

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL

AMES, IOWA

JUNE 24, 2021

The Special Meeting of the Ames City Council was called to order by Mayor John Haila at 11:02 a.m. on the 24th day of June, 2021. As it was impractical for the Mayor and Council Members to participate in the meeting in person, Mayor Haila and Council Members Gloria Betcher, Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and David Martin were brought in telephonically. Council Member Corrieri and *ex officio* Member Trevor Poundstone were absent.

WELCH AVENUE TREE-TRENCH FENCING: Municipal Engineer Tracy Peterson explained that the tree trenches have been installed along Welch Avenue. She reminded the Council that they were engineered to improve stormwater quality and include trees and native plants to aid in treating the water. After the tree trenches were constructed, the City started receiving feedback about the safety aspects of the area, particularly for pedestrian safety due to the depth of the boxes. The tree trenches were designed and constructed to be 2.5' deep from the top of the sides to the soil level in the bottom of the box. The deepest end is on the north and was also designed to act as benches where visitors can sit. It was noted that there are no longer picnic tables on Welch Avenue. City staff and Campustown Action Association (CAA) met and discussed several solutions to the safety issue. It was pointed out by Ms. Peterson that the tree trenches were funded through a grant from the Iowa Department of Ag and Land Stewardship (IDALS), so if the City made changes that did not meet the requirements of the grant, the City would have to repay the grant.

Ms. Peterson introduced Civil Engineer Hafiz Ibrahim, who is the project manager on this project. Mr. Ibrahim reviewed the options that had been explored, as follows:

1. Install grates over the trenches.
2. Install decorative fencing around the trenches.

According to Mr. Ibrahim, multiple issues would be encountered with the installation of grates. He said that, due to the size of the trenches, there is no standard grate that would fit. The grates would have to be custom-made; the cost would be almost triple that of the cost of fencing and would cause a substantial delay in delivery. In addition, in order to keep the debris from passing through the grates, the mesh spacing would have to be extremely close, which would inhibit the growth and viability of the planted material in the trenches. The grates would also have to be strong enough to allow people to walk across and stand on them. Ms. Peterson pointed out that the planted material in the trenches needs to have some sunlight to grow. The plants are meant to filter the storm water, and if that feature is lost, it would jeopardize the state funding.

Mr. Ibrahim advised that staff and the CAA had agreed that ornamental fencing around each trench would be an attractive addition that would prevent pedestrians from falling into the box. He listed the following benefits from that approach:

1. There is a standard size ornamental fence that can be ordered that matches the fencing in other nearby locations.

2. A gate can be added, which would provide easy access for maintenance and cleanup.
3. Fencing will not inhibit the growth of the plant material in the trench.
4. The installation of ornamental fencing would not change the intent of the grant, so the grant funding would not be jeopardized.

It was noted by Mr. Ibrahim that the City has to place the order now in order to get the fencing installed before the students return in the fall. In addition to that, if not ordered now, the price could continue to increase. Installation costs could increase as well. Director Joiner stated that if the Council opts to direct staff to move forward with fencing, it will be five or six weeks before the fencing is received. It will take an additional two weeks to install.

Public Works Director John Joiner noted that Council Member Gartin had found some examples of grates; however, those are a much smaller unit than what is needed for this project. He reiterated that what is needed for this project is much larger and will have to be custom-designed.

Mayor Haila asked what material would be used to construct the fencing. Mr. Ibrahim stated that the fencing would be made of commercial-grade steel. He commented that it is believed that the fencing will withstand the wear that will occur in Campustown.

Maintenance of the tree trenches was discussed. Mr. Joiner advised that City staff had been maintaining the trenches since their installation. Mr Ibrahim advised that the Campustown Action Association will be given a key to access the trenches to provide help with maintenance.

Ms. Peterson noted that with the Welch Avenue construction bid, the bid alternate that would have also awarded trash receptacles, benches, and tree trenches was not awarded. The trash receptacles were ordered, have been received, and are being installed by City staff. According to Ms. Peterson, the contractor planted the plants; however, many did not survive. The contractor has been replacing the plants, and more will be added. She said that staff will continue to monitor the health of the trees and plantings. Mr. Ibrahim advised that the sedges (plants) will grow to be two to three feet tall. They are planted in seven of the nine trenches.

