

MINUTES OF A WORK SESSION OF THE  
INDEPENDENCE CITY COUNCIL  
TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023 – 7:00 AM.  
(City Hall Community Room)

1. CALL TO ORDER.

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a work session of the Independence City Council was called to order by Mayor Johnson at 7:00 a.m.

2. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Mayor Johnson, Councilors Spencer, Betts, Grotting, McCoy

ABSENT: None

STAFF: City Administrator Kaltsas, Administrative Services Director Simon, Public Works Supervisor Bode

VISITORS: WHPS Sergeant Denneson

3. General Administration

a. Pioneer Creek Park Concept Plan

Kaltsas states the city spoke with some local organizations about some options to team up and prepare a concept plan for Pioneer Creek Park with some help from them and the Hennepin County Grant. Last Fall the city talked about the Hennepin County grant but decided to wait to have better plans before submitting to have a better chance of getting a grant. The city tried to gauge interest from organizations and residents of what they wanted to see in that park. The residents were very interested in a pickleball court. The city took the master plan that was done 15+ years ago back to the designer to look at it, what the topography shows, wetlands, how the roads are laid out and how we could fit softball, baseball, lacrosse, soccer, frisbee, a warming house, hockey, bathrooms, pickleball and parking into it. They came up with 3 concept plans that we looked through. Kaltsas said he tried to help pare that down with conversation with the organizations. Ball fields take up the most space. The city classifies this as a community park and should allow multigenerational activity. We have to take into consideration lighting, tournaments, traffic, and the noise up against the residential neighborhood to the North.

Orono baseball wants as many fields as possible, and softball wants a place to host tournaments. I came back with the concept of having 3 softball fields and 1 baseball field. The 4-field layout, or cloverleaf is the best use of space. The entrance drive would have to be pushed to the North a little to accommodate these fields. There are 3 soccer/multi-purpose fields in the back. There are some wetlands on the property on the South side that is significant. The city asked the designers to stay away from the wetlands/trees. The sledding hill is a really nice feature, and we would like to keep it.

Johnson asked about volleyball. Kaltsas said that we have the existing sand volleyball courts, and it may be used more when other events are going on. If both sides of the park were built with fields, there would be a central location for bathrooms, playground, pickleball, warming house, and skating rink. There is also a spot for a possible concession stand inside the baseball/softball cloverleaf. We need more parking stalls that would mostly be due to baseball/softball. There would be 300 parking spots total.

Betts asked what you do with the skating rink in the summer. Kaltsas said it just sits. Some people have said you could use it for other sports, but they don't hold up well for other sports unless you invest a lot of money. Betts asked if it could be used for broomball. Kaltsas said we could have a say in the ground underneath so it would accommodate this.

Betts asked if the trail would be impacted. Kaltsas said no. Grotting asked if it would make sense to have a trail all the way around. Kaltsas said he will put that back in the plans. He said Orono soccer is trying to find an indoor facility. We could partner with them where they would lease the land and manage that facility. We could get a bathroom, concessions, and something for the community. It would be a full field, most of the space where the 3 soccer fields are now. Those facilities are not money makers though. You have to be willing to subsidize that. They have to manage those as a private facility. You need people to market, advertise and sell. Minnetonka Youth hockey built a facility in Victoria, and it just isn't possible to make the money back. We are not in a position to do that. If they put up \$3 million and we did a lease it might be a facility that we could have that would serve our residents. They are good for kids and families. We are in MN where we don't know the weather.

Johnson said you could end up with an empty building as well. Kaltsas said we do pole barns nicely out here. The problem is, it's still a couple million dollars. In talking with these organizations, Orono baseball believes they can bring \$400k to the table. Baseball says they will partner with Orono youth softball to build all of what they want for that clover. Each field is probably \$150k.

Betts asked if it is possible to just do half. Kaltsas said that's what we are thinking. The layout shows the 1 baseball and 3 softball fields. Once kids are 12, they go to the bigger fields. If they were to bring money to the table, how much would we want to be a partner in that? Pickleball is probably \$150k. Prices are higher with concrete right now. Soccer is about \$100k each. We are talking about doing this right, under drainage, topsoil, grading, perimeter drainage to do it right. The grant with Hennepin County is \$500k. You typically have to match whatever they give. We could look at broader grants like the DNR grant. Our park fund today is about \$200k. Within the year I anticipate it being \$400k due to Otten and Koch filing final plat. We are starting to have enough money to get some form of this plan.

