

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS AND STREET MAINTENANCE COMMITTEE

---

Date of Meeting: May 1, 2023, at 5:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall.

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

Also Present: Mayor Katie Rosenberg, Eric Lindman, Allen Wesolowski, Anne Jacobson, Jill Kurtzhals, Liz Brodek, Dawn Herbst, Lori Wunsch

In compliance with Chapter 19, Wisconsin Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted and received by the *Wausau Daily Herald* in the proper manner.

Noting the presence of a quorum, at approximately 5:15 p.m. Chair Larson called the meeting to order.

### **Discussion and possible action approving the closure of the McClellan Ramp and skywalk**

Larson asked if anyone present would like to comment on this issue. No one came forward.

Larson walked the ramp today. It is dated and he will not dispute that it needs to be replaced. He will dispute the way it has been brought forward. He gets tired of things being brought to us with the notion it needed to be done two weeks ago. He does not believe there has been a survey taken of the people affected by this. He believes the ramp is important as it serves two of the largest buildings downtown; the City Square building and Dudley Tower. To his knowledge there is no strategic plan to move forward other than to just tear down the ramp.

Rasmussen said there has been talk of this in a number of meetings. The city commissioned a city-wide parking study a few years ago that ascertained the engineering condition of the ramps. In public meetings back to 2015 or 2016 we were already talking about the fact that the McClellan Ramp has less than 10 years to live. At that point, a plan was put in place to likely bring down that structure. Depending upon parking demand, there was talk of constructing a new ramp on either the church block or on the McClellan site depending on what made the most sense and what the costs were. They were taking a study of what the surface parking and ramp parking demands were. This was before the rise of work from home and now a lot of the office towers are not even close to full capacity. There is 30% or less in use and permit sales. Staff was performing enough maintenance to hobble structures along to end of life. We knew a long time ago and had agreed that at some point McClellan would need to go. It is nearing 50 years old and has had a continuous flow of water, concrete and road salt. Its life expectancy is pretty much up. Her concern is collapse. In New York two weeks ago, a ramp went down full of cars and killed the ramp attendant. Cars were pancaked and falling off the top onto the sidewalk below. If we think people are upset about the fact that we may retire the McClellan Ramp, imagine how upset they would be if the ramp comes down with cars or people in it. She is very nervous about its condition. 20 years ago, she parked in the ramp every day; it was not the best back then. She parked in the ramp for a few minutes today and drove right back out. As soon as a car drives behind you, it is bouncing. You can feel the flex in the joints. When it is raining, water is running through it. When we have two engineers and an engineering firm saying the ramp is done, she feels we need to listen. We would be looking at an awful sum of money to get the ramp through the fall and another awful sum to get through 2025. She is not a fan of letting the ramp live much longer.

Diny hopes the impression was not given that they were not listening last week. He thinks there are two issues. One is a long-term strategic plan that may be changing due to different work schedules since COVID. The other issue is the safety of the ramp. If it needs to be shut down, we need to shut it down. We need to talk about budgeting if we are talking about planning. The destruction of the ramp will cost as much if not more than maintaining it. Part of the plan is how will we pay for it and what are we going to do next. With the information given, he is convinced it likely needs to be closed and soon. He feels that decision can be made without clouding it with everything else we need to look at.

Henke needed some time to think this over after the discussion at Council. He agreed with a lot of things that were said at Council. As this was talked about at Finance and Council, there were a lot of points brought up that he felt CISM would have answered and not felt like something was missed. He feels staff has the power to shut it down if it is that bad and questioned if that happened. Wesolowski indicated the top level was closed on Friday. Wesolowski stated some people were concerned if the top level was closed there would not be enough parking,

but when he went through today at 10:00 am it was still 50% empty with closing the top level. Henke asked if notices were sent out. Wesolowski said they did not feel notices were needed as there is adequate parking in the rest of the ramp. People that want to utilize the skywalk can take the elevator to the skywalk level. Henke mentioned that when we take away street parking, the residents have a chance to come to committee. If that is what this meeting is for, he feels it was worth it. Wesolowski explained that this spring we did not plan on closing the ramp June 1. We have a \$350,000 budget for ramp maintenance. We went out for bids on the JC Penney Ramp, which came in at approximately \$185,000. There was about \$100,000 to put into McClellan. When we had Walker go through the ramp and give estimates, we found we did not have the money to band aid it through. Since we did not have enough money to try to get it through another year, it was brought forward to Finance to make the decision. It was staff's opinion that it did not make sense to band aid it for another year. The consultant said it is one of the worst leaking ramps that they have seen.

