

Greenwood City Council
Excelsior-Greenwood Joint Worksession Minutes

7:00 pm, Tuesday, April 10, 2012
Council Chambers ~ 20225 Cottagewood Avenue ~ Deephaven, MN 55331

1. Call to Order/Roll Call/Approval Agenda

Greenwood Mayor Kind called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.

Greenwood Councilmembers Present: Mayor Deb Kind, Tom Fletcher, Kelsey Page (7:22), Bob Quam, and Biff Rose

Excelsior Councilmembers Present: Mayor Nick Ruehl, Greg Miller (7:12), and John Olson

Others Present: Excelsior City Administrator Kristi Luger, Morgan Dawley and Barritt Lovelace of WSB Engineering, Greenwood City Attorney Mark Kelly, and Greenwood City Clerk Gus Karpas

Quam moved to approve the agenda. Second by Fletcher. Motion was approved by a majority of those present.

2. St. Alban's Bay Bridge Presentation and Discussion

Mayor Kind introduced Morgan Dawley, WSB Engineering who gave a presentation for the members of the joint worksession.

Mr. Dawley explained that the maintenance for the St. Alban's bridge has been shared jointly by the cities of Excelsior and Greenwood since possession of the bridge was turned back to the cities by Hennepin County at the same time it turned back Minnetonka Boulevard around 2005.

Mr. Dawley discussed the inspection process conducted by Hennepin County to evaluate the functionality and structural soundness of the bridge. He said the most recent inspection done in July 2011 has found the bridge to be functionally obsolete, indicating the bridge elements such as the shoulder width and rail heights do not meet the current minimum standards. He said the sufficiency rating of the bridge is at 51.5 on a scale of 0 to 100. He explained when a bridge is rated at below 50; it is categorized as "Structurally Deficient." As a way of example, Mr. Dawley said the bridge was rated 54.1 in 2009. He said the current rating does not necessarily require an immediate closure nor does it indicate imminent failure. He said the rating system is used to determine funding eligibility for rehabilitation or replacement projects. He said the current rating of the bridge requires a more in-depth inspection process which will provide more information on the bridge's current structural condition. Joint conversations between the cities began in 2007 due to the 2005 inspection status of the bridge and a design process was discussed but the cities decided to wait until after the 2009 inspection.

Mr. Dawley discussed the historical status of the bridge, noting it was constructed in 1941 as part of the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) which was part of President Roosevelt's "New Deal" program. He said the bridge is eligible for the National Register of Historical Places according to a study by Mn/DOT. He said when historical significance is identified, additional coordination with Mn/DOT's Cultural Resource Unit and the State Historic Preservation Officer is needed to arrive at a bridge replacement or rehabilitation alternative which is not cost prohibitive. He said typically, rehabilitation projects are more expensive than replacement. He said once a bridge is listed as historic or eligible to be historic it cannot be removed from the list.

Mayor Ruehl asked if historic status was based on the age of a bridge and questioned what was historically significant about the St. Alban's bridge. Mr. Dawley said the status is based on a list of aesthetic criteria. He suspects that since the bridge was constructed using WPA funds the government feels there are elements of the bridge that need to be preserved. Mayor Ruehl asked if those criteria were available for review. Mr. Dawley said ~~they were~~ and it is possible that they could be obtained with a little research. Mr. Lovelace noted that he was not sure there was a report done on this specific bridge. Mayor Ruehl said he needs some justification for spending additional dollars for a rehabilitation of the bridge and that he would like to see some background material supporting the historical claim. Mr. Lovelace said that just because the bridge is listed as historical doesn't mean it can't be replaced. Mr. Dawley agreed stating that it is possible that total replacement would be allowed or that just some of the historical aspects would have to be maintained.

Councilmember Quam asked if the bridge needed to be rehabilitated or replaced at this time. Mr. Lovelace said he was not sure but the bridge deck would need to be replaced even in a rehabilitation project. His feeling is that if a significant portion of the bridge needs to be removed in order to rehab it, the bridge might as well be replaced. Councilmember Fletcher asked if it was possible to have a more attractive bridge if totally replaced while maintaining some of the historic nature. Mr. Dawley said that concept would be available in a redesign.

Mr. Dawley discussed the funding options available and said since the cost of the project would be split between two cities, some type of joint powers agreement would have to be drafted for the project. He said in order to be eligible for federal funding; the bridge must have a sufficiency rating of less than 50 for replacement and less than 80 for rehabilitation. He said St. Alban's bridge does not qualify for replacement funding since its rating is still above 50. This being the case, he said federal funds will cover 80 percent of construction costs, with the remaining 20 percent of construction cost as well as 100 percent of the design and indirect costs the responsibility of the local authority. He said the selection process for federal funds is done by the Metropolitan Council and that the selection of projects is competitive. The next selection process will be in 2013, with the funds not available until 2017.

