

**MINUTES OF A STUDY SESSION OF THE PRINCETON CITY COUNCIL
HELD ON FEBRUARY 2, 2012, AT 4:30 P.M. IN THE CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

Acting Mayor Paul Whitcomb called the meeting to order. Council members present were Councilors Victoria Hallin and Thom Walker. Mayor Jeremy Riddle and Dick Dobson were absent. Staff present was Steve Jackson, Mark Karnowski, Carie Fuhrman, Brian Payne, Bob Gerold, and Katie Hunter. Also present was City Attorney Dick Schieffer.

CIVIC CENTER

Karnowski reminded the City Council that a couple of years ago, the city set aside \$250,000 over a two-year period to hopefully refurbish the City's Civic Center. Because of the State's subsequent reduction in Local Government Aid payments, the Council decided to use those funds to balance the budget.

Because of the current condition of the Civic Center, staff has been informing customers that the building may not be rented out this summer.

Karnowski went on to say that after speaking with one business leader in the community who was for the renovation, it was indicated that because of its historical significance of the Civic Center and because the city doesn't have another facility like it. The individual suggested starting a citizen's group and getting support from locals for the restoration.

Karnowski said that the structure was formerly the local Sportsmen's Club and was constructed by that organization from the trees that were logged on the site.

The building is testimony to the drive and perseverance so typical of the past (and current) Princeton residents.

Karnowski said that City resident Jim Burroughs who had been invited to speak to the Council was not present. Jim was a member of the Sportsmen's Club that originally built the building and quite possibly was present during the building's construction.

The building is at the point where it would need to be fixed or decide that it needs to be razed. It's such a fine example of positive citizen activism that staff's preference would be to find a way to save the building.

Whitcomb said he had a chance to speak with Burroughs and found out that the trees used for the building were milled right there on the lot. The building was built in the 1940s. The club used to do smelt fries, and plant trees. In fact, there may be some descendants that are still in the area and that may be willing to help.

Walker said he has the same opinion about getting the public involved and preserving the Civic Center.

Hallin pointed out the possible funding resources on the back of Karnowski's cover letter. Fuhrman explained that to apply for funding through the National Trust Historic Preservation, the Civic Center would not have to be listed on the National Register. For the MN State Capital Grants in Aid Programs, Fuhrman said the property would need to be listed on or eligible for the National Register. The City's argument could be the local lumber that was used for building material. These grants both require a one to one match and are smaller grants up to \$10,000.

Fuhrman said another possibility would be to take out a Direct Loan through United States Department of Agriculture, the group that is facilitating the Waste Water Treatment Plant loans. A

loan would be available at a rate of 3.75 percent on a forty-year term. It would be a General Obligation Bond with federal funds.

Walker stated that the City would be “putting the cart before the horse” to take out a loan on this project. Whitcomb agreed.

Hallin added that in her mind this building is a historical building representing the entire City of Princeton. Hallin would like to see a plaque on the wall when the building is completed.

Steve Milo; Princeton city resident, spoke up to say that he currently lives directly across from the Civic Center. When the building is not in use, there is a lot of illegal activity going on there. There are kids that climb into the building and also on top of the roof. There used to be more drug activity than there currently is, but Milo’s concern is that something needs to be done with the building either way. Milo went on to add that he loves the idea of renovating it, but as long as it’s renovating and doesn’t just sit and sit unused.

Mary Anderson, also a city resident and neighbor to the Civic Center, stated that she and her husband have lived thirty-five years across the street from the Civic Center. Her family has used the Civic Center for family reunions years ago. The building is still being used frequently enough, Anderson believed, and the entire park area is a highlight of the Civic Center. Because of the history that the Andersons have seen with the building, they also have an interest in seeing the building be renovated and preserved.

Martin Cunningham, another neighbor who claims he lives in the original homestead near the Civic Center, has had several of the family members stop in and talk to them. He mentioned he would like to see the skating rink continue to be set up in the winter and the Civic Center to be renovated and remodeled.

Whitcomb said he feels there is more than enough community spirit for the renovation of the building and that is encouraging.

The option of selling the Civic Center was brought up to the City Council. Whitcomb said he believed the building could not be sold. Karnowski said that just today, a gentleman came into City Hall and asked if the land could be sold; having an interest in purchasing it. Karnowski said he believed that if bonds were sold to purchase the property as a park, then the City cannot turn around and sell it. Or, if it was platted as part of a subdivision park, it could not be sold. When the Sportsmen’s Club gave the property to the city, there could have been covenants on it that prohibited sale of the land. Research would have to be done to see if sale was an option, but Karnowski added that gathering the responses of the citizens and City Council, sale would be the last option.

Cunningham from the audience added that the family members related to his original homestead thought that the property could not be sold either.

Mr. Anderson added that as mentioned before, there just isn’t another place like the Civic Center in Princeton. In example, for use for a wedding party, the renter has the whole park area. There are other parks in the city, but nothing with a building.

