inver Grove Heights, it's one third the size of the Y with no lifeguards. The Y had swimming lessons for kids in the neighborhood. As far as a central location, I was told that they were looking for something central. There's nowhere more central than West St. Paul. People are coming to the Y here from the High Bridge. If there isn't land available, then it would be good to know this is an impossible situation, rather than stringing people along.

Mayor Napier said we did not have a pool, the Y had a pool, and it was a private entity. But, as a community, if you look at Inver Grove Heights or Eagan, we would love to have that. We don't have the money, resources or land for it. But that doesn't mean that something couldn't materialize down the road. This is a priority and we constantly talk about it. We would love to make it happen but we are kind of stuck right now. We need a partnership to make it happen.

A resident asked about the corporate Y in Minneapolis. It's hard to feel like we can support the Y idea.

Mayor Napier said the YMCA has some resources and they are doing this all over the country. They need to partner to make it happen here.

A resident asked why we cannot tie in with the schools.

Councilmember Vitelli said we tried.

Mayor Napier said we had some very productive meetings and got some movement in conversations and some financial things on the table. But it just didn't work. We won't burden the taxpayers without a partnership. We even included Dodge Nature Center and they were pretty willing.

Councilmember Vitelli suggested that the resident ask the corporate office what they did with the money they received when they sold the West St. Paul YMCA.

A resident thanked Mayor Napier and Councilmember Justen for responding to her email. We do have a city pool, she said, and that it went down when the Y took it over. A lot of people think the Y owned it. Other people live in the city and didn't know we have a pool. There is very little signage. I'm with Councilmember Vitelli that the Y had plenty of chances to fix up the building and get the pool. What annoys me is we live close to the pool and pay taxes on it. If we want membership for the season, I have to pay \$90 more a year than a Y member who lives in Mendota Heights, Eagan, St. Paul, or wherever. A slide rotted out and, if that was any park in the city, it would have been replaced. But we have a pool that people pay a fee to go to and this happened. The Y's answer was that the kids can jump in the pool. She asked her granddaughter if she would want to jump or to slide. Her granddaughter answered, "a slide." Getting the Y to clean up the parking lots like City Staff did when they ran it, also.

A resident asked if the Y is going to be running the pool.

Mayor Napier said the Y is still running it.

A resident commented that it is only a seasonal pool.

A resident said it should be a City pool versus private.

A resident said that she has been a YMCA employee for 29 years. If you work at the Y, it's really a big loss. She doesn't like it when people say bad stuff. You have memories of the Y and they're wonderful.

Mayor Napier said he would like to defend the Y a little bit. We, as leaders of the city, have to deal with the City Hall that's falling apart because it's aging. They had an aging façade that is beyond the scope and they had to deal with it. I want to respect that they had to deal with issues. For many years, they were a good asset to our community and everyone hates to lose them. At the same time, we have to understand what they are doing.

In respect of time, Mayor Napier said he wants to keep going with the survey.

Nowicki said the next survey questions are weighted response questions and the audience could give three responses, the first being worth three points, the second worth two points, and the third response worth one point.

Survey Question #6

What is the most serious issue currently facing West St. Paul (top 3 in order)?

- A. Property/Housing Maintenance, neighborhood quality and stability
- B. Crime
- C. Property taxes
- D. Attracting jobs and employment
- E. Attracting shopping and restaurants
- F. Environmental issues
- G. Improving walkability, bike trails
- H. Improving parks and open space

Results: In order of priority, residents said the most serious issue currently facing West St. Paul is property/housing maintenance, neighborhood quality and stability (A). The following results tied between property taxes (C) and attracting shops and restaurants (E).

Mayor Napier said our property maintenance is well underway. To him, crime is one that we really need to focus on. When he saw the newspaper article, we are rated too high on crime.

Police Chief Sturgeon said he is really passionate about this. You can look at stats and interpret them however you want. I don't understand why the FBI records the statistics the way you do. Part 1 crimes are robberies, aggravated assaults, homicides, rapes, and they throw larceny and theft in there. West St. Paul Police responds to a lot of thefts on Robert Street, and they put thefts in with part 1. That's why our part 1 crimes are so high. If we could take those out, we would be very low. They report the part 1 crimes but not the details of what those are. We do have a serious problem with shoplifting on Robert Street. It's people from outside our community that come in and commit those crimes. It's not an unsafe city. It's because of shoplifting at our retail stores.

Mayor Napier thanked Chief Sturgeon for bringing this up because perception is reality. I will be doing this at the State of the City to let people know that we are not ranked fairly. It's fair to say we have crime and thefts, but anytime you have a retail corridor like we do, we are going to have thefts. Our Police Department does a great job. Chief Sturgeon said every time I go to the public and talk about whatever, I always bring this up because this is really irritating to me.