Gisselman's concern at Council was the legal obligation with the Dudley Tower. He does not want them to be surprised with how we are proceeding for the rest of 2023. Lindman's contact for the Dudley Tower is Paul Schlindwein. He left him a voice mail but has not heard back. Gisselman does not want their legal department to show up at a Council meeting; the city has an obligation to provide them a ramp to the second tower. He wants to make sure that our legal obligations are taken care of before we go much further.

Gisselman moved to close the McClellan Ramp as of June 1, 2023 and recommend a budget for the demolition of it in 2024. He added that the Walker report was included in the packet, and he feels there is a need to proceed for the safety of the customers of the McClellan Ramp. Rasmussen seconded the motion.

Larson asked how many permits are sold. He had talked to a person in the ramp who knew of people that wanted permits but were told permits were not available. Lindman does not have the exact numbers, but thought it was 280 to 300. They do not all park in the ramp. There is a surface lot at 120 Scott Street that they can park at. They can also park in Lot 14, the gravel lot. Larson asked if staff has talked with the City Square Building. Lindman stated formal notices have not been sent out because Council approval is needed to permanently close the structure. Staff did talk with the landlord, Compass Properties. They let their tenants know this is being brought forward. We have had quite a few conversations with Mark Craig. We have had emails from some of the tenants and have responded with other parking options. This may have been a different discussion if we did not have plenty of parking in the Jefferson Ramp and other lots. It always was the city's intention to get this ramp into 2024. A Towers Area report was done by the city that showed this ramp going away around this time. That has been discussed with tenants of the ramp and landlords downtown over the years.

Larson questioned what will happen when buildings start renting again. He has concerns about overcrowding at the Jefferson Ramp. There may have been strategic plans in the past, but questioned what the strategic plan is moving forward when the ramp is torn down. He spoke with someone in the ramp who is fully aware of the ramp condition and needed changes but would rather be able to park where their cars are protected from the weather rather than just a paved lot. He noted the ramp is in a TIF district and tearing it down and rebuilding could possibly come from the TIF district. He understands the need to tear it down but is uncomfortable with no strategic plan moving forward.

Rasmussen mentioned the materials received in Finance last week. They talked about the short-term plan for post-mortem on the McClellan Ramp. This included consideration of paving the gravel lot to the north in 2024. If that is paved it will bring approximately 70 new stalls. There are 300 covered stalls available across the road in the Jefferson Ramp. When the Towers Area Master Plan was developed, there was a stake holder engagement component. There were focus group meetings where all of the management of the affected businesses were around the table. No one thought this would be necessary this soon, but the deterioration has sped up to this point. If we would have a development boom downtown and parking needs change, we hold enough land in the area where we could have discussions about replacement of a ramp. With a lot of people still working from home, we do not need to plan to reconstruct a ramp in the immediate future. We could revisit that if the demand is different.

Larson feels it may be more of an inconvenience for the City Square people to park in the Jefferson Ramp than it is to those in the Dudley Tower. If there are plans to pave the lot where the ramp is now, he is concerned for

elderly and handicapped individuals. He asked if there would be immediate parking for those people so they do not have to walk an extra block and a half. Lindman stated there is parking in the 120 Scott Street lot with handicapped parking. That lot does get parked up. If there are concerns, we could always mark a couple extra spots. He has not heard of any concerns at this point but would be willing to look at it. We will be working with our staff to do some grading and add gravel to the gravel lot to make it more usable than what it is now.

Brodek cannot speak for Dudley Tower legal counsel, but she did receive an email from an attorney with Ruder Ware asking about the ramp closure. A few others from the Dudley Building have contacted staff so they as well as City Square are aware of the plans. There was an adopted market study done in February 2020 that does detail many different scenarios. Staff is internally working to figure out what makes the most sense and working with stake holders to figure out what that should look like.

Diny hopes it does not look like we were sharp shooting staff last week. The process matters because the public has an opportunity to see how we operate. We take different routes because of emergencies. He is glad to hear there has been talk with stake holders, so this does not come as a surprise. If you build a chicken coop in this town that is 2' bigger than what is allowed, you are required to get permission from your neighbors. That is why he asked last week what the neighbors think. Their input is important and now that we have that he will support this. He wants to continue to keep people informed and work on the strategic plan.

Larson will begrudgingly support this for the safety of the people, but he does not feel the public has been properly notified of this change. There have been Master Plans in the past but there is no Master Plan going forward.

Amy Zientara, Building Manager for the Dudley Tower, primarily came to listen tonight. They have not had communication with anyone regarding the McClellan Ramp, the skywalk, or their development agreement in quite some time, probably 3 years. However, they are fine if the McClellan Ramp comes down assuming the land is blacktopped, stripped and parking is made available.

There being a motion and a second, motion to close the McClellan Ramp as of June 1, 2023 and recommend a budget for the demolition of it in 2024 passed unanimously 5-0.

## **Adjourn**

---

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