Hallin added that she hosted three graduation parties at the Civic Center and there was always adequate space for a large group of people, plus basketball hoops.

Karnowski said when the City Council was looking at remodeling the building the first time around, the idea of bi-fold doors to separate the sun room from the main room if one group needed to train separate groups, per say. Also, the windows were looked at when tearing down Arcadian Homes last year to replace the windows in the sun room, but that did not work out. In close, there are possibilities out there for cheaper renovation.

Walker asked if the log part of the structure is still sound. Gerold replied that the log structure is still sound after speaking with the Building Inspector about a year ago. The kitchen area and sun room do not seem as sound. Gerold added that a new roof and insulation are needed the most. Walker gathered that the building would need to be gutted out, but the outwardly appearance seems to be fairly solid.

Whitcomb said he would like to see a committee put together to gather if there are any citizens willing to help. Some big box names like Menard or Home Depot may be willing to donate material as well.

Hallin added that some colleges may send students that are in a certain profession to help build.

PATRICK SMITH CONSULTING (HISTORICAL GUIDELINES)

Fuhrman introduced Pat Smith with Pat Smith Consulting. Smith said his firm also works with MacDonald & Mack architects. Do work such as historical surveys, re use studies, and design guidelines. The economic benefits of historic preservation are that the buildings are a public treasure telling the history of the city and also, some are privately owned. The State Historical Preservation Office has grants available for up to \$7000 with no match from the city. They would fund, for example, a building facade study. The study would give a brief history and description of the building and existing conditions. The architect would figure out what the building could look like if the owner was interested in doing the changes. The studies are not regulations; they are just giving the owners ideas. The building façade will give owners an incentive to take on the improvements which are not costly. Smith handed out an example of the Philip Henk Building (Butch's Tavern) in Chaska, Minnesota. The Renovation Potential suggested things like installing replacement windows, constructing a street-level storefront, repairing brickwork, reconstructing a balcony, and re-erecting a sign consistent with historical photos.

The grants are available later in February and March. Smith suggested having an open house inviting business owners to attend. Staff and business owners can rank the possible buildings.

With the \$7,000 grant, an architect could do up to ten buildings. The city could contribute money if they wanted.

Dobson asked if there were funds available for the building owners if they decide to do the renovations. Smith said that most of the funds available are for non profits and grants are available only once a year. State grants for private owners are not available through state funds.

Hallin asked if a Legacy Grant would be available for buildings on the Historical Register. Fuhrman said the City has three buildings that are on the register now; two homes and the Train Depot.

The city would apply for the grant and receive the funds. Pat said he has offered to apply for the grant free of charge. Smith would only ask for some city staff time to help administer the grant.

Walker said that the offer would be hard to turn down. Walker suggested asking for the Visionary Committee's input because of their interest in downtown. Fuhrman said the topic has not been brought up yet, but she will suggest it.

Dobson added that the main ideas of the Visionary Committee are attracting more people to town. Currently, the topic at hand for the committee is the Amphitheatre in Riverside Park. Dobson said that if buildings in downtown that have historical value are renovated or improved, it enhances the city itself.

Walker asked about the old Ben Franklin building doesn't match the rest of downtown; it's more of a 1970's vintage. Could the architects take a look at possible improvements so the building would better fit into downtown Princeton? Smith thought that would be a possibility.

Carol Ossell, a downtown business owner, addressed the City Council. Ossell repeated Smith in order to get the full understanding of the grant money. What the architects would suggest and draw would show the owners what could be done to the buildings to bring them back to their historical façade. This is just the first step in the process and would possibly spur somebody on to asking questions. Ossell added that she thinks this is a fabulous idea.

Penny with the Mille Lac County Depot added that if a building wants to be put on the National Registry, it can be an expensive, drawn out process.

WALKER MOVED TO AUTHORIZE PATRICK SMITH CONSULTING TO START THE GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS FOR THE HISTORIC DESIGN STUDY. HALLIN SECONDED THE MOTION. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (4 AYES, 0 NAYS).

SCHOOL DISTRICT/MARK PARK SOFTBALL AGREEMENTS

Karnowski reminded the City Council that in December of 2011, the Council adopted a fee schedule for the use of the softball fields at Mark Park.

In January the School District sent an email advising that, in their opinion, previous agreements between the School District and the City meant that the city could not charge the School District for using those fields.

Karnowski went on to say that after reviewing the agreements, City Attorney Schieffer is of the opinion that the agreements do not preclude the city from charging the School District the same fees paid by other groups for softball field use. Schieffer also recommended that the city exercise its option to terminate those obsolete agreements since the provisions of the 1995 Joint Powers Agreement have not been complied with since about 1999 and the 2009 agreement hinges on the 1995 agreement.

