

**PROCEEDINGS
OF
THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
OF THE
CITY OF LOWELL
MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2017, 5:30 P.M.**

1. **CALL TO ORDER; PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE; ROLL CALL.**

The Meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Mayor Mike DeVore and Deputy City Clerk Theresa Mundt called roll.

Present: Councilmembers Greg Canfield, Jim Hodges, Jeff Phillips, Alan Teelander and Mayor DeVore.

Absent: None.

Also Present: City Manager Mike Burns, City Deputy Clerk Theresa Mundt, City Attorney Richard Wendt, Sergeant Christopher Hurst, Lowell Light and Power General Manager Steve Donkersloot and DPW Director Rich LaBombard.

Planning Commission: Chair Bruce Barker, Commissioner John Gerard, and Commissioner Marty Chambers.

Parks & Recreation: Chair Perry Beachum, Paula Mierendorf, and Luanne Wisniewski.

Also Present: Betsy Davidson, Al Halbeisen, Dave Austin of Williams and Works, Jeanette Bloom of the DNR, Tina Dickerman Friends of the Fred Meijer Rails to Trails, Andrea Ketchmark of the North Country Trails, and Robert Brown.

2. **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

IT WAS MOVED BY CANFIELD and seconded by TEELANDER to approve the agenda as written.

YES: Councilmember Canfield, Mayor DeVore, Councilmember Hodges, Councilmember Phillips, and Councilmember Teelander. NO: None. ABSENT: None. MOTION CARRIED.

3. **CITIZEN COMMENTS FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA.**

There were no comments.

4. **DISCUSSION REGARDING COMMUNITY TRAILS**

The City Council requested their first Committee of the Whole meeting be held to discuss the trail system and to clarify any confusion there may be. City Manager Michael Burns stated Williams and Works Engineer Dave Austin was present to provide an update as to where the City is with the current trail plan. In addition, City Attorney Richard Wendt was present to guide the group through concerns regarding the need to change the ordinance pertaining to sidewalks in order for the trail to go in.

Austin gave a broad overview of the trails coming into the City of Lowell. There are many great things going on in the Lowell community. We are home to the Lowell Area Recreational Authority that was formed many years ago in order to develop a community wide trail system within the entire community. In

2009 a grant was received to begin the first phase of the LARA trail that travels from Foreman to Gee and up to the high school. This was the first phase of the master plan. Concurrent to that there are no longer trains coming through anymore allowing for the ability to secure the railway's right of ways, creating 125 mile continuous rail trail system. A grant is also being applied that will connect Lowell to Saranac and Lowell to Belding. While the City was building an internal system, the regional trail system was also being developed east and north. When completed, this trail will be the fifth longest rail trail system in the country. In addition to that, we are home to the North Country Trail, which is a foot trail.

Austin explained several different routes were considered and after reviewing it with several committees, a route was agreed upon traveling along Gee Drive to Sibley to Valley Vista. It would guide riders through town onto Main Street. It is a common practice to use existing streets as a trail option. The riders would then continue south on Bowes Road to Hudson. An underpass near the river could be built to cross under Hudson. The trail would travel through the fairgrounds and crossing the Flat River with a short bridge, winding up by King Street and working its way down through the existing recreation properties to the South Jackson and crossing over the Grand River.

Austin advised that is the preferred option, noting the DNR in conjunction with the National Parks System, did a study of the Master Plan and identified communities that would be trail hubs. Lowell was selected as one of these and would bring more people to the commercial businesses and community. Austin explained MDOT and the DNR are interested in closing this gap. The primary funder would be MDOT with about 60% while the DNR has potential for trust fund dollars.

Councilmember Canfield believed the City should find a way to make this happen without making it a burden on the property owners.

Burns questioned if there would be any ordinance changes. Wendt explained if the sidewalk is expanded to ten feet then it is deemed a trail and is no longer the property owner's responsibility; however it remains five feet in width it is still the owner's responsibility. Wendt went on to state the Michigan Motor Vehicle Code states if bicycles are allowed on a sidewalk, the bicyclist must give an audible signal before overtaking the pedestrian.

Austin advised the City may want to include a map in the ordinance defining the sections of the trail going through the City of Lowell.

Wendt advised the easements that are in favor of the City will require the approval of the City Council.

Wendt confirmed LARA had insurance. He then advised they could add the property owner as an indemnification to their policy. The question then came up about maintenance. Burns questioned the additional costs to the City.

Robert Brown spoke about options for maintenance. He advised one community hires out high school athletes and donations are made to different programs within the athletic department for their efforts. Brown advised the City of Lowell has approximately two miles of trails to maintain.

Councilmember Hodges stated he was in favor of the trails.

Planning Commission Chair Bruce Barker spoke in reference to bike trails in South Haven and encouraged everyone to see how they are marked.

Burns questioned when the MDOT application would be completed. Austin responded in the summer as MDOT reviews such applications quarterly. He also noted it would take approximately one year to obtain funding.

Wendt asked Austin who would be responsible for the operation and maintenance when the trails are constructed. He also questioned the definition of what is a sidewalk versus a pathway. Austin explained the ordinance addresses sidewalks and he understood the City would define what a trail is or incorporate maps into the ordinance. Wendt suggested LARA request that the City add this to the ordinance and also request how the maintenance of the trail would take place.

5. **ADJOURNMENT.**

IT WAS MOVED BY HODGES and seconded by TEELANDER to adjourn at 6:44 p.m.

YES: 5. NO: None. ABSENT: None. MOTION CARRIED.

DATE:

APPROVED:

Mike DeVore, Mayor

Susan Ullery, City Clerk