

STREETS, BUILDINGS & GROUNDS MEETING MINUTES

of November 15, 2021

In Attendance: **Vermilion City Council:** *Steve Herron, President of Council; Monica Stark, Council at Large; Frank Loucka, Ward Two, Steve Holovacs, Ward Three; Barb Brady, Ward Four; Brian Holmes, Ward Five. Absent: Emily Skahen, Ward One*

Administration: *Jim Forthofer, Mayor; Susan Anderson, Law Director; Tony Valerius, Service Director; Chris Stempowski, Fire Chief*

Call to Order: Steve Holovacs, Chairman, RESOLVED THAT this Streets, Buildings, & Grounds Committee comprised of the committee of the whole does now come to order.

TOPIC ONE: **Main Street Revitalization Project (Repaving of Main Street from Huron Street to Beach**

Mayor Forthofer called on Andy McDowell and Stella Dilik of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC) and members of the Vermilion Parks Board to address City Council. He explained last December the WRLC, and the Parks Board came before Council to paint a picture of what the project down at Main Street Beach was going to look like. At that time, they asked for the assistance from Council and getting approval for the reduction of the old Inland Seas Museum and to fund \$66,000 in city funds to build a sewer line connection to the site that will be the future Comfort Station – both were accomplished. The museum was reduced by competitive bid that was incredibly lower than expected and the WRLC is now in the last stages of acquiring the last house on the right, which will be removed to make way for the Comfort Station. He asked the WRLC to inform council of phase 2 of the project.

Stella Dilik said she is responsible for fundraising and Public Relations for the organization and noted that Andy McDowell is the Vice President of Conservation transactions in their western region. They work together on land acquisition projects that include restoration or some transformation into a public space. Their purpose was to give council an update and request support on behalf of the city for the street improvements.

Andy McDowell provided council with documents outlining the Main Street Beach Revitalization. He explained they have been involved in a number of projects down at the beachfront for a number of years; first beginning with the Wakefield Metro Park that was completed in 2011. From there they went on to the former Maritime Museum property and completed this acquisition in 2013. In 2018, they completed the Vermilion Beach Extension – Stuchal I. The Main Street Beach Area Revitalization – Stuchal II acquisition project for 2021 is slated to close in about two weeks and then the house will be

demolished in the middle of December, and then a bathroom from there and then a parking lot after that

He said in December 2020, they presented to Council an overall conceptual plan, which has somewhat changed. However, the tone and feel are pretty similar, and it has evolved into a better master plan that is much more refined and it has had much more community input into it as well. They presented an overall Conceptual Plan in 2020 to revitalize the beach area. The first piece other than getting the Stuchal property under contract was to demolish the Inland Seas Museum. In the other master plan, it had proposed a pavilion, but the feel they got from everybody in town was that once it was down the view was just too great, so let's keep it as is for now, so right now the museum piece is the green space. He again reiterated that the acquisition of the Stuchal II property will be closing in a couple weeks and demolished in the middle of December. After that, it will be followed by the Comfort Station construction with the goal to have this up and ready by Memorial Day of 2022. Before the Comfort Station can go in place the sanitary improvements need to be done and there is a lift station down where those two houses were, so it has to be totally redone in order to supply the needs for the Comfort Station. He said shoreline revetment includes the area out in front of the museum along the lakeshore. There needs to be work done there from an erosion standpoint. The structures out in the lake are in pretty good shape from what they have been told, but it is more of the actual shoreline and the type of vegetation that needs to get out to make it look more appealing. He said they are before council today to complete road work paving from Huron Street down to the beach area, and to improve accessibility.

S. Dilik said in 2020 they shared a budget that was closer to \$2.5 million and due to some cost engineering they have been able to reduce the overall expense anticipated for the full scope of this project. The piece they want to focus on today is really the roadwork piece that is proposed at \$492,000. When looking at the funding model for the whole project, it includes funding that was allocated by the Parks Board and the remainder is public funding sources. They secured a state capital budget, and they have a NatureWorks grant and some other grant requests. They will submit a Coastal Management Assistance grant in December and there are some other grants they can apply for as well. There are also private funding sources, so individual foundations and corporations have already contributed to this, which gave them the resources needed in order to raze the museum and acquire the Stuchal II. She said they also included in council's packet a rendering of what the proposed Comfort Station will look like, and it gives it perspective on what that space will turn into down at the beach.

Andy McDowell said the Comfort Station as proposed is an outstanding building. He said Brad Scholtz and others with the Parks Board have engaged a committee of citizens to help plan this restroom and the components that are needed – everything from how many stalls to the Shore Thing Concession area and so forth. He said there is some engineering going on

that is going over what they expected to budget, so it has to be shrunk down where the budget needs to be, but essentially this will be what it will look like when it's done. He said this is in the planning stages and Brad has input from a number of community members as they have been a good committee that has been engaged all summer long in planning this, as well as providing input on the master plan.