He said the bridge currently qualifies for State Bridge Bond Funds since the bridge is functionally obsolete and has a rating below 80. He said state funds are available for up to 100 percent of abutment-to-abutment costs for eligible rehabilitation and reconstruction projects, while the roadway approach, bridge removal costs and design costs would be the responsibility of the city. He said these funds can be used for the 20 percent local match for federal funds. He said there are currently no bridges waiting of the Bridge Prioritization List for use of State Bridge Bond Funds and cities have been encouraged to pass resolutions identifying their priority bridge projects to ensure funds are used and not reallocated to other priorities. He provided a sample resolution which would be the first step in applying for the funds.

Councilmember Olson asked why the cities would not want to wait until the bridge's rating dips below 50 so we could get federal funds. Mr. Dawley said he did some calculations using both the state and federal funding formulas and that the overall cost would still be about 80/20 in either scenario (80% paid by federal or state, 20% paid by the two cities). Councilmember Fletcher asked if it was easier to obtain state funding. Mr. Dawley said it was. Mr. Lovelace said the process to obtain federal funds is strict, while state funds are distributed by the Army Corp of Engineers who tends to be more flexible.

City Attorney Kelly asked what the chances were for replacement versus rehabilitation. Mr. Lovelace said about 50/50.

Councilmember Miller asked if the Bridge Bond Funds need to be paid back. Mr. Dawley said the funds were technically grants created in the state bonding bill. He said due to the 35W bridge collapse and closer scrutiny on bridges, more funds have become available. Miller asked if a combination of funds could be used for a project. Mr. Dawley said he was not sure. Miller

asked if there any other funding sources available. Mr. Dawley said these were the main ones that cover the bridge structure itself, but there are Township Bridge Funds available for cities that were not state aid cities like Excelsior and Greenwood. He said if these funds were deemed appropriate, they would cover design costs over \$10,000. Mr. Lovelace discussed Heritage Funds but doubted the bridge would qualify.

City Attorney Kelly asked if there was one funding process that gave the cities greater control over the design process. Mr. Dawley said the fact the bridge is eligible to be historical; any design would need to be approved the appropriate federal or state agency depending on which entity funds the project. Mr. Lovelace said dealing with the Army Corp of Engineers for state funding would allow for more flexibility.

Councilmember Fletcher asked about arguing for replacement based on safety concerns. Mr. Lovelace said safety could be a factor in making a case for replacement. He said the Sufficiency Rating will help determine the current safety condition of the bridge. He said Mn/DOT is currently conducting a load capacity test on the bridge and based on that outcome, the bridge cities may need to limit the weight capacity of the bridge. City Attorney Kelly asked if there was a load capacity in which the bridge has to be replaced rather than rehabbed. Mr. Lovelace said he was not sure, but the current bridge has a load rating of 12.6 and a new bridge would have a minimum load rating of 20. Councilmember Fletcher asked was what the original design capacity was for the bridge. Mr. Lovelace said it was designed for smaller loads and guessed it was designed around a 15 load rating.

Mr. Dawley presented a cost estimate for both the rehabilitation and replacement of the St. Alban's bridge. He noted the estimate included a 15 percent contingency and a 30 percent indirect cost to arrive at the total project costs for each alternative.

Mr. Dawley presented and distributed slides illustrations showing concepts of what the bridge might look like with rehabilitation and replacement. He said he was available to answer any questions.

Councilmember Fletcher asked if the space between the piers could be open to improve the sight lines for boats. Mr. Lovelace said they could and they even could be removed with a single span bridge.

Mayor Kind asked if reconstruction funds included widening of the road. Mr. Dawley said that the replacement cost estimate includes updating the bridge to today's standards (including widening the bridge), but that rehabilitation cost does not include widening the bridge road. Kind asked if the channel could be widened. Mr. Lovelace said it could be in a replacement scenario.

Councilmember Page commented that he felt the bridge has no aesthetic value. City Administrator Luger said the cities may have very little choice in the redesign of the bridge due to its designation. Councilmember Fletcher commented that the state funding process may allow a replacement of the bridge with the retention of some of the original historic design aspects. Mr. Lovelace said this may be true but cautioned the determination is totally subjective.

Councilmember Page asked if navigation would play a role in the decision since the channel needs to be widened to accommodate boat traffic. Councilmember Rose asked if a bridge posed a danger to the general public could it be removed from the list. Mr. Dawley said those concerns should be voiced along with structural concerns. Councilmember Miller noted that widening the channel would bring in other outside agencies into the process and increase the cost of the project.

Councilmember Fletcher asked if the construction costs would be cheaper if the bridge kept its structural components. Mr. Lovelace said the cheapest option would be a single span.