Mayor Napier thanked Chief Sturgeon for his passion.

A resident they rated the walkability and gives the Chief lots of credit. Walking down Charlton and when cars come from the east to a four-way stop, they never look to the right and roll through the sign. I almost got killed two months ago. The Police Department was very informative and put Officers out there. Going down Charlton, you are taking your life in your hands.

Chief Sturgeon said we did something like 4,000 traffic stops last year alone. We have an Officer dedicated to traffic related enforcement and education. I agree they don't stop. You can put as many signs up as you want, but studies show signs don't help that much.

A resident said we love it here but we notice there is a huge difference when we get in our car. We avoid Robert Street and, instead, take Wentworth and Thompson. Every time cars pull out in front of us like we don't exist. If there is anything that can happen to make us feel safe.

Chief Sturgeon said if everyone can drive high alert. I've been here 30 years now and, when I first started, we would go to the 1900 block of Charlton for speeders. We can go to the same spots consistently and it's like holding a fishing pole and the fish keep coming. In my world, there is a lot to dealing with road engineering for traffic safety. Traffic engineers take that into consideration for roadway safety and reducing speeds.

Mayor Napier said we are talking about solar trailers to show your speed. They make solar ones more efficient and they have worked. We are looking to put some out in the community soon. They are effective and not as gaudy to take away from the neighborhood.

A resident said they have a problem with the traffic lights that don't work. I call 911 and heard that I can call Xcel Energy, also. I have a vision problem and they don't work because they're all flashing. On Robert Street, cars make U-turns.

Chief Sturgeon said, unfortunately, U-turns are legal on Robert Street. Minnesota Department of Transportation designers for that road understood there would be a lot of U-turns. As long as they are not impeding traffic, they can make U-turns.

A resident said, at the same intersection, there was a car in front of me and a cop in the left lane. The light turned green and a pedestrian was waiting to cross. The light turned and the cop did nothing. I waited and someone else saw that car go and didn't realize there was a pedestrian and almost hit me.

Chief Sturgeon said he would like to know the exact date and time. The Officer could have been responding to a call.

A resident said people turn as soon as they see the green light, even if there is a pedestrian waiting.

Chief Sturgeon said we are going to do some pedestrian traffic detail this year. I'm not guaranteeing that it's going to create a perfect situation.

A resident said at Amore the light turns green for the walkers before it turns green for cars. It's enough to get it going.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said we recently got the Public Safety Committee going, which is a small group of Councilmembers. We have been addressing the top two items here. Housing maintenance and walkability and bike trails. A lot of things you are mentioning here, continue letting us know because Council is digging deeper into it.

Mayor Napier said public is welcome to attend these meetings.

A resident said this only effects a few houses but the cul-de-sac at Emerson, people come past Perkins so fast that it's hard to get out onto Emerson from the cul-de-sac. For a while there was a sign for driving speed.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said we were talking about that intersection at our last Public Safety Committee meeting.

Survey Question #7

In what area(s) should the City commit more resources (top 3 in order)?

- A. Infrastructure replacement or maintenance
- B. Police
- C. Fire
- D. Parks maintenance
- E. Recreation programming
- F. Debt retirement
- G. Trails & sidewalks
- H. None
- I. Other

Results: In order of priority, residents said the City should commit more resources to infrastructure replacement or maintenance (A), Police (B) and trails and sidewalks (G).

Mayor Napier said infrastructure is a huge priority. Nothing will bring value down on your homes than infrastructure. It can bring down your whole city and its unfairly done. You can have a lot of good things to offer in your community but, if you have streets like Moreland is right now, that should be a priority for our city. That's why the local option sales tax went into effect so we can

continue working on our infrastructure. We've been playing catchup for the past 12 years. Nothing against the Council from previous years. As you know, we've been cut State aid for the past few years. We have to take care of our infrastructure or we become a city no one wants to be a part of. This is a priority for Council.

A resident asked if you are aware of Ayd Mill Road. No one wanted to travel Robert Street, so Carrie Street now looks like Ayd Mill Road. The apartments, semis and others all use our road.

Mayor Napier said we have our roads rated for worst, all the way down. The sales tax allows us to keep improving them. Our City Engineer has the ratings on all of our streets. We will begin working on our worst road first.

A resident said they heard there will be another roundabout. We are the shortcut from Oakdale, so our traffic will increase.

Schroeder said we just did a traffic study on all those streets within the county. They are really projecting a much different outcome than what you are suggesting. Once the apartment building and Hy-Vee and the roundabout go in, it will be studied again.