Betts said once you get something in there, you will start to draw people in. A lot of people don't know that the park is even there. Kaltsas said if we had a nice road that wasn't wet and muddy, we would get more people. Grotting asked what the maintenance costs annually will be for the city. Kaltsas said we would have to look pretty hard at the arrangements we would need to make. We would want to only mow for maintenance. We also would have to put money away for long-term maintenance. The big one is bathrooms. Betts asked how many parks are still using biffs. Kaltsas said he thinks a lot of parks still use them. Grotting asked if this is something that might have a gate on it, so we don't get people coming in and ruining it. Kaltsas said it would only get gated at night and I think that is a good idea. Grotting said that the biggest thing about the park is that you really can't see what is going on from the road. With the grading plan, if you have the fields visible that would draw people's eye. Kaltsas said we would cut that berm down a little so you can't see. The baseball fields will be fenced anyway. He would want to look at security. He asked Denneson if he has seen anything out there since the video cameras have been installed. Denneson said no.

McCoy said he likes this concept. He said if you bring someone into grade, you should grade it all. Trying to match it up later doesn't make sense. He said figure out the cost and maybe it would offset a bond. Softball pays a pretty significant usage fee right now. I don't think we should say we are not putting bathrooms in the cloverleaf. There are a lot of elderly people that come to these that would need a bathroom close by. Maybe not right away but he suggested putting in the underground requirements for a future bathroom. Denneson said Westonka fields remind me of this. The wheel concept with the concession stands and maintenance in the

middle of it and a couple of bathrooms. They rotated to whatever youth group was out there and they would run the concession as a fundraiser for that sport.

Kaltsas said there is a build cost and an operation cost. Scheduling becomes an issue and how to manage that, the cleanliness, etc. On the build side, my next steps would be to price it if we were to build it. Some of these pieces can move within that. If you start putting in multiple bathrooms that is expensive. Spencer asked if there is any priority or need if we can't build all of it, either turf or fields that are a greater need. Kaltsas said right now it is desire, they just need more. McCoy said that softball doesn't have a home besides the varsity fields. Baseball could go to Maple Plain and softball could come to our field. Spencer said that he graded his share of fields. He asked if this is something we will need to hire two seasonal employees to maintain. Delano had seasonal employees. There are expenses. What is our responsibility, he asked. Kaltsas said our intent is to put together a partnership agreement. One year they might have a couple people doing it and then the next year they might not have anyone, and they will start calling the city to come maintain it. We will have an agreement that says what they need to do. The bases, striping, all of that is their job.

Denneson said that is great, but it is still a city, and you could have other people coming in to use it. Organizations would get priority and we would have to have some slots available for others to use as well for a fee. Grotting asked what the upside of not doing it. Kaltsas said the baseball/softball is your cost primarily. Their fields are different. If we just did soccer and mowed every week, there isn't much expense with that. That's something we can do with the staff we have and resources. McCoy said that softball had 8-9 fields last year for the smaller kids and those fields are not going to be available this coming Fall now.

Grotting asked what the good, better, and best scenarios are. Kaltsas said he would spend the most on types of facilities that would accommodate the most users. He said he wouldn't just build the diamond and parking lot. He would do 2 multi-purpose fields, pickleball and 2 softball fields for different generations. Unless something from hockey fires up, I wouldn't do it. Not many youth organizations want outdoor rinks anymore. The rink is a whole issue too for maintenance. If Orono brings \$500k, then we would be inclined to go all the way. We want to leverage a grant and get a nice start. If we could agree on a master plan, we could start developing it and we could stick to that plan.

McCoy asked if soccer came back and said they want to do it. Kaltsas said you could do everything in there. He told soccer to look at building a pole barn. Johnson said you need a reinforced roof if you have another winter like this one. Spencer said there is a significant part of the community that is in Delano. He asked if this going to be dedicated to Orono. Kaltsas said Delano has great facilities, so they won't need it as much. This isn't our only park, and we should think about land for another park. Spencer said Delano has the same problem that Orono does for scheduling time. Kaltsas said we are going to set up an agreement they are going to be the primary maintenance, the city will have a say. If they came to us with \$500k and they would get 20 years of rent fee and if Delano showed up, they would pay a fee. Spencer said if Orono is the one giving money, they are the ones that would drive it. Kaltsas said we would want a certain percentage of availability to other groups and people. We can reach out to others to get an idea of how this is run in other cities. Spencer said that would end up with a whole Public Works staff and another administrator impacting budget. Kaltsas said he will put costs together and phases. He said he has until Fall to get the grant together. Organizations want to know for fundraisers.

## **b. Medina Sewer Connection and Town Line Road Project Updates**

Kaltsas explains that the city got approved by