He explained the sanitary upgrade and proposed roadwork would be a slight amount of widening of Main Street from Huron Street to the beach. It has a number of parking spots along Main Street – new parking areas as well as two handicap accessible areas. The bottom stretch of this will be permeable pavers as there are erosion and drainage problems, so this will control the drainage and the water in this corner. The sanitary sewer upgrade aspects will be somewhere in the back corner where you can see the Comfort Station and the two handicap spots. They will be adding the parking lot, but that will be coming out of the Parks Board side of funding – not out of the roadwork piece. It is going to increase handicap parking down there and obviously it improves public access to the lakefront where the restroom will be. Where the house is now that they are demolishing, this area will have a parking lot with a couple center spots and a couple handicap accessible spots, but also a turnaround and a drop-off lane. They feel it is a very cost-effective long-term solution. It will add to the visitation of the site and the current visitation will be pleased with having such a fine facility down there for restrooms to meet the needs of families. Also, it has an economic benefit by giving the city a lakefront piece. They are also taking into account trespass issues and inappropriate behavior when it comes to lighting, accessibility, visibility, and lines of sight. They also receive a lot of comments from community members that live down in this area who were concerned about people coming across the line, so they are adding all those elements too. They are also working with the Erie Metro Parks on some of this too when it comes to the Wakefield Metro Park as well. He said they are requesting from Council today the funding for the roadwork and the sanitary sewer upgrade.

Mayor Forthofer said the funding would be for the paving from Huron Street directly down to the beach. It is one-half of the roadwork – the other half is paid for by the Parks Department where people turn to the right and go around the circle. The congestion that currently exists will be gone with this circular drop-off. He said in 2017, when he was on Council, they had started to talk about addressing Main Street. They were going to put in some permeable pavers and curbs, and before they did this they did a waterline and pulled everything out, and then temporarily put down different patching on Main Street, but they never got back to it because there were economic issues the next year. He said once all the construction is done and the sanitary work is done, and the parking lot is put in front of the Comfort Station – they stop being a third world country as far as sanitary facilities go. They will need a decent street to get down there and this is why they are before Council. He said it also includes lighting and sidewalks at \$492,000, which is the estimate by Bramhall Engineering.

Andy McDowell said the timeline on the backside all blends together because their goal to date has been to get the house demolished to get this bathroom ready. He said the road construction will not be done during the summer season as they do not want it torn up in the middle of July. Mayor Forthofer said as Stella pointed out the big ticket on this is over a million dollars, but so much of this has been taken care of by private donations raised by Western Reserve and by the Parks Board contribution, so they are asking for a contribution from the City for this street, which is a street they were meaning to get at some years ago anyway.

B. Brady did not think this amount was part of their permissive use budget – the \$500,000 was not there and Amy Hendricks is not here to ask, so is this money available? Mayor Forthofer said Amy knew she was going to ask this and her answer to everything is yes, we have the money, but it is up to Council to determine on how to use it. B. Brady said something will have to drop off obviously.

Stella Dilik said the quote that came from Bramhall Engineering for the \$492,000 is less than the \$504,000 that they shared last year in December, so it did come down a little bit, but it has always been part of the whole plan. T. Valerius said the estimate from Bramhall Engineering does include a 20% contingency.

B. Brady asked if they could justify the lighting and the sidewalks by bundling them under permissive use. Mayor Forthofer was uncertain. S. Holovacs said at least they know they have the cost covered and this beach project is something they have been looking at for probably the last 10 years and he thinks the restrooms themselves are something that will put Vermilion back on the map.

S. Herron said he noticed there is a total of four handicap spots which is certainly an improvement. Is there any reason there couldn't be more or does this meet the minimum requirement? A. McDowell said there is no reason there couldn't be more. S. Herron said personally he believes there will be so many more people in the population that are going to be handicapped and that need this. A. McDowell said he wouldn't be surprised if the ones at the end of Main Street could add a couple. He said the landscape architect is also looking into the museum lot as to how many cars can fit in that lot once it is redone.

S. Holovacs said based on this plan they need four and they probably can go to five or six, but the minimum is the four. T. Valerius said the minimum is actually two spots. S. Holovacs said then they took it to four and they could do more if they wanted to. T. Valerius said in the future there will be two more handicap spaces up on the hill.

B. Scholtz said the timing is important because it folds nicely into the rest of the project, so if Council is willing now it would be a great time to do this.

S. Holovacs MOVED, F. Loucka seconded to have legislation prepared to approve \$492,000 for the roadwork and sanitary sewer upgrade from Huron Street to the beach on Main Street. Roll Call Vote 6 YEAS. **MOTION CARRIED**.

