



MOBILITY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes
July 18, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.
Council Conference Room
(248) 347-0475

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm.

ROLL CALL

Present: Brian Smith (Chair), Ericka Thomas, Justin Fischer, Gary Becker, Jay Dooley, Joe Tolkacz

Absent: Ed Roney

Staff Present: Lindsay Bell, Senior Planner, Community Development
Barbara McBeth, City Planner, Community Development
Jeffrey Herczeg, Director, DPW
Rebecca Runkel, Plan Review Engineer, DPW

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Smith made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded and passed 6-0.

REMARKS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Chair Smith reviewed the agenda and reiterated the goals of the committee. Chair Smith

MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Walkable Novi old business

Chair Smith indicated that he wasn't sure if there was any old business leftover from Walkable Novi; determined that there was none.

2. Sidewalk Maintenance Program

Mayor Fischer provided an overview of sidewalk maintenance in the City thus far; started budgeting for the program in 2019 leading to the Meadowbrook Glens Pilot Program where cost-sharing did not go well and participation was not where it was wanted. Since then, staff has put together memos regarding the pilot program and benchmark city comparisons. Mayor Fischer reinforced the idea that we need to re-look at these memos and what we have tried up to this point in order to finalize policy and make a council recommendation. Mayor Fischer asked if it was time for the committee to review phase three of the Neighborhood Sidewalk Program. Director Herczeg stated that it was and that funds will be available for engineering next year.

Director Herczeg stated that the City has just awarded Phase Two of the Neighborhood Sidewalk Program. Director Herczeg continued, providing an overview of funding and the current state of the program: it is currently being funded out of ~\$800,000.00 for Phase Two due to bridging the budget years, seeing if more can be added to the contract; the best way to maximize our dollars is to concentrate on one area at a time. Staff members Runkel and Scallions have started putting together a larger analysis of programs and city comparisons based on the current Council goal to evaluate sidewalks and establish a program. Director Herczeg stated that the current program concentrates on older subdivisions with larger sidewalk deflections and that changes in condition each season leads to some complications. With a bigger program we would see better construction pricing. Staff was concerned about meeting the \$400,000.00 budget for the program but rollover can be used for engineering, change orders, etc.

Mayor Fischer asked what the cost was of replacing one panel. Engineer Runkel stated that it is around \$6.50 per sq. ft of concrete. Mayor Fischer followed up by asking what the cost would be to a resident. Engineer Runkel replied that if two or three panels needed replacement and a tree removed the cost would maybe be \$200-300. Director Herczeg clarified that tree removal would be covered by the City. Mayor Fischer stated that we need to get back to a baseline and evaluate some other cities' programs. He stated that he appreciates the memos and is excited to hear more about what staff has learned.

Mayor Fischer and Director Herczeg discussed this year's construction timeline, clarifying that construction may continue into the spring if needed but that the work will likely be done by this winter. Director Herczeg stated that, if the contractor performs well, staff would look to add more to the contract and that committee has time to review the next round of the program.

Member Becker asked as to whether tree removals are covered by the City. Director Herczeg clarified that the City will cover tree removals if the tree is in the right-of-way/is a 'city tree.' Member Becker asked after the level of damage caused by trees; is 90% an accurate number? Director Herczeg confirmed this, stating that most damage was caused by trees, resulting in adjacent panels needing replacement, as well. Member Becker inquired as to the life expectancy of sidewalks. Director Herczeg indicated that there should be a 20-year life expectancy; if trees aren't removed it will continue to cause problems. Member Becker asked about 2" deflections and the City's liability when someone is injured. Director Herczeg referenced state law requiring that, as long as the sidewalk is on a maintenance list and the City is actively working to make fixes, then that is fine; ultimately, some liability does exist. Member Becker concluded by stating that he lives in a subdivision with no sidewalks – through taxes he would be subsidizing fixes for those that do have them. He continued, stating that the benefit to himself would maybe be that he would someday wish to walk through those other places. If the cost of administration is accounted for, the City is big enough that we should just cover it ourselves because sidewalks are for everyone and there is the issue of liability.