Mayor Napier said the nice thing to know is that it's in alignment with the Council's priorities. We are on the same page as you guys.

City Manager Schroeder welcomed Representative Rick Hansen to the meeting.

Mayor Napier thanked Representative Hansen for all the work he does to support West St. Paul.

Representative Hansen said infrastructure is his number one priority. We are trying to get some sewer money, inflow and infrastructure money, and living infrastructure of trees. We are trying to get some additional money from the State. He just came from a meeting with Governor Walz. We are still working on getting infrastructure replacements. The City and Council did a great job with the Capitol tour. We looked at a lot of lift stations and I am confident we can try and get some help so that it doesn't go on property taxes to pay for those basic infrastructures.

Mayor Napier thanked Representative Hansen for continuing to fight for the residents of West St. Paul.

Survey Question #8

What park or facility do you frequent most often (top 3 in order)?

- A. Sports dome (RAC)
- B. Ice arena (John V. Hoene)
- C. Outdoor swimming pool
- D. Marthaler Park
- E. Garlough Park
- F. Sports Complex (at Oakdale/Wentworth)

- G. Thompson County Park
- H. Harmon Park
- I. Trail System
- J. My neighborhood park (Orme, Kennedy, Oakdale, Dodd, Weschcke, Southview, Emerson, Mud Lake, Haskell)

Results: In order of priority, residents said the park or facility they frequent most often is Thompson County Park (G), Harmon Park (H) and the trail system (I).

A resident asked who sets the hours for dome use. Without the Y, we checked into it but you have to be someone who doesn't work to be able to use it. Is there any chance it could be open at other hours? It's not open on the weekends and you can't go there after 7:00.

Mayor Napier said we looked at it.

City Engineer Beckwith said we have a management company that runs the dome for us. When they don't have leased slots, they do open it up for free walking, although it's odd hours. It's an enterprise that has to pay for itself. The City has to levy property tax to support the debt and equipment replacement, so we have to think about how all that gets paid for. A year ago, Council heard from Staff of the dome management company to start charging for that walking. Council wasn't interested in that. They are supportive of continuing open and free hours.

Mayor Napier said you could ask why we have it. How many users come into our community and spend money as they are using it. We are constantly working on that. If we can make headway to get more hours, we should try working on it. It is a nice place to walk.

Mayor Napier asked how many residents have experienced the renovations at Thompson Park. We need to get that out to the community about what a great addition and a great place to walk in the spring.

A resident commented on the Sports Complex at Oakdale and Wentworth. It is used as a park and ride but, in the summer, most nights it's youth league softball and baseball. But Wednesday nights are adult night and Thursday morning it looks like there were 30 frat parties, empty beer cases all over the park and yet the trash barrels are empty. Is there any accountability?

Schroeder said we will look into that.

Mayor Napier thanked him for bringing this to our attention.

A resident said she volunteers and cleans with gloves and garbage bags, including at Harmon Park. People leave diapers. I was so disgusted with the garbage that I stopped.

Mayor Napier said we invested \$6M into this park. I'm disappointed and frustrated by the lack of respect. The only way is to have our own community police it and make us aware

of the issues. It comes down to trying to build enough value in our community. How do you call someone out on leaving a diaper?

The resident commented that they did.

Mayor Napier said we hear about vandalism and graffiti and it's tough for us to handle.

Chief Sturgeon said we are working with our IT Department to install more cameras here and at the Sports Complex. Starting a new program this year called Paws on Patrol, bringing in the community who are out walking dogs that, if they see something, say something. For you to help us, contacting us if you see something, and police your own neighborhood, as well.

A resident asked if they need a dog to do this?

Chief Sturgeon said you don't need a dog. We will also have community events like this to talk about it. One date is already set in June to get more people involved and passionate about the community.

A resident said her neighborhood park, "No Name Park," isn't on the list.

A resident said I love the Harmon Park complex and that it's available to families. It has added a lot of diversity to West St. Paul. I realize a lot of people don't know how to take care of things but we need to set by example.

Mayor Napier said it's great to see kids in the park enjoying the space. We have one senior who lives nearby who said every time she drives by the park, it gives her a great feeling.

A resident said it's excellent entertainment to come watch the games and it's free.

A resident suggested a slogan for self-policing and neighborhoods watching out for each other.

A resident thanked Chief Sturgeon for upping the game on the activity here. We live two blocks from here but stopped coming here because of some of the inappropriate behavior. My kids don't want to come here because of that. It's frustrating to spend \$6M but not use it.