TOPIC TWO: Fence on City Property

Mayor Forthofer explained that behind Ford Lane to the west there is some city access for sewer lines and water lines, and sometime ago there were fences put in along that line on city property. It was done by permission through an ordinance previously. A lady that lives there had a fence that was in line with others. Since then, the fence has eroded and has fallen down and she simply wants to rebuild the fence in the exact same location and an ordinance was discovered by Gwen Fisher that supports the idea that this fence is allowed and it must be pretty much on the back side of that line, so it is not digging right into the sanitary lines running underneath. Since this ordinance was discovered, this is almost a done deal in discussions.

Mark Watkins of Niagara Road, which is on Ford Lane said he tried to work with the lady because she said she could not afford to put a fence up. He agreed with the neighbors on each side as they were going to pay for the fence, but he suggested that the 15'+ strip of city land be divided between the two of them, which he does not know why it was not done this way in the first place. He did not think she could afford to put the fence up because he talked to her. He said he wanted to put the fence 7½' over as a suggestion. Mayor Forthofer said if the 15' strip of city land is divided in half and the fence posts are sunk down in the middle of it, then it will be digging right into the city's line, so this is why it is all the way over on the west side. M. Watkins asked if she would be responsible for the fence. Mayor Forthofer said yes it would be all her costs. S. Holovacs said they found the easement to allow this to happen. There was an agreement between the city and the residents to have a fence there on city property. T. Valerius said it is all the way to the western edge is what the ordinance states. Mrs. Watkins said their question was whether they were allowed the 7½', so what the city is saying they are not able to. T. Valerius said the ordinance states the fence is permitted to go up on the western edge of the city property, but if Council wants to amend this ordinance and allow the 7½', then they could do that.

B. Brady said the city owns 15' and then there is a 15' right of way towards the Ford Lane property, so this has to be cleared. If the city needs to get through there they need the full 30' and if there is a fence down the middle of it, then ... M. Watkins asked her if she has been over there. B. Brady said yes, she was in his back yard. M. Watkins asked her if she saw all the buildings on it. B. Brady said they are not on the city property. M. Watkins said they certainly are. B. Brady said not the ones she saw. She also said the property owner did not tell her she could not afford to put the fence up.

TOPIC THREE: Thoughts on Ice Jam Mitigation

Frank Loucka said he put this issue on the agenda to see if the city wants to consider engaging dialogue with the Army Corp of Engineers regarding mitigation of ice jams on their valuable Vermilion River. He said the river is about 66 miles long and unfortunately the City of Vermilion is at the very tail end funneling all the ice and debris to pass through the city on its way to the lake. He doesn't believe that the Corp has a real understanding of their relatively shallow river. First they built a break wall probably about 100 yards too close to the mouth, and then the Corp recently changed the design of the east pier that will complicate their contractor's ability to clear out ice at the mouth. Also, they do not operate an icebreaker small enough to give any benefit of assistance to the City of Vermilion. Through research he learned that the Corp operates a Cold Region Research Engineering Lab over in Hanover, New Hampshire and one of their published goals is to develop innovative ways to avoid or minimize ice jams. The western New York community of West Seneca, which is about 10 miles southeast of Buffalo has an ice dam by the Cazenovia Creek, which is similar in size to the Vermilion River. According to some preliminary research by Gwen Fisher and himself, and since then, Gwen has put together more information – they worked with the Corp on design installation of this ice jam including shared funding. It appears to him that the Corp has been very helpful to some Cold Region entities that reach out relating to ice jam mitigation. As an example, although not in anyway applicable to their situation in Vermilion – the Corp of Engineers operates a huge ice boom at the outlet of Lake Erie where it protects the Niagara River from ice jams all winter. The boom has been in operation since 1964. Off the shore in Buffalo, it keeps ice in the lake from flowing down the Niagara River damaging shoreline properties and power plant intakes. Obviously, this is a much bigger river and more critical than Vermilion. However, to him beginning dialogue with the Corp could be a possible great help to Vermilion since they are certainly a part of the Cold Region demographic. He said Gwen has since put together much more information on the Cold Research Lab and information from West Seneca.

TOPIC FOUR: Entrance to Skate Park

Frank Loucka said Vermilion takes great pride in their city's parks, typically driveway access is nicely paved and attractive, except at the combined entrance to the city's Skate Park and Service Center. The condition of this driveway is atrocious and most recently a tire eating chuck hole was temporarily repaired. They invested over \$180,000 for a former mudhole downtown and are looking at investing many thousands of dollars to improve the entrance of their Main Street beach. He believes the city should include the repaving of this drive, which to him presently is an embarrassment to the city and the parks system.

Mayor Forthofer asked if he was talking about repaving the entire driveway into the Service Center. F. Loucka said the driveway and then the entrance portion of the Skate Park as many people are driving on the grass to avoid the mess.

S. Holovacs adjourned the meeting after no further business came before the committee.

Next meeting: December 13, 2021 – 6:00 p.m. – Vermilion Municipal Complex, 687 Decatur Street, Vermilion, Ohio (Immediately following a Public Hearing & Special City Council Meeting)

Gwen Fisher, Certified Municipal Clerk