

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS AND STREET MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: February 9, 2023, at 5:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

Members Present: Lou Larson, Doug Diny, Chad Henke, Lisa Rasmussen, Gary Gisselman

Also Present: Eric Lindman, Allen Wesolowski, TJ Niksich, Tara Alfonso, Chris Barr

Approval of minutes of the January 12, 2023 meeting

Diny moved to approve the minutes of the January 12th meeting. Henke seconded and the motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Discussion and possible action on driveway request for 2201 Grand Avenue

A request was received to add a driveway at 2201 Grand Avenue. Wesolowski explained that under Wausau Municipal Code Section 12.20.080 there is an access management plan for Grand Avenue that would prohibit an additional driveway. He noted that this parcel has driveways off Kent Street.

Dan Higginbotham, 2625 Northwestern Avenue, appeared on behalf of the owner of the property. The access management plan was created in 1996. At that time there was no need for driveway access as K-Mart was still there and there was a stop light on the south side of K-Mart for access. The access management plan is quite limited; it goes from the city limits to Kent Street. The only properties on the east side of Grand are Brickner's, the former K-Mart parcel which is now apartments, and the shopping center. Brickner's has access at the stop light. The party that purchased the shopping center is looking to revitalize. He is getting kickback from potential tenants. Those wanting to go to the south end of the shopping center have to go north on Grand Ave, east on Kent Street, and back south to get to the southernmost building of the shopping center. They are requesting an access only driveway, similar to what Kwik Trip has in Weston where there is an angle entrance only on the north side of their building and an entrance/exit on the east end of the building. The owner is trying to be a good neighbor and trying to do some lighting, parking lot, and building façade fixups.

Wesolowski pointed out the requested driveway location, which is across from Eau Claire Boulevard. There are no driveways for this parcel off of Grand Avenue. There are three driveways on Kent Street. Kent Street is a signalized intersection with good access. The proposal is for a right-in only driveway. Wesolowski is not sure how we would keep people from exiting. Higginbotham stated the driveway could be moved north to where there is a median. It could be a 45-degree angle similar to Kwik Trip and clearly marked. The owner is willing to give up the first driveway on Kent Street.

Because we do not have a non-mountable median in that area, Rasmussen feels it would be almost impossible to enforce no exit from the driveway. With Grand Avenue's width and traffic flow, it is dangerous enough at times. It appears that the approaches on Kent Street were reconstructed when the road was done. Three entry points from a signalized intersection is robust access to the site. She is hard-pressed to cut into the curb that close to the corner when it is not that much of an effort for someone to go around the corner to get into the site. This access has been this way for a long time and the public is used to going around the corner to get in and out.

Diny feels that 90% of the traffic on Kent Street is for the Kwik Trip on the north side. He asked if an entrance on the southern part would make it less congested. It would be hard for Wesolowski to guess how much traffic would take the entrance. Grand and Kent is a big intersection and more than capable of handling the traffic that is there.

Henke questioned why the access management plan was created in 1996. Wesolowski indicated that was when reconstruction started on Grand Avenue from Kent to the city limits. The access management plan was developed to call out driveways that would and would not be allowed in the future.

Larson will not be supporting this. He sees it as a hazard and an unpoliceable situation. People will make left turns there and will try to go across.

Higginbotham stated retail businesses have been degrading since 2000. This has not been a robust shopping center by any means and has slowly gone into disrepair. The person that has purchased it is trying to revitalize it. He does not think this will create a precedence for the city. 17th Avenue has almost the same traffic count as this street, but there is no management plan on 17th. There are some businesses that have two or three accesses onto 17th, both in and out. If we move the driveway north, the median will block people from going across to Eau Claire Boulevard. Rasmussen believes if the driveway is moved north, it would create a pinch point between people parking and navigating the parking lot. If moved too far north, it would be too close to the signals creating a totally different problem. Higginbotham would want to move it just north enough to where there is a median.

Lindman feels if it is moved any further north, it would encroach on the right turn lane and create conflicts. Anytime a new driveway is put onto Grand, it creates conflicts and there is no way to police them. Consideration was given to what access is there now. Staff's perspective is that there is adequate access to the site and would not recommend another access onto Grand.