Mayor Napier said this is a great item for our Public Safety Committee to discuss. The Police Department has done a great job with parks but we don't want that to happen. We are definitely going to make it a priority.

Survey Question #9

What is the most important when choosing a community to live (top 3 in order)?

- A. Quality of schools
- B. Low crime
- C. Proximity to shopping and restaurants
- D. Proximity to night life and entertainment
- E. Quality of parks and open space
- F. Walkability, trails and sidewalks
- G. Access to public transit
- H. Proximity to employment
- I. Neighborhood aesthetics and cleanliness

Results: In order of priority, residents said the most important factor when choosing a community to live in is low crime (B), quality of schools (A) and neighborhood aesthetics and cleanliness (I).

Mayor Napier said what he hears a lot is the location. The proximity to the airport, downtown St. Paul, Mall of America. When you think of all the activities, it's all really close. We are actually in a really good spot. Residents tell him they love the area because of where it's located.

A resident said when they moved into Carrie Street, we were the young people on the block. Most of our block has kept up with the neighborhood, keeping things trimmed clean and moved and being respectful to each other. When you have a neighborhood where people take pride in their home, you're going to see those nice homes, night life, etc. It all goes hand in hand. Eventually, a lot of us will pass on and a ton of ne families will move in. You have the opportunity to set that now to have that quality of living.

A resident said the quality of schools is why we moved here. To me, that's where we will get you families, if we invest in our schools.

Mayor Napier echoed the quality of schools. ISD 197 has done a great job with the environmental magnet schools, which just received an award. We set the bar of how to achieve success in education through other ways than not just academics but through the environment and technology. A lot of great things are happening with our School District to support the referendum. They're getting the technology and investments that they need.

A resident said kudos to everyone here. I've never seen another community with how well a Council gets along with the School District, the Police Department works with Mendota Heights Police Department, the School Liaison, etc. Superintendent Peter Olson-Skog is fantastic, as well is the Principal at Moreland. Everyone works well with each other and that's why it works so well.

Mayor Napier said the School Board has an initiative that each School Board Member reaches out to a City Official and meets with them one on one. I have a meeting scheduled with someone. It's cool to have that community and partnership with your School District. I am so glad they have that as an initiative. We are going to make this happen and keep it

going. We want to showcase our School District. I am really appreciative of them having this same drive for this partnership.

Survey Question #10

How do you receive most of your information about West St. Paul (top 3 in order)?

- A. City newsletter (What's Happening in West St. Paul)
- B. City website
- C. City Facebook/Twitter
- D. Other social media groups (WSP Neighbors, Conversations in WSP, etc.)
- E. St. Paul Pioneer Press
- F. Minneapolis Star Tribune
- ~~G. Southwest Review~~
- H. Cable Television (NDC4)
- I. Word of mouth, friends, relatives

Results: In order of priority, residents said they receive most of their information about West St. Paul from the City newsletter (A), other social media groups (D) and by word of mouth, friends and relatives (I).

A resident said Council meetings could be added to this list.

Mayor Napier said Marketing & Communications Manager Dan Nowicki creates our City newsletter. He is the one that makes my articles look so good.

Nowicki told Mayor Napier that it's all the content he gives him.

Mayor Napier said thank you so much for what you do. Adding humor, partnership with Dodge Nature Center. It's a gem in our community. You have a great partnership with them and have great content. Hats off to you. You really do put our city out there for everyone to enjoy.

Nowicki said he appreciates that. A lot of content comes from the management and their staff members. I just throw it into a book and try to make it look nice.

Mayor Napier said it's old tech but it works.

Nowicki said I started here six years ago and my first thought was to get rid of it. But as we've progressed and put more effort into it, it just keeps going up, so we will continue.

Mayor Napier said the rating for social media and word of mouth tied. As we get a turnover in our city, it may rely a lot on social media and word of mouth in our community. I am glad to hear that it's high on the list.

A resident said when they have a problem, they let their Councilmembers know, and it works.

A resident said the list is missing the West St. Paul Reader.

Kevin Hendricks, founder of West St. Paul Reader, added that it's www.weststpaulreader.com.

Mayor Napier told Mr. Hendricks that he does an awesome job, and a great job for the pilot program he developed. People are watching, keep doing it. Nice job. Everyone applauded.

Councilmember Justen said we are also missing the Cable Commission. The three percent for the Cable Commission, if you watch the meetings on tv, that counts as cable. If you stream them, the only reason we have them is because of cable.

Nowicki said the tv station and the workers who do the Council meetings and such, they're going out to ribbon cuttings and other events and putting together articles. If you're not paying attention to them, you're probably still seeing a lot of their work through our content.

