

MINUTES OF MEETING
CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION
PARKING DECK COMMITTEE
CITY CENTER COUNCIL CHAMBERS
TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2021 – 1:00 pm

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

Also present: Clerk Ann Vollrath, Robert Megowen, Alan Kiley, Grant Dossetto, Craig Waddell, Mike Salmi, and Frank Fiala.

APPROVAL OF
PREVIOUS
MINUTES:

A motion was made by Liebau and seconded by Needham to approve the minutes of the May 18, 2021 meeting as written.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried

OPPORTUNITY
FOR PUBLIC:

No one addressed the committee.

BUSINESS:

The commission reviewed a matrix example supplied by Bill Leder and the matrix draft submitted by Tom Merz. Dan Liebau said he hopes to flesh out the matrix and settle on a template. The primary focus will be to evaluate the options and considerations as a committee and public comment can be made at meetings or by correspondence.

The committee reviewed the options and decided to include the four options provided in Tom's draft and taken from the discussion points supplied at an earlier meeting by Eric:

- Option 1 – Deck stays. Do nothing and wait.
- Option 2 – Deck stays. Perform maintenance/upgrade work to extend life.
- Option 3 – Remove part of the deck.
- Option 4 – Remove deck entirely.
 - Sub-options could include working with a developer to redevelop a portion or all of the property.

Dan Liebau provided draft definitions of the first three options and asked the other members to provide any suggested changes to his definitions and work on a definition for Option 4.

Option 1: No Action

The parking deck remains as is and utilized to the extent allowable. Parking availability is generally more than sufficient, but will likely be reduced over time. No

maintenance will be performed under this option; therefore, a cost savings could be realized. Structural integrity will continue to decrease, likely to a point that areas of the deck and space below will no longer be accessible. Access to public sidewalks and businesses will depreciate over time due to closures. Estimated timeline for when additional actions/decision making will be required is 2-4 years.

Option 2: Extended Maintenance

The parking deck remains as is and utilized to the extent allowable. Parking availability is generally more than sufficient, but will likely be reduced over time. Maintenance will be performed to extend the overall life of the existing structure. It is anticipated that maintenance costs will increase annually, consistent with increased deterioration of the structure. Structural integrity will continue to decrease, likely to a point that areas of the deck and space below will no longer be accessible. Access to public sidewalks and businesses will depreciate over time due to closures. Estimated timeline for when additional actions/decision making will be required is 5-8 years.

Option 3: Partial Removal

The parking deck remains, but some portion of the parking surface is removed. Parking availability will be reduced, but will remain sufficient. Maintenance will be performed to extend the overall life of the remaining structure. It is anticipated that maintenance costs will continue to increase annually, but will likely be reduced overall simply due to a reduction in surface area. The remaining structure Structural integrity will continue to decrease, likely to a point that areas of the deck and space below will no longer be accessible. Access to public sidewalks and businesses will depreciate over time due to closures. Estimated timeline for when additional actions/decision making will be required is 5-8 years.

A discussion was held about financing the possible removal of the deck. City Manager Waara said financing can be done through a bond and then the City can work with a developer to put a tax-based development on the property using Brownfield tax credits to make the bond payments. He said more than one small-scale development on the property will not make it possible for the developers to receive a return on their investment.

Alan Kiley, owner of Joey's Seafood and Grill, said he does not need the back door entrance to his restaurant from the deck because customers can access his business from Sheldon Avenue and also from the stair tower connecting the restaurant to Pewabic Street. He would prefer less entrances to his business. However, he wants people accessing the restaurant from the Sheldon Avenue entrance to have available parking without having to walk a long distance.

City Manager Waara said a council member asked at a previous meeting for the City to send a survey to all business owners on the deck about usage of the deck. Mr. Waara said we have a lot of data on usage of the deck as well as the recently completed parking survey.

Mike Needham said it is more important to look at accessibility to the businesses and how we compromise in the future with business owners to satisfy the greater good. The City should also work with business owners to make sure future parking is used the right way.

The committee reviewed the draft Considerations and agreed on these Considerations:

- Accessibility
- Aesthetics
- Increase Downtown Housing Stock
- Private Development Opportunities
- Parking
- Financing

The members will work on definitions for the Considerations.

Craig Waddell of Houghton suggested soil samples to determine if there are any contaminants in the land so that it is eligible for Brownfield assistance. City Manager Waara said the criteria for Brownfields is such that there may be no argument against that. The current deck qualifies for Brownfield.

Mr. Waddell suggested there may be residents in Houghton willing to donate money to help pay for the deck. He mentioned the ability to use Go Fund Me for municipal projects.

Mike Salmi of Houghton asked if there is a possibility of the developer coming back to work with the City. City Manager Waara said that is a possibility.

The committee will work on the draft document through Google docs before the next meeting.

The next committee meeting is Monday, June 21, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

A motion to adjourn was made by Needham and seconded by Liebau. The meeting adjourned at 2:37 p.m.

Mike Needham, Secretary