

MINUTES OF MEETING  
CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION  
PARKING DECK COMMITTEE  
CITY CENTER COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
TUESDAY, MAY 4, 2021 – 12:00 noon

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

Also present: Clerk Ann Vollrath, Frank Fiala, Alan Kiley, Craig Waddell, Robert Megowen, Brad Baltensperger, John Nelson, and Chris Riesgraf.

APPROVAL OF  
PREVIOUS  
MINUTES:

A motion was made by Needham and seconded by Waara to approve the minutes of the April 20, 2021 meeting as written.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried

OPPORTUNITY  
FOR PUBLIC:

No one addressed the committee.

BUSINESS:

Tom Merz responded to the letter read at the last meeting about keeping the recordings from the meetings on Facebook so that residents can view the recording when they have time. He recommended the recordings will be kept on the City's Facebook page for two weeks following the meeting and then deleted. The rest of the members agreed with this timeframe.

Dan Liebau presented a draft document looking at the 7 options provided by the city manager earlier and creating categories to guide the public when soliciting public input. He asked the committee members to review this document and provide feedback.

Tom Merz said he is not sure the options discussing keeping the present deck should be included. It is his opinion the committee may want to consider what replaces the deck after it is removed. There will need to be some parking (public or private) provided, but the committee will need to look at how to pay to remove the deck and how to pay to provide the parking. The City needs to have some private development involved in order to qualify for grants. The downtown needs to increase its tax base because it is not growing from a fiscal standpoint.

Eric Waara said he reached out to Rich and Associates to provide a budget estimate to replace a portion of the deck with a new deck. He will provide this budget estimate when it is received.

Mike Needham said he feels the City needs to provide more housing downtown and there is not a lot of vacant land available. The City can encourage more

housing by making city-owned land available for development. The City also needs to accommodate the property owners adjacent to the deck with the details to be worked out.

Mike Needham said all of the 7 options should be included to show the path that arrives at a conclusion. All options should be considered.

Frank Fiala asked the committee to not dismiss any of the options. He is offended that no one asked him what will happen to his business if the deck is gone. He also wants the City to pay an engineer again to determine the condition of the deck so it is known how long it will last.

Mike Needham said he talked to Alan Kiley, owner of Joey's Seafood, at length about the importance of the deck to downtown businesses. He also said that as a member of the council, he does not feel it is necessary to spend more money on another study to determine the condition of the deck. The council has not chosen to spend money on another study.

City Manager Waara said the engineering study performed last year said it will take at least \$1,800,000 to fix the deck to keep it for awhile longer.

Craig Waddell asked the committee to review a document he prepared addressing how the businesses near the deck are affected.

City Manager Waara said the City is not going to forsake the business owners that rely on the deck.

Dan Liebau again reviewed the document he prepared. He asked the committee to develop the matrix and better define the categories that the public can have input on. Structure is needed to determine how this is being evaluated. He asked the members to think about what the criteria is that they are measuring against and what is hoped to be achieved. He would also like to know what the current number of parking spaces is and what is the number of spaces that are lost if the deck comes down.

City Manager Waara said the committee should come up an idea on how to weigh the input they are soliciting.

Mike Needham said the document going forward may mainly be driven by master plan strategies with a breakdown on some of the topics. This is a great beginning point.

Dan Liebau asked the committee to evaluate what the categories or principals will look like to come up with a good picture of what factors are valuable to the community.

Mike Needham asked if the committee feels the seven columns represent the full spectrum of what they should be considering.

Brad Baltensperger of Houghton said he feels there is a need for development that produces tax revenue. He attended some of the citizens group meetings and no one in that group articulated a vision. They just wanted to do the process better and were concerned about viewscapes, greenspace, and businesses. He asked that the emphasis be put on the cost to the taxpayer with a solution that minimizes the cost to the taxpayer. He also said a tall development does not have to cover the entire three blocks. There can be some portions of the development that are tall and some portions that allow views.

Prior to the next meeting the committee will work on the matrix.

The committee decided to meet at 1:00 instead of noon going forward. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 18<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

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Mike Needham, Secretary