A resident said they needed more than three choices. They watch the Council meetings and the Reader.

Mayor Napier said none of these are going away. This just tells us that the newsletter is very important.

A resident said some of the meetings that are public and smaller, such as OCWS, than the Cable Commission cannot do could be done through YouTube.

Mayor Napier suggested that Nowicki look into it.

A resident asked if they tape Park & Recreation Committee meetings?

Mayor Napier said they are not filmed but it's something we could look into as a possibility.

Councilmember Berry said the OCWS is something we've talked about. A lot of conversation happens there and we start at 5:00 p.m.

A resident said that is the one I would really enjoy streaming. It doesn't have to be high quality.

Councilmember Vitelli said it is all volunteer, so that's more of the issue.

Councilmember Berry said it could be Facebook Live.

A resident asked Mayor Napier if he could keep the community informed on Coronavirus.

Mayor Napier said I will rely on the City Manager and the Marketing & Communications Manager to get us information out tomorrow. We will send a blurb out about it and keep you informed.

A resident said the other great thing is the City website. You can sign up and get agendas emailed to you, event invites, also text to your phone so you don't forget about meetings coming up.

Mayor Napier said it works, because she is at all of our meetings.

Question & Answer Period

Mayor Napier said he would like to give credit to Staff for all they do, spending their evening with us tonight, and most of them live in other communities. The audience applauded.

Mayor Napier said Councilmembers Berry, Eng-Sarne, Justen and Vitelli are here tonight. He asked them to stand for questions.

A resident said, with winter almost over and the snow melting, property owners on corners with the disability access points need to keep them clear of snow. Being a dog walker, it's lousy. Not just homeowners but businesses, as well. I live on the north end. If we could spend the next nine months communicating because, for three months a year, our disabled residents cannot use our sidewalks. To the general public, I wanted to communicate this for corner property owners.

Mayor Napier said it's an on-going issue. The sidewalk gets shoveled, then you got to work and the plow comes by and fills it all back in. It's all we can do to try and enforce it that they have 24 hours to clear it up. It's an on-going challenge in Minnesota but we can keep it on our radar. We could shoot out information on social media, including photos of some.

A resident said last October I was replacing the top surface boards on a deck, about 18 boards on a deck that had been there for 35 years and were pretty long. I had to get a building permit to do it. This is a deck that was about 10 feet by 20 feet by 32 inches high. Replacing the surface boards. I asked the Building Inspector how much the permit would be and he said about \$99. I went to pick it up and it was \$225. That's a real gouging.

Mayor Napier said permits are basically to recover the expense of administrative and physically going out to inspect it. It's usually based on the scope of the project. I can have Staff look into it and get some answers. Community Development Director Hartshorn will look into it for you, he said.

The resident said we're talking about keeping neighborhoods looking good but someone is getting charged that for a permit.

Mayor Napier said the whole idea is to cover the expense of inspections. Whether it was fair or not, we can look at the calculations so you can better understand it. We should be doing that anyway.

A resident said when you have a contractor doing the addition, they should include the cost of the permit.

Mayor Napier said that is correct, they are included.

A resident gave a plug for Thompson Park. It is absolutely fabulous with a lot going on there. We do not turn away younger people. There is a lot of stuff going on.

A resident said they were at the Council meeting Monday and the discussion was about prevailing wage and that all these buildings are happening. My concern is about many projects have been built without the prevailing wage. My concern is that Council is considering pulling that back, making it easier for private corporations to use taxpayer dollars and not require them to be paid prevailing wage. I encourage everyone to look into it.

A resident said last year the vast majority of people attending neighborhood meetings were homeowners. I encourage you to reach out to renters before compiling this data because it is not representative of them.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said I went door to door to get people to vote. Renters replied that they received the flyer in the mail but we will continue the effort. We will keep reaching out.

A resident reminded everyone that March is Food Share Month. There is a bucket at City Hall and other places in the city to donate.

A resident asked about the City Hall Open House.

Mayor Napier said we moved it here last year as an experiment and a pilot program. We are moving it back to City Hall this year. It's a great community event. If we have good weather, we have a great turnout.

Mayor Napier said we have a State of the City address on May 7th at Evolve at 8:30 a.m. I would love to have a great turnout there. Town Square will be there to film it. It's fun to share with the community all the good things we are doing.

Mayor Napier thanked everyone for being here tonight and being involved in your community.

Mayor Napier thanked Staff for the work they do and thanked all of the residents for coming to the Town Hall Meeting this evening.

The meeting ended at 8:00 p.m.

Shirley R Buecksler
City Clerk/Recorder