Deb Ryan, 702 Elm Street, goes to this shopping center quite often. She believes there are a number of residents in the apartments nearby that walk over. She feels one of the new owner's first priorities should be the inside of Family Dollar.

Gisselman is torn as he is looking at it from the business part of Grand Avenue. Some people on the southeast side are concerned about the lack of business on Grand Avenue. He encourages business development there, but this may open up some traffic congestion. He does not see where there could be a compromise without causing more issues.

Diny moved to approve the driveway as requested. Seconded by Henke and the motion failed 1-4 with Henke, Rasmussen, Gisselman, and Larson the dissenting votes.

Discussion and possible action on parking restrictions on North 2nd Avenue between Eldred Street and Strowbridge Street

Wesolowski explained there are apartment buildings from Strowbridge to Eldred. People from the apartments have been parking on the street. The road is 37' back-to-back. Typically, if a roadway is 37' back-to-back, we do not restrict parking. They do park close to the intersections so it may make sense to restrict parking 50' back from the intersections.

Larson did not see a petition in the packet and asked how this was brought forward to committee. Rasmussen received feedback from the plow driver. 2nd Avenue between Eldred and Strowbridge is a hill. The driver gets to the crest of the hill and there are cars everywhere causing issues getting through. By the time he gets up and over the hill, he is committed. This apartment complex has ample parking for everyone that lives in the building; the residents just do not want to park there. People are parking on 2nd Avenue from the corner all the way to the crest of the hill. With the wing up, the plow driver can barely make it through and cannot clean the road properly. In other areas we have put parking restrictions on one side from November to April, which solves the winter problem.

Diny asked why people are not parking in the parking lot. Rasmussen guesses they want to make entry into the building by the front door versus the back door to have a shorter walk when they are carrying bags. This complex has existed in this neighborhood since 1975. Parking has become an issue only within the last few years. There are a number of buildings, and each unit contains 8 apartments. Even if each unit has two cars, there is still enough room to park off street. She believes it is a matter of convenience for the tenant.

If parking is restricted here, Larson asked if Rasmussen would foresee a problem with people parking on other streets. Rasmussen guesses they would move around the corner onto Eldred. If they park on Eldred, they would most likely only park on one side. The goal should be that they park in the parking lot.

Chris Barr explained the problem is when you come off Eldred Street, south onto 2nd Avenue. He slides across the street because it goes from a flat area to a hill. He suggested restricting parking on the east side because he does not turn left off of Eldred with the plow.

Rasmussen moved to restrict parking on the east side for the entire block from November 1st to April 1st. Seconded by Diny and the motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Discussion and possible action on parking restrictions on Summit Drive from Beechwood Drive to North 3rd Avenue

Rasmussen said this area has the same issue. The pinch point is the Beechwood/Summit Drive intersection. This request came from the plow driver and a neighbor in the 1600 block of Summit. The issue is coming from the apartments and condos along the curve. Trash pickup for the apartment and the condo has to T in on the curve and it is a tight corner to begin with. The request is for parking restrictions on one side from November to April. Discussion followed.

Stuart Mikul, 321 Summit Drive, lives in the condo. His children visit and need parking. There are no driveways up to Beechwood on the other side of the street. He checked early this morning and there were two cars in front of the apartment building and one across the street. He questioned overnight parking limitations and if the Tech parking lot would be something he could use for overnight parking if needed. Rasmussen said the private sector owns that lot and an arrangement would have to be worked out with the owner. Discussion followed on restricting parking on the south side during the winter. Mikul added that their mailboxes are out front and sometimes the mailman has to jockey in and out due to parked vehicles.

Rasmussen moved to restrict parking on the south side of Summit Drive between Beechwood and North 3rd Avenue from November 1st to April 1st. Henke seconded.

Henke noted alternative side parking overnight in the wintertime. Rasmussen said the enforcement is lacking and there is an insane number of violators.

There being a motion and a second, motion to restrict parking on the south side of Summit Drive between Beechwood and North 3rd Avenue from November 1st to April 1st carried unanimously 5-0.

Discussion and possible action on lease with Lamar Advertising for billboard signs at Bridge Street and 3rd Street

Wesolowski stated Lamar is asking for a 5-year lease. Last time the lease was approved for one year.