Member Tolkacz stated that they live in Meadowbrook Glens and was initially told that residents would be paying as part of the pilot program. They asked if there was a change in direction? Director Herczeg answered by stating that there was a change in direction because it became too complicated. Technically it is the homeowner's responsibility but after more discussion realize it would have cost more to administer the cost-share so it

was decided to cover all costs. Mayor Fischer added that the idea was, if more money is coming in, the City can go further – if there is a 2" deflection maybe the City covers that but 1" maybe homeowner pays for that – it was more about getting it done. With the administrative costs and confusion – Council direction was for the City to cover it and not charge homeowners. Member Tolkacz stated that the pilot program wasn't clear on the amount of tree removals; it was unclear if residents could opt-in/out; it still isn't clear who is responsible for replacement – this has not been communicated well. Director Herczeg responded, stating that right-of-way trees can be removed at the discretion of the City, but DPW doesn't like to do that; residents get upset and trees do provide value. Director Herczeg continued, stating that 'wrong tree, wrong place' is a real issue and you cannot have a 35-year old silver maple coexist with city infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, sewers). Another topic that needs to be addressed – cities with similar conditions have trees that cannot be in 10-ft right-of-way without having to do something; the reality is that power outages can be caused by trees. This is a difficult conversation and for staff it makes sense to remove trees where possible. Chair Smith inquired if there are native trees that would be better. Director Herczeg stated that there is a list of approved trees. Mayor Fischer stated that, in regards to replacement trees, we do not want to spend \$400,000.00 and replace the trees just for the same issue to arise again.

Member Thomas spoke, stating that she used to live in a place where she was assessed and would pay for her own sidewalks. Member Thomas continued, stating that residents had been given the choice to act by a certain date or the city would do it and add the cost to the tax bill – which was minimal – she would have to see numbers first before deciding. In some places, residents do not have a choice, so another thought – if a resident does not want a sidewalk and we make them take it and maintain it, we are forcing them to have the sidewalk and maintain it. Chair Smith followed-up by asking how resident buy-in worked in the current program. Director Herczeg stated that the City sends several letters and meets with residents/HOAs as applicable. You cannot expect to reach everyone. After running the numbers on what we would be collecting from residents beyond covered tree damage and it was minimal; would probably be like that in most cases. Member Dooley asked what percent of damage to sidewalks is due to trees. Engineer Runkel stated that the City replaced around 15% of total sidewalk during the pilot. Member Dooley followed up by stating that we know what percentage of the total was replaced, however, wasn't sure if that was all due to trees. He continued, asking if we had walked subdivisions or if the homeowner was expected to report; is the City canvassing subdivisions. Director Herczeg stated that the City is doing canvassing.

Member Dooley stated that he likes that homeowners are responsible for the sidewalk. He recounted issues arising in the City regarding homeowner responsibility and the correction of poor workmanship later on. He stated that he hopes the City is responsible for tree damage because residents did not put them in. He asked what would constitute a homeowner being responsible for replacement? Director Herczeg stated that a 2' deflection or other deterioration would cause that. Member Dooley asked if it was the homeowner's fault, though. Director Herczeg stated that, in some cases, the homeowner did put a tree there. Mayor Fischer and Members Thomas and Dooley discussed the idea of fault being irrelevant – like with driveways where, if they are damaged, you have to fix it. This line is arbitrary and is based on policies set by the former and current Council. The group settled on the fact that this committee needs look at other communities, cost/benefit analyses, and all options regarding what the program could look like. There is not enough info to decide on, currently. Member Becker added that the committee is

for promoting the use of sidewalks and we need sidewalks that can be used. Fighting over deflections is not useful and the City should encumber costs.

Member Dooley asked if there were any updates on the status of the Greenway trail. It was presented to Walkable and nothing came of it. Engineer Runkel stated that RCOC is working on the design of Novi Rd at 8-9 Mile and that they are having discussions with Northville about connecting – connection is costly and there isn't much right-of-way so we aren't sure what will come of it. Planners McBeth and Bell added that it is approved in the Active Mobility Plan which was adopted by Council, so it is in effect. The plan has some near-term objectives and they are curious about the committee's prioritization of items in the plan. Chair Smith stated that he is interested the Active Mobility plan prioritizations and the process. Mayor Fischer added that the Active Mobility Plan was only approved in Council on a 4-3 vote and this may affect the support prioritizations receive.

Chair Smith asked what the life expectancy of sidewalks are in general with current funding levels. Director Herczeg indicated that this would be part of a larger discussion; should be at least 20-years. Member Smith stated that it would be helpful to look at the age of sidewalks throughout the City. Director Herczeg stated that there was a memo which provided a valuation of the network; that would have been 2018 numbers. We can get into that analysis if we need to. Meadowbrook Glens was a worst-case scenario. Engineer Runkel added that there is only one subdivision older than Meadowbrook Glens – everything else is newer, mostly late 80s and 90s and a lot of 2000s in the City.