A concern was expressed by Council Member Martin that there are gaps in some of the wells. Ms. Peterson stated that during the first couple of years when it rains, the soil will naturally compact. Staff will also add soil.

Mayor Haila asked if the fencing will be attached inside or outside of the trenches. Ms. Peterson replied that the fencing would be installed inside of the trenches. The area designed to serve as a bench will still be able to function as it was intended.

Council Member Martin noted that Mr. Ibrahim had stated that it would be possible to install a gate in the fencing around each trench and asked where that would be located. Mr. Ibrahim answered, if it is decided to go that route, they would be installed on the street side.

Council Member Gartin commented that he was not a big fan of the fencing and asked staff to back off the wall of fences and consider an alternative. He stated that Council is working to improve the area and make it more attractive. In his opinion, the fencing would detract from the appearance. Municipal Engineer Peterson pointed out that the trenches collect the water, but do not in themselves actually preserve the water quality. She reiterated that the grant was received to improve the water quality, so if the scope changes, the City would have to pay back the grant. Also, flooding on Welch would not be accommodated. Mr. Gartin said he does share in the goal of having trees and creating an urban landscape. He also acknowledged the added benefit of storm water management with the tree trenches; however, aesthetics is also important. Concerning the issue of safety, he will defer to the expertise of others to determine what would work. Concerns have been expressed that the tree trenches will become an area to deposit trash, which would further detract from the appearance of Welch Avenue.

Council Member Beatty-Hansen commented that all of the trash receptacles have not yet been placed, but once added, the amount of trash going into the wells will be a lot less. She believes that the trash receptacles are being added this week, and it is hoped that will cut down on the amount of trash thrown into the trenches substantially.

Council Member Gartin asked who would be in charge of maintaining the trenches and what is the proposed frequency of maintaining. Ms. Peterson advised that maintenance is and will be performed through a partnership between the City and CAA. Staff will continue to monitor the situation; perhaps more receptacles will be added. Trash thrown on the street can actually go down the storm sewer, into Lake LaVerne, and eventually, into the watershed. Mr. Gartin commented that trash that comes from the night before will still be thrown inside the tree trenches. Mr. Joiner said that the City crew that goes out once a week to take care of the flowers can continue to remove the trash from the tree trenches. The trash cans will be placed close to the tree trenches. Mr. Gartin reiterated his thoughts that it is a given that there will be trash in the tree trenches no matter when or how often it gets picked up.

It was also stated by Mr. Gartin that he is not “married” to having flowers inside of the trenches if the reasoning behind not using grates is because there would not be enough sunlight for the flowers to grow. He wants the Welch Avenue project to be attractive and well-liked.

Council Member Betcher noted that the Council can’t lose sight of the timeliness of the project. She stated that her main concern is that the trenches are safe for everyone who is walking in Campustown.

Council Member Beatty-Hansen said if the mesh is changed inside the trench to a small enough net to catch the trash, it might be a threat to wildlife. She recommended that they start with the placement of trash receptacles near the fencing and see how that goes before any changes are made.

Council Member Junck asked how long it will take for the sedges to grow to maturity. Mr. Ibrahim answered that it will take about a year. According to Mr. Ibrahim, the plants were chosen to best

treat the water quality. He also noted that when the sedges grow, any trash that would be deposited inside the fencing around the trenches will land on top of the plants.

City Manager Schainker noted that no matter what design was chosen, it won't alter people's behavior: People will continue to throw their trash outside of the trash cans and sometimes it will end up in the tree trenches. Ms. Peterson pointed out that the trash receptacle design for this project was specific; the others were such that pedestrians could just put their trash on top of the receptacle.

Mayor Haila again questioned the composition of the fencing and its ability to withstand abuse. Mr. Ibrahim confirmed that the fencing will be made of steel and hollow in the middle. The Mayor commented that it did not look to him that it will be strong enough and asked if the vendor was aware of the types of abuse that the fencing would be subject to in Campustown. Mr. Ibrahim stated that the fencing will be commercial-grade and will be bolted to the inside of the trench. City Manager Schainker commented that there is no guarantee from the vendor that the fencing will hold up to the kind of treatment that it might receive in Campustown.

Municipal Engineer Peterson brought the Council's attention to Page 15 of the Council Action Form, which showed a picture of the fence that was installed for a new restaurant just south of Cy's Roost. The fence is very similar to that which is being proposed for the tree trenches. She shared that a similar one was also installed at 200 Welch a few years ago.