Rasmussen believes the Planning Department has been trying to get rid of this billboard for a number of years. Every time this comes up, staff recommends getting rid of it and then there is an uprising from the businesses that utilize the sign for advertising. Last time, Lamar was willing to negotiate the lease that if the parcel needed to be reclaimed for a legitimate commercial development, we would be able to exit the lease arrangement and get the billboard removed. In the meantime, we generated revenue from the lease. If the exit clause in the lease is such that we could accommodate development with reasonable notice to Lamar to remove the billboard, it seems silly not to continue to lease the land.

Gisselman asked if there was an exit clause in the existing agreement. If we can get out of the lease in a reasonable amount of time and its not doing any harm, why should we give up the income. Alfonso stated the lease is in the packet. Paragraph 5 indicates Lessor may terminate this lease upon 60 days written notice if the intention by the lessor is to redevelop this premises either through a lease or sale. It envisions we would only terminate it if we were developing it; we could not arbitrarily end it.

Rasmussen feels that is a fair exit clause and added that there is a robust list of advertisers that use the sign. Gisselman also believes marketing individuals have appeared in the past stating it is a great advertising/marketing tool.

Larson is not for this as he believes there is not a place for billboards in the city anymore. With internet, tv and radio advertising, he believes this is an eyesore.

Diny asked if there have been any formal complaints or efforts by others to remove the sign other than compliance with non-conformance. Wesolowski is not aware of any complaints. Rasmussen said we received a hail of complaints from people who wanted to keep it when we planned to get rid of it.

Rasmussen moved to renew the lease for 5 years using the terms outlined in the sample lease in the packet. Motion was seconded and carried 4-1 with Larson the dissenting vote.

Discussion and possible action on design alternatives for Downtown Street Redevelopment

The entire presentation provided by Matt Graun, Vice President of Becher Hoppe, and Sean Jergens, SRF, can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIFkMbHuF_U.

Rasmussen asked if the expectation is for the final finished state to be 2+ years out depending on the phased development. Wesolowski indicated the final state for 3rd and Jackson would be 2024. We would need to budget for this in 2024. Assuming Block 4 is completed at that point, Rasmussen asked if that would hinder the progress of Block 5. Graun stated the focus would be to finish the area from the parking lane on the west side of the road to the east in 2024. There would still be a little bit of working area for development in Block 3 or Block 5.

Gisselman asked what the rest of the project looks like once Block 4 is developed. Graun indicated they want to use Block 5 for staging. Technically, the city does not own Block 5. Once Block 4 gets to capacity, they plan to work on Block 5. Discussion followed. Graun noted the developers have a vested interest in getting the areas looking good as soon as they can as they want to attract people to the area. Graun added that they are looking at redoing the façade on the Sears Ramp to the north. Wesolowski explained that the former Sears building butted up to the ramp. The existing knee walls do not meet code and there is currently temporary fencing. At a minimum we will have to put railing or something in this area. The façade on HOM Furniture and the Imaginarium will get a huge upgrade this summer. The City may want to do something to match their façade. Improvements will be needed for the Penney's elevator to make it accessible.

Henke asked how temporary 2nd Street will be. Graun stated it would be 6" of base course with 2" of asphalt. The ultimate goal would be to pulverize that as a base for the future concrete surface. There should not be much of a need for barricades. There will be a gradual slope going to the Block 3 area. Henke can see a lot of people coming out of the JC Penney's Ramp going to the Imaginarium and suggested adding a pedestrian light.

Rasmussen moved to accept the 30% plan rendering recognizing that initially everything will be done in a temporary state and directed staff to continue to work with the stakeholders to proceed to the appropriate percentage of planning to get started in 2023. Seconded by Henke.

Diny asked if the intersections that are shaded on the rendering indicate brick. Jergens explained the shading represents colored concrete potentially in the roadway. This is being evaluated but their strong preference is that all of the roadway, driving and parking surfaces be concrete.

There being a motion and a second, motion to accept the 30% plan rendering recognizing that initially everything will be done in a temporary state and directed staff to continue to work with the stakeholders to proceed to the appropriate percentage of planning to get started in 2023 carried unanimously 5-0.

Adjourn

Rasmussen moved to adjourn the meeting. Henke seconded and the motion carried unanimously 5-0. Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:45 p.m.