

City Council Study Session Minutes – February 8, 2016

Mayor Laurie Gere called to order the regular Anacortes City Council study session of February 8, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. Councilmembers Eric Johnson, Ryan Walters, Erica Pickett, Brad Adams, Liz Lovelett, John Archibald and Matt Miller were present. Mayor Gere moved Item 5 to the beginning of the agenda to accommodate the guest speakers.

South Commercial Avenue Conceptual Design

Assistant Public Works Director Matt Reynolds reviewed the contract with Alta Planning + Design to perform conceptual design work for the South Commercial Avenue Corridor, funded primarily by a WSDOT pedestrian/bicycle safety grant that concludes March 31, 2016. Mr. Reynolds introduced Alta consultants Steve Durrant and Chris Saleeba to present the firm's three proposed design alternatives. He invited feedback from councilmembers following the meeting in keeping with the grant time schedule.

Mr. Durrant shared a slide presentation which was included in the evening's Council packet. He first recapped the project goals to foster multimodal access, economic development, equity, safety, connectivity, environmental protection and public health. He then reported on the Open House held January 12, 2016 in the City Council Chambers to help identify opportunities and challenges along the corridor based on public input. Mr. Durrant displayed the results of a parking utilization study performed by city staff to sample parking demand and availability on Commercial Avenue. He then described three different design concepts including pedestrian activation zones, bike/pedestrian facilitated crossings, planting strips to treat stormwater runoff, raised and/or signalized pedestrian and bicycle crossings at intersections, on street parking, left turn lanes, and one vehicle travel lane in each direction. Councilmembers offered their ideas and feedback on each concept. Mr. Durrant summarized the evaluation strategies his staff used to rank the alternatives, then shared Alta's rating of the three alternatives which favored Concept B.

Mr. Archibald, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Miller, Mr. Adams and Ms. Pickett spoke in support of Concept B. Mr. Miller said he needed to hear more from business owners and managers in the study area and warned that plantings would need to be configured so as not to block storefronts and signage. Mr. Miller and Ms. Lovelett both asked if the concepts would be acceptable to WSDOT on that stretch of State Route 20 and if any state funding might be available. Mr. Walters asked for pricing for the different concepts. Mr. Durrant said that developing pricing and phasing strategies would be his firm's next task. Mayor Gere asked councilmembers to send any additional feedback and questions to Mr. Reynolds.

Fire Protection/EMS Master Plan: PSC Recommendations

Fire Chief Richard Curtis reported on the Public Safety Committee's extended review of and policy recommendations on the Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Master Plan developed in 2014. His slide presentation was added to the Council packet for the evening. Chief Curtis summarized the goals of the Fire Protection and EMS Master Plan, including Council determination of level of service and coordination with the Comprehensive Plan. He recapped the development of the master plan and the concurrent evaluation conducted by the Washington State Rating Bureau (WSRB), then displayed a chart comparing the recommendations of the two bodies for achieving higher levels of service. Chief Curtis then described in some detail the master plan's assessment of the department's current level of service, presented his own recommendations for changes, and presented the recommendation of the mayor and Public Safety Committee for services including initial fire suppression attack/imminent rescue, fire suppression, and EMS response time both inside and outside the city limits. He summarized the increases in professional staffing and volunteer personnel that would be required to implement the recommendations. The chief also summarized the committee's recommendations for infrastructure investments, some of which were already underway. Chief Curtis responded to councilmember questions regarding event frequency, response times, call distribution between day and night shifts, staffing for inspections, the cost for implementing the recommendations, and the relative cost of renting vs. building Station 3. He advised that the discussion would continue at the February 22, 2016 study session and that he would bring to that session the additional information just requested by councilmembers.

Mayor Gere moved Item 4 forward on the agenda to accommodate the guest speakers.

Tommy Thompson Trestle and Causeway Potential Replacement Project in Cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources and the Samish Indian Nation

Parks and Recreation Director Gary Robinson presented an interagency agreement proposed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to consider removal and replacement of the Tommy Thompson Trail trestle and causeway. Mr. Robinson summarized some potential benefits and concerns of the project as outlined in his packet materials for the evening. Mr. Robinson then invited staff from DNR and the Samish Indian Nation to address Council regarding the project.

Birdie Davenport, DNR Aquatic Reserves Program Manager, advised that DNR's interest was ecological benefit to the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve. She said both water quality and species health are affected by the creosote-coated pilings and the causeway and that sediment had accumulated south of the causeway due to insufficient flushing. Ms. Davenport reported that the Samish had prepared a detailed feasibility study to show that removing the causeway would improve hydrologic function of the bay. She added that many important species would benefit from creosote removal including herring, forage fish, Olympia oysters and clams. Ms. Davenport argued for the potential social benefits of the project as well and the possibility of leveraging grant opportunities. She encouraged adoption of the interagency agreement to support the process which could extend for years or decades. Ms. Davenport mentioned other regional partners who were supportive of the project including the Samish, Northwest Straits Foundation, Skagit Marine Resources Committee, the Swinomish, Department of Ecology and others.

Mr. Adams asked about the extent of creosote piling in the bay. Todd Woodard, Natural Resources Director for the Samish Indian Nation, described the piling inspection conducted by divers as part of the feasibility study, methods for removing piling, and the possibility that additional piling would be discovered under the causeway. Mr. Woodard said the Samish were highly supportive of the project and that their feasibility study showed that removing the causeway back to the end of Weaverling Spit would restore a natural interchange of water between the inner and outer bay. He described the tribe's interest in dovetailing a shoreline restoration project along the inner portion of the bay.

Ms. Lovelett inquired about the cost of the project and the city's financial role. Ms. Davenport distributed a recently completed cost estimate and stressed that DNR would be seeking grant funds and did not expect the city to come up with money for this project. Mayor Gere requested a copy of the Samish feasibility study. Mr. Woodard said he would provide that. The mayor advised councilmembers that the agreement would come back for consideration at a future regular meeting.

Utility Billing: Liens, Temporary Service Disconnections, Service to Low Income Customers

City Attorney Darcy Swetnam began the discussion with a presentation that summarized the city's current code and practices for collecting delinquent utility billing accounts and proposed new code that would clarify customer expectations and provide additional tools to collect on seriously delinquent accounts. Ms. Swetnam described the two categories of enforcement tools: collections, which pursues the person who incurred the charges, and liens, which follow and can encumber title to the property to which the service was provided. She reviewed in some detail the different types of liens and the state law constraining which types of liens can apply to which types of utility services (water, sewer/stormwater and solid waste). Ms. Swetnam suggested several possible changes to the Anacortes Municipal Code to establish the order in which partial payments are applied to charges and to provide for sewerage and solid waste liens with specified interest rates. She addressed questions from councilmembers on a wide range of related issues and advised that the discussion would continue in the coming months.

Finance Director Steve Hoglund then addressed several other utility billing questions, referring to the agenda bill included in the evening's Council packet. He reviewed the code provision allowing utility services to be discontinued in special circumstances, the code provision allowing low income customers to apply annually for a 20% discount on utility rates, and the snow bird provision which was repealed in 2015. Councilmembers and the mayor discussed various means of better communicating these provisions to utility customers and ensuring equitable assessment of utility fees among those who benefit from the utility systems.

There being no further business, at approximately 8:50 p.m. the Anacortes City Council study session of February 8, 2016 was adjourned.