Director Herczeg stated that there would be a cost involved with a comprehensive program. Boardwalks are another conversation with \$2-3 million three plus years out in the CIP – there is a need to consider lifecycles and reconstructions.

Mayor Fischer asked if staff has the feedback necessary to continue working. Director Herczeg stated that a presentation can be put together including options, numbers, and historical information.

Member Becker brought up the Meadowbrook Glens pilot; huge percentage was tree-related and wanted to know if the cause was due to developer activity back when the land was developed – are we paying for a lack of oversight 30-years ago. Director Herczeg stated that it was probably more so a lack of knowledge; best practices in place today that weren't back then. Member Tolkacz added that, depending on the size of the access area, it may not matter what type of tree is planted – there will always be issues. Member Becker stated that the City requires a certain number of trees to be put in by developers; homeowners planting trees later is a different story. Another reason as to why the City should be paying for sidewalks. Director Herczeg added that everything is currently being done according to best practice – in short, the answer is yes.

Member Thomas stated that knowing how much more we could do by charging residents would be helpful. Director Herczeg replied by stating that the City would absorb some costs such as tree related damages and administration; it really depends on the type of program the committee settles on. Mayor Fischer added that staff should use the pilot as a baseline and show how much more could have been done.

Member Dooley asked if staff has looked at alternative building materials. Director Herczeg stated that the City would likely continue using existing materials – would rather not mix and match.

3. Active Mobility Plan Priorities

Chair Smith began the conversation by bringing up 9 Mile Rd. between Novi and Taft – this is a high priority and gaps would be difficult to fill in as it is narrow and there isn't much room. Chair Smith asked if we have ranked where priorities are? Engineer Runkel stated that the last prioritization scored that section pretty badly as far as feasibility; staff can look again. Member Becker added that the north side is especially difficult due to berms and other factors. Chair Smith asked if there has been talk of putting up signage to route people around things like this. Engineer Runkel stated that staff felt this wasn't a good idea due to increased traffic added to neighborhoods. Senior Planner Bell stated that there was a 9-Mile corridor feasibility study. Oakland County was making effort to create a continuous path between oak Park and South Lyon, phase 2 will look at what will need to be added like crosswalks, sidewalks, etc. This can involve rerouting – staff will provide more info.

Chair Smith stated that South Lake Drive is another problematic area. Even more narrow and even less right-of-way. Mayor Fischer added that this area does need more effort as the Active Mobility Plan lacked detail for this.

4. Roads

Chair Smith stated that the old roads report was reviewed. Director Herczeg provided a recap of the state of roads: Roads Committee formed for several reasons including the prioritization of roads, formatted for TAMC reporting criteria – information is a little dated now and PASER will look different by 2025 as the goal of reducing poorly rated roads to 30% is addressed. Staff will provide a cleaner presentation as we enter next CIP season and this will likely be an entire meeting.

5. Transit

Chair Smith stated that the committee should look at issues as SMART and PEX continue to be utilized in the City. Connectivity will be a focus. Mayor Fischer stated that the goal is to have staff look at Oakland County programs and decide if we want to participate; bring it back to the committee for feedback. Director Herczeg stated that staff can bring in PRCS Director Muck to speak on this topic.

Chair Smith brought up the need for a transit hub at Providence Hospital.

Mayor Fischer stated that Twelve Oaks is blocking the placement of stops on their property – inquired if the same was accurate. Director Herczeg stated that would be a discussion for PRCS Director Muck and City Management. Chair Smith stated that SMART wanted their stop to go right up to the mall. Engineer Runkel added that there are a couple stops that dip into Twelve Oaks' property. Chair Smith stated he would follow-up on this and Director Herczeg stated that staff would, as well, per the request of Mayor Fischer.

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

Staff will bring a presentation to the next meeting regarding sidewalk maintenance programs for discussion.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dorothy Duchesneau stated to the committee that the old Sears service garage would make the perfect bus stop. They provided the committee with a news clipping regarding Oakland County's transit services to veterans in collaboration with the Oakland Transit division. They stated that people seem to be utilizing PEX. Hopefully the bus shelters promised by the County will come to fruition.

Mayor Fischer provided a brief response and stated that Oakland County is subsidizing seniors and veterans; this is marketed by the City.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Smith made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 pm.