

## City Council Workshop

Wednesday, August 30, 2023 6:00pm

Miller, Nyenhuis, Pardun, Anderson and Ward present.

Citizens present: Scott Spisak, John Goodfellow, Stuart Krahn, Anne Reich, Kristina Smitten, Bill Smitten, Doug/Mary Dieter, Dave Stephans, Steve Stuby, Sue Logan, Tom Warth, Julie Warren, Juanita Ikuta, Geoff Schodde, Kitzie Vadheim, Harold Teasdale, John Waugh, Gerry Mroska, Josie Holman, Mary Vogel, Eileen Hunter, Jerry Montie, Mary Fernstrum, Cecily Harris.

Mayor Nyenhuis called the meeting to order at 6:07pm. Nyenhuis noted that the premise of a workshop is for the Council to be able to review and discuss an item without public comment, outside of expert opinion should the situation arise.

Ward also reviewed how the workshop will work and promised that in addition, there will be a public hearing on this issue. She then reviewed the history of the grant process:

2017 – a comprehensive Natural Resource Management plan was created for all lands within Jackson Meadow, with the exception of the Hollow.

2020 – A \$63,000 grant was awarded for the North Meadow, which consists of lands owned by both Jackson Meadow and the City.

2022 – A \$198,000 grant was received for the Hollow property, which is 100% City owned. A draft work plan was submitted in July by Critical Connections and a meeting was held to discuss the plan. In August, the City Council agreed to halt progress on the plan in order to address key issues and receive public comment. Since then, Critical Connections has terminated their agreement with Jackson Meadow and Stantec has stated they are interested in working with the City and Jackson Meadow on the plan.

Ward advised there has been several comments received from residents with their thoughts on the draft plan.

Kristina Smitten, Jackson Meadow resident and writer of the Hollow grant, reviewed the discussions with Stantec. Stantec has visited the property and suggested a few changes from the original plan but will submit their proposal by Friday of this week. Ward questioned items she believes the Council needs to consider who will maintain the land both short and long term. Anderson also has concerns about funding and volunteerism for managing all lands, both Jackson Meadow and City owned. He is concerned that the budget is always an important item to all residents and he is concerned that even a few thousand dollars needed to continually maintain those lands could significantly impact the budget.

Miller thanked Kristina Smitten for the work she has put into the grant process and work she has done. Miller is also concerned about funding for these properties. The City not only owns the Hollow, but the 40 acres by the maintenance building, and many City trails. Miller believes the comments received were helpful, however he would like to see a wider polling of the residents on their vision for this property. Miller also noted that there are many projects around this town which have been started and never finished. There is a narrowing bandwidth for volunteers in the City, and that should be kept in mind.

Pardun noted that the City Council did approve Kristina Smitten to apply for this grant with a City match of \$9,000. He would have liked to have seen more discussion as to what was going to happen on that property and noted that if the work plan wasn't received until July and a decision was expected by Council in August, that is a very tight timeline. He would like to see the proposal by Stantec and then have the Council visit the Hollow property. Pardun also noted that there was an issue getting volunteers to work on the North Meadow project and it is a concern for the Hollow property as well. Pardun questioned what the worse case scenario would be if the project was put off until a public meeting is held and the Council has a chance to review and discuss the Stantec proposal.

Mayor Nyenhuis believes it's obvious that the residents care deeply about this project given the number of residents in attendance at this workshop. He believes the plan shows really good science and management for a first phase, just as the North Meadow project. He does not believe the volunteerism fell short on that project and was a very successful first step of restoration. He believes the Hollow property is in disarray and there is room for discussion on portions of the work plan but the plan makes the restoration work easy. He believes it is wasteful to think grants will always be available but does not believe it will be taxing on the City budget. He would like to see the Forest Advisory committee and the Parks & Rec committee members work through the plan with the contractor.

Ward does not believe the City should move quickly and would like more public comment. She would like to take advantage of the grant but believes there should be a process. She questioned the deadline for work to be done in order to keep the grant. Nyenhuis stated the timeline for getting out an RFP should be as early as possible in order to secure a contractor and begin work in the winter, however there is no hard deadline. Nyenhuis stated if Ward would like to host a workshop for Council or citizens on her property to discuss options, then he welcomes her to do so.

Ward then suggested broader public input beyond Jackson Meadow residents after the Stantec proposal is received.

Pardun noted the grant timeline is already one year behind and he would like to know if there is an option to put the work off one additional year in order to follow the process of receiving more public input and reviewing the plan without losing the grant.

Kristina Smitten clarified the proposal from Stantec is a time and materials proposal, not a revised management plan. The ecologist for Stantec agrees with the majority of Critical Connections plan. She believes approximately 85% of the plan is accurate and approximately 15% of the plan could use the public process to complete. Critical Connections had planned on having the RFP out by August 15<sup>th</sup> in order to secure a contractor. She stated that unless the Council decides that they do not want to use the management plan as drafted for the work and instead use public input, she suggests going out for RFP now in order to help keep the timeline, but with the understanding that the plan is in draft form. Currently there is also not enough money from the grant to complete all of the work listed in the plan. She also noted that the work plan written in the grant is DNR approved and if the City chooses to deviate from the plan, it may have to go back and ask the DNR for approval. She believes at the time the grant was applied for, there was an open space committee being formed that would have helped to manage the process, however that committee never came to fruition. If this is something the Council believes the Urban Forest committee can help manage, that may be an option.

Miller believes transparency is very important. He would like to make sure that all citizens are engaged in this process and have input in the outcome.

Anderson would like to know where in the process the long-term budgeting will be known. Smitten believes that if the property can be maintained with fire suppression, that will be imperative for the management however she cannot give a timeline for actual long term budgeting costs.

John Goodfellow, member of the Urban Forest committee, believes management can happen at any time of the year, not just when the ground is frozen if the right equipment is utilized. He also believes that a management plan presumes the objective of the owner, and the presumed objective in this plan is to restore the site to how it previously was. He also does not believe the plan is clear cutting as the budget for tree removal is only \$10,000 which is insignificant for a 35-acre area.

Nyenhuis would like the Council to determine what items are actionable for the September Council meeting. Smitten suggested the Council award the RFP and have the draft plan in final form all at the October meeting. There was a question of what the RFP will contain. That will depend on the proposal that comes back from Stantec. Pardun wanted to make sure that it is stated in the RFP that the plan can change should the Council choose.

After further discussion, Anderson summarized the timeline as follows:

- Stantec plan is received.
- RFP goes out.
- Update on progress and public hearing date set at the September 14<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting.
- October meeting – final plan is shared and RFP is awarded.

Information can also go out in the next newsletter to help inform residents as well. The Council agreed with the proposed timeline.

Nyenhuis also noted that if any resident would like to comment to please send to the City office and not individual Council members.

Nyenhuis moved and Anderson seconded to adjourn at 7:24pm. All in favor, motion passed.

Minutes taken by Lynette Peterson, City Clerk