Because notification of any termination of the 2009 agreement has to be made before mid February of this year, staff is recommending that the Council adopt a motion to terminate both the 1995 and 2009 agreements and notify the other parties of that decision.

The School District has, indeed, invested considerable funds into Mark Park and, in the opinion of staff, should get some consideration for those investments. So staff's hopes are to work with the School District and, hopefully, negotiate a new and more equitable agreement that takes their investment into consideration.

Walker asked if the agreements were ongoing year by year and Karnowski said they were.

HALLIN MOTIONED TO TERMINATE BOTH THE 1995 JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT FOR OPERATION OF MARK PARK MADE IN 1995 AND THE 2009 FACILITIES USE AGREEMENT MADE IN 2009 WITH THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. DOBSON SECONDED THE MOTION.

Dobson said a lot of things have changed for the School District and the City since 2009, and it would be beneficial to both parties to go ahead and reach an agreement through discussion. That way both parties are on the same page. The School District has done a lot at Mark Park. Discussions should be held to get this finalized, concluded Dobson.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (4 AYES, 0 NAYS).

Rick Lahn, Princeton School District Superintendent, asked if he could speak. Whitcomb gave him permission but explained that the motion was already made and seconded.

Lahn introduced himself and Carol Breitreutz, Director of Business Services. Lahn said that in 2009, the same attorney drafted the agreement. The School District has invested a substantial amount of money into the fields and the District had felt that this was a great JPA. Lahn said that the District would like to work together for a facility in Princeton for people to use, working independently. The District has spent near \$85,000 on investing and improving the facility with the idea that the District would not be charged a fee,

For example, the backstop was installed by the District as consideration for the use of the property. Again, as the District made these investments, they were led to believe a fee would not be charged.

In fact, over the last fifteen years, \$216,000 has been spent by the District on the ball fields, after tracking back. That is a substantial amount of money. Lahn said the District is happy to spend the money because these improvements benefit our students and community, while working together for the common good. Lahn stated that the District was very surprised when they received a notice that the JPA was going to be pulled off of the table. The District was facing financial problems, like the city. The District has a tough time increasing activity fees for people that are paying taxes to city and to the School Dist already.

In conclusion, Lahn said the District would like to keep a positive working relationship with the City but any kind of fee is unacceptable to them. Lahn thanked the council for the opportunity to speak.

Dobson said that the information Lahn had given could be part of the discussion on the agreement. Hallin said she agrees that the fields are a benefit to the students and the community.

2012 COUNCIL PRIORITIES

Karnowski asked how the City Council would like to proceed with the suggested list of 2012 Council Priorities.

The Council concurred that they would take the list home, return them to the City Administrator who would then rank them in importance.

REVISITING THE CIVIC CENTER TOPIC (JACKSON'S SUGGESTION)

Jackson said that even though this is jumping back to a topic that was already discussed earlier on the agenda; the City Council should decide if the Civic Center is even suitable for rental this

coming year. Up until now, staff has been telling callers that the building may not be open this spring/summer due to conditions. But, City Hall has received several calls to date asking if the Civic Center can be rented at all, so a decision should be made soon.

Walker said that if the Council decides that the Civic Center is not suitable; can Gerold address the Council on how to secure the building. Gerold said the materials would be purchased to board the windows up, but Walker stressed that regular plywood may make the building look so deserted and remote. Walker and Hallin suggested painting the plywood at least, to match the siding of the building. Walker mentioned that boarding up the Civic Center could quite possibly stir more interest in the community in helping to renovate it.

DOBSON MOVED TO KEEP THE CIVIC CENTER CLOSED FOR THE 2012 SEASON AND UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. WALKER SECONDED THE MOTION.

Whitcomb suggested that Bob Gerold compile a list of what needs to be done to the building, so there can be a starting point; then the City Council can let people know what the plan is.

Walker suggested the building be used once again for a Sportsmen's Club, like in years past. Could the City get a year-long tenant for one day a week to use the building? Whitcomb said that Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts had looked at the building, but because of closing the Civic Center in the winter, it was not feasible for the clubs to meet there.

All vote aye;

Mrs. Ossell addressed the City Council asking what improvements were planned for Riverside Park, as she saw it listed on the 2012 Priority List. Walker said the amphitheatre, a possible fishing pier that the Department of Natural Resources had talked about, a connection to trails and the river: just a general improvement to make the park more attractive.

Fuhrman mentioned that there is a grant available specifically for fishing piers from the DNR, but the big cost was if the City were to use grant dollars, the parking lot would need to be brought to American's with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) code.

Karnowski said that there are several issues with having fishing piers on a river as opposed to a lake.

ADJOURNMENT

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS:

DOBSON MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 5:20PM. HALLIN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (4 AYES, 0 NAYS).

Respectfully Submitted,

Katie Hunter
City Clerk

ATTEST:

Paul Whitcomb; Acting Mayor