

MINUTES OF MEETING
CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION
PARKING DECK COMMITTEE
CITY CENTER COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND FACEBOOK LIVE
TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 2021 – 12:00 noon

PRESENT: Tom Merz, Eric Waara, Mike Needham, and Dan Liebau.

Also present: Clerk Ann Vollrath, Code Enforcement Officer Jeff Jepsen, Frank Fiala, Alan Kiley, Bill Leder, Craig Waddell and another member of the community.

APPROVAL OF
PREVIOUS
MINUTES:

A motion was made by Waara and seconded by Needham to approve the minutes of the March 16, 2021 meeting as written.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried

OPPORTUNITY
FOR PUBLIC:

Clerk Vollrath read a letter from Joan Suits asking the meetings be recorded for the public to access in case they are unable to take part in the meetings when held during the day.

BUSINESS:

City Manager Waara presented a handout with discussion starters for the parking deck.

Mike Needham said he would like to see ways to fund the parking deck without using general fund money or increasing the tax burden on the taxpayers of the entire city.

Dan Liebau said the recommendation made by the committee will need to include the cost so the council has an understanding of what the cost will be.

Tom Merz said he does not feel a potential project with more than one private developer involved is feasible because of the size of the property. More than one private developer would preclude any ability to provide public parking.

City Manager Waara said when the city funded the large maintenance projects on the deck from 2011 to 2015 it used money from the general fund. This money could have been used elsewhere in the city.

Mike Needham said he would like to see less burden on the general fund. He feels the parking fund should be self-sustaining.

City Manager Waara said the original intent when the parking deck was built was that it would be self-sustaining. However, users would not pay to park on the deck

so the general fund was forced to pay the bond. In 1982, the DDA was formed as a way to cover the bond payments. There has not been any growth in the DDA since it was formed so the DDA is not able to cover bond payments.

A discussion was held about whether parking fees would need to be increased all over town to cover the cost or just on the big deck.

City Manager Waara included options to remove some portions of the deck and leave other portions standing.

Craig Waddell suggested the deck be removed and replaced with a taxable use. He does not feel waterfront property is a good location for a parking deck. The recent engineering report said the deck needs to be replaced. He would like to see general fund money spent on some of Houghton's other needs including the Safe Routes to School program and sidewalks. If Houghton were more walkable, there would be less need for people to park downtown.

Frank Fiala said Houghton must provide parking to utilize its services. The City must ask what affect there would be to downtown businesses if there is a radical change in parking. The deck is an asset to the businesses. He asked the committee to set aside cost and just think about possibilities and then come up with recommendations. He also asked the committee to recommend the City pay for the secondary structure study to ascertain the current condition of the deck.

City Manager Waara said more public input is needed to discuss cultural, business, and financial ramifications. What the City is doing now is not sustainable. He would like to come up with a workable solution. Mr. Waara said he does not think it is fair to make all of the taxpayers of the city fund the parking deck.

Dan Liebau asked if the public comment already received could be compiled in a usable way. He would like to align the comments with the concepts in the memo and perhaps there are more concepts to consider.

Craig Waddell said he put together a document of comments he will provide the members.

The committee will begin work on compiling the comments already received and prepare a solicitation for more comments that can be provided by e-mail. The committee will ask people making comments to provide their name and if they are a resident of the city, downtown business owner or downtown building owner.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 4th at noon.

A motion to adjourn was made by Liebau and seconded by Needham. The meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Mike Needham, Secretary