Councilmember Rose asked if there have been any previous construction on the bridge to update it. Mr. Lovelace said the records show only minor repairs over the years.

Councilmember Miller asked if the pedestrian bridge would be impacted. Mr. Dawley said it would be unaffected. Mr. Lovelace said the new bridge would match the height of the pedestrian bridge.

Councilmember Fletcher asked if there was any downside to adopting a resolution prioritizing the bridge if there were no immediate plans to address it. Mr. Lovelace said “no” and that, by law, the city is required to have a priority list. Mr. Dawley said it’s the city’s responsibility to identify the need within their community. Mayor Kind asked if the next step in the process was to adopt the resolution. Mr. Dawley said it would be if it’s the desire of the cities to move forward. He said another step would be the drafting of the joint powers agreement, then to start the design process based on the historical parameters.

Councilmember Fletcher asked what the expense would be to get a preliminary review by the Army Corp of Engineers. Mr. Dawley said between five and ten thousand dollars. Mr. Lovelace noted that once you meet with them, you have a pretty good idea what their attitude is regarding your design. Mr. Dawley said a preliminary meeting allows for an opportunity to refine the plan and more closely estimate the associated costs.

Mayor Kind asked Greenwood council members if they are comfortable using the services of WSB Engineering (Excelsior’s engineering firm) or whether the council wanted to involve Greenwood’s firm (Bolton & Menk). The consensus was that it made sense to use one engineering firm. City Attorney Kelly said that in lieu of a joint powers agreement a simple mutual agreement to share consultant costs between the cities should be sufficient. Mayor Kind indicated that one city should draft the document and send it to the other city for their review. Councilmember Fletcher suggested that Greenwood City Attorney Kelly draft the agreement since Excelsior has already assumed some expense for some preliminary engineering costs. Those in attendance agreed.

Councilmember Page suggested the cities may want to hold off on adopting any resolutions at this time. Mr. Lovelace said that would be fine since getting on the funding list early doesn’t matter because funding decisions are made once plan designs are completed.

Mayor Ruehl said the cities should not adopt any resolutions until they know what they need to do in terms of rehabilitation or replacement of the bridge. He said he’s cautious on spending taxpayer money and doesn’t want to assume that replacement is the path until there is a justification for doing so. He said if the bridge is not “historically significant” he doesn’t see the need to spend extra money in rehabilitating it. He also doesn’t see the need to spend upwards of ten thousand dollars to “find out” what direction the cities need to go in its planning and design process. Mr. Lovelace said they could meet with the Army Corp of Engineers for much less, but there’s always the possibility that calculations and the like may be necessary for them to make their determination. Mayor Ruehl is not interested in justifying to anyone why the bridge needs to be removed and replaced. Mr. Lovelace said the meeting is necessary to determine if it needs to be removed or rehabbed. Mayor Ruehl said the city first needs to know if and why the bridge is deemed historical. If there’s no justification the cities need to argue against the more expensive rehab project.

Councilmember Quam asked why there was a need to fix the bridge at this time. Mayor Ruehl agreed noting there are additional inspections being conducted. He doesn’t support spending money to find out the direction to go when we may not need to at this time. Councilmember

Rose said there needs to be an investigation on how the bridge may have gotten on the list and what the qualifications are to permit replacement.

Councilmember Page asked if there would be any advantage to having citizens approach the Army Corp of Engineers asking that the bridge be replaced. Mr. Lovelace said there would be none in the initial stages, but if the cities submitted a design and were denied, then they should voice their opinions. He reiterated that there is no clear definition on when the bridge must be replaced and that the process is dependent on a subjective decision.

City Attorney Kelly said there is a need to figure out the stages of the decision process to provide the cities a clear understanding of it.

Mayor Ruehl stated for the record that he's not trying to replace a bridge of historic significance, rather he trying to understand why it would be deemed historically significant.

City Attorney Kelly said the cities need to determine a list of what they want regarding the bridge so it could be passed on to WSB during the design process.

Councilmember Rose asked if the bridge is required to be rehabilitated would it be redone in the same manner as it currently exists or if it would need to meet today's load capacity standards which would make the bridge "beefier." Mr. Lovelace said the bridge would need to be rebuilt to the current required standards.

Mayor Kind summarized the discussion noting that City Attorney Kelly would draft a mutual agreement between the cities and that she and Excelsior City Administrator Luger would review the Historic Bridge Report to see if it includes information on why the bridge is eligible to be listed as historic. Mr. Dawley said they would provide the staging information to Mr. Kelly.

3. Adjournment

Rose moved to adjourn. Second by Quam. Motion was approved by a majority of those present. Meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted
Gus Karpas
Greenwood City Clerk