

**WORKSHOP MINUTES
OAKDALE CITY COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 28, 2023**

The City Council held a workshop on Tuesday, February 28, 2023 at Oakdale City Hall, 1584 Hadley Avenue North, Oakdale, Minnesota. The meeting began at 5:00 PM.

Present: Mayor Kevin Zabel

Council Members: Jake Ingebrigtsen
Andy Morcomb
Susan Olson

City Staff Members: Christina Volkers, City Administrator
Sara Ludwig, City Clerk
Jim Thomson, City Attorney
Andrew Gitzlaff, Community Development Director
Melanie Lee, Human Resources Director
Luke McClanahan, City Planner
Nick Newton, Police Chief
Lori Pulkrabek, Communications Manager
Jim Romanik, Public Works Manager
Kevin Wold, Fire Chief
Jason Zimmerman, Finance Director

Other: Kristen Denzer, Chief Executive Officer for Tierra Encantada
Rachel Crowley, Chief Operating Officer for Tierra Encantada
Daniel Sheehy, Director for Tierra Encantada

MARLYS PRE-K/PRESCHOOL @ 1470 HELMO AVE N CONCEPT PLAN

City Planner Luke McClanahan provided a brief introduction about the concept plan including the proposed location, business model, and estimated number of students and employees. He recapped the staff analysis which identified two areas of concern – the stormwater provisions and parking provisions.

Kristen Denzer, CEO for Tierra Encantada, addressed the parking concern by providing some background about other location sizes and associated designated parking. She referenced obtaining a parking variance for other locations by showing the limited amount of time parents spend at the site on a daily basis. To address the concern with the stormwater provisions, she mentioned adding long rain gardens. She moved on to the preliminary site plan designs and photos.

In response to Council Member Ingebrigtsen’s question about acquiring additional acreage to the north to solve the parking issue, Ms. Denzer said they are only acquiring what is needed for the full project.

Mr. McClanahan noted that when the Site Plan is submitted, staff recommends the developer must also provide results from a suggested traffic and parking study.

Council Member Ingebrigtson suggested adding an access point on the south end of the parking lot and creating one-way traffic flow. He also suggested using the Pace Analytical parking lot as an option for staff parking.

Ms. Denzer provided a detailed breakdown of the average time a parent spends in the parking lot, during the busiest time of the day, in reference to the number of parking spots available.

City Administrator Chris Volkens asked about the available staff parking in the proposed parking lot. Ms. Denzer stated that only 40% of staff drive to work, and when they do they often carpool. She did mention some staff use public transit as well. There would be a few designated staff parking spots, but they would have to use off-street parking as well. Ms. Denzer also mentioned speaking to the neighboring businesses to ask about using their parking spaces if needed.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about the lack of mass transit near this site, Ms. Denzer correlated the parking situation to their Eagan location that has a similar site profile, noting no parking issues at that site.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about the number of employees that will be onsite at any given time, Ms. Denzer stated 20-25.

Staff was requested to research fencing requirements in this specific zoning code due to the developer indicating the use of a privacy fence in the front of the site around the playground areas.

Ms. Volkens stated that another workshop discussion would need to take place after the traffic and parking study is completed.

TRAINING ON OPEN MEETING LAWS – JIM THOMSON, CITY ATTORNEY

City Attorney Jim Thomson provided an overview of the "Open Meeting Law". He explained that the law applies to the City Council and to any committee, subcommittee, board, department, or commission of the city, but does not apply to the city administrator or city staff. He defined "meeting" and "special meeting" as it applies to the Open Meeting Law (OML). Attorney Thomson recommended that Council avoid serial meetings on matters that will or could come before the Council for a decision.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about who is liable for a lawsuit under the OML, Attorney Thomson stated that the council member will always be named, but the city can be named as well and if the City is named, the City Attorney will be responsible for that portion.

Attorney Thomson talked about the importance of treating emails (or tweets or text messages) like phone calls; not using “reply all” in email conversations but, rather, responding only to the city administrator who would then forward the comments to all members; and remembering that emails between council members will almost always be public data. He advised against discussing city business with more than one council member, or discussing city business at social gatherings.