Moved by Junck, seconded by Beatty-Hansen, to direct staff to install a 3' ornamental fence around the tree trenches on Welch Avenue by contracting with The Door and Fence Store of Ames, Iowa, at a cost of \$21,958, with funding to come from the available funds in the project budget.

Council Member Gartin stated that he is concerned about the quality of steel as well as the design of the fencing. He asked if there was any possibility of upgrading the quality of fencing material. Mayor Haila replied that this is a time-sensitive project. The manufacturer is more than likely not interested in upgrading the material.

Council Member Martin noted that there is a threat to the grant funding, which was in the amount of \$100,000, if the City sways too much from the design. He stated that he supports the fencing for now, but is concerned whether it is good enough in terms of structure as well as aesthetics. Mr. Martin said he was hoping for something with a more grandeur design given the other improvements that have been made in the Campustown area. He hopes that staff pays close attention and would be willing to replace the fencing with another material in the future if need be. In addition, there should be a plan for having trash picked up every day until those who are picking it up that say that the amount of trash has lessened to the extent that it doesn't have to be every day.

Council Member Betcher also stated that she was skeptical about the fencing material. She commented that Council Member Martin is correct about the investment in the area. Ms. Betcher noted that the City needs to be conscious of doing things right, but, in this case, the City also has a need to do things quickly. The fencing, alone, is not deterring the deposits of trash, which causes

a problem with storm water management. Mayor Haila pointed out that trash will be in the trenches after it rains as it will wash in there.

Vote on Motion: 4-1. Voting aye: Beatty-Hansen, Betcher, Junck, Martin. Voting nay: Gartin. Motion declared carried.

Moved by Martin, seconded by Betcher, to ask staff to come up with a strategy for daily maintenance (trash pick up) for at least the rest of the calendar year unless canceled because it is no longer warranted.

Vote on Motion: 5-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Ms Betcher stated that if daily trash pick up is not needed, the schedule can be changed.

TRANSFORMER OIL RECONDITIONING AND REPAIR: Electric Services Director Donald Kom stated this item is coming to Council because the amount of the bid is over \$50,000. The bid is for oil reconditioning and repair of a transformer for the Electric Services Department. The work needs to be completed as oil testing has revealed that there is elevated moisture in the oil. Normally, an inhibitor is added to transformer oil to keep moisture out; however, testing has revealed that this inhibitor is gone. Moisture in the transformer will lead to deterioration, which could lead to catastrophic failure. There is also oil migrating between the main tank and the Load-Tap changer tank that needs to be addressed. According to Director Kom, this project is time-sensitive because this transformer is required to supply power to Unit No. 8 for start-up. Electric Services is striving to complete Unit No. 8 start-up prior to July 23 to meet MISO deadlines.

Mr. Kom advised that on June 11, 2021, a Request for Quotation (RFQ) was issued to 103 vendors for oil reconditioning and repair of the transformer. Two bids were received. Staff reviewed the bids and concluded that the apparent low bid was unacceptable as it did not include the costs of replacing barrier boards or seals. The City would need to purchase and receive those items before repair, which could delay the project. In addition, the quote provided did not include draining the oil out of the tank and did not create a vacuum to draw out the moisture. The quote from the alternative bidder, although offering a higher bid cost, did include all the necessary work that City staff had solicited in the RFQ.

Moved by Betcher, seconded by Junck, to adopt RESOLUTION NO. 21-384 awarding a contract to Maxima of Shawnee Mission, Kansas (dba North American Substation Services, LLC, of Alamonte Springs, Florida) for transformer oil reconditioning and repair in accordance with the bid in the amount of \$56,335.50 (inclusive of Iowa sales tax).

Roll Call Vote: 5-0. Resolution declared adopted unanimously, signed by the Mayor, and hereby made a portion of these Minutes.

DISPOSITIONS OF COMMUNICATIONS TO COUNCIL: None.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: Council Member Betcher commented that in the time between now and

the budget season, she would like the Council to consider how to fund the CAA efforts to improve the Campustown area.

ADJOURNMENT: Moved by Betcher to adjourn the meeting at 12:01 p.m

Diane R. Voss, City Clerk

John A. Haila, Mayor