Attorney Thomson went on to explain the Council’s quasi-judicial role. He noted that Council should avoid advocating a position until all information is presented, especially on development/land/zoning proposals.

Next, Attorney Thomson stated that council members may not participate in matters in which they have a personal financial interest. If there is a conflict of interest, they should disclose to the group and abstain from discussing or voting on the matter.

The last topic covered by Attorney Thomson was the Data Practices Act. He noted that the physical form or storage media, and location (work or personal device), does not matter but, instead, the subject matter is what qualifies as “government data”.

MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION – HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR

Human Resources Director Melanie Lee provided a brief overview of two new NeoGov products currently being implemented – Insite and Onboard – which will assist with hiring/recruitment, and onboarding/staff training, respectively. She updated the group on current hiring and recruitment statistics for the City. Lastly, Ms. Lee went over the 2023 Work Plan for Human Resources which includes finalizing job descriptions, personnel file organization and digitization, reviewing and updating policies, and improving the open enrollment process, among other things.

ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

Ms. Volkens requested that Summer Hours for the City be brought back in 2023, beginning Memorial Day and ending Labor Day. City offices would be open to the public for nine hours Monday through Thursday, and four hours on Friday, maintaining a 40-hour work week. Council was supportive of this request.

Ms. Volkens asked Council their opinion about adopting Juneteenth as a City holiday in 2023. She noted that the governor signed the bill into law earlier this year, but it does not take effect until August 1, 2023 and thus the first holiday for employees would be June 19, 2024. The management team did not have a strong opinion on early adoption (2023 versus 2024), however employees have expressed a desire to make it a City holiday as soon as possible. Council was supportive of adopting Juneteenth as a City holiday in 2023 thus providing all city employees an extra holiday (unplanned and unexpected) in 2023....in appreciation for the good work by our employees on behalf of the City and for the residents of Oakdale.

COUNCIL TOPICS

Council Member Ingebrigtsen proposed interviewing a fifth council member vacancy applicant – #4, in light of the fact the City received a letter of recommendation regarding that applicant. Ms. Volkens informed the group that she had notified the applicants not chosen for an interview, but did include language of “at this time”. The Council was supportive of adding the fifth council member vacancy applicant – #4, as an interviewee.

Council Member Morcomb asked what City development information can be shared with the public, specifically referencing updates received by the Community Development Department. Mayor Zabel said anything that has been part of a Planning Commission meeting, workshop meeting, or Council regular meeting, not internal correspondence as it is preliminary and still in discussions.

Council Member Olson asked the Council if they would consider discussing the discrepancies in the THC Consumable Products City Code and the Liquor Control City Code, specifically in relation to the language around licensed-location restrictions. Mayor Zabel suggested waiting until the State passes the omnibus cannabis bill that is currently moving through the House and Senate, but would like to review both of these Codes in their entirety at that time.

Council Member Olson asked Police Chief Nick Newton to provide an update about the shoplifting issue that has been happening at the local Walgreens. Chief Newton shared additional context about how the Police Department came upon this information and is handling this issue going forward.

Mayor Zabel wanted the group to be aware that COVID E-Snap benefits are coming to an end which means local food shelves like Open Cupboard are going to see an uptick in demand.

Mayor Zabel asked Council if they would support allocating funds to the Communications Department for paid advertising for the City’s social media channels. After a brief discussion, the Council was supportive of having staff implement a small amount of spending now and bring back results to a future workshop.

Mayor Zabel mentioned that a local Girl Scout Troop reached out about submitting a project proposal to the City Council that would help improve the community. They decided on painting a crosswalk on the Hadley Blvd Trail. Council Members Olson and Morcomb agreed to attend their meeting on March 30, 2023 at 6:30 PM at Castle Elementary to hear their project proposal. The Council decided that this item would be added to the subsequent workshop meeting for discussion after the Girl Scout Troop meeting to ensure proper procedures are being followed. Mayor Zabel suggested sending the Troop a letter once their proposal is accepted and suggested a ribbon cutting for the project in the Spring.

ADJOURNMENT

The workshop was adjourned at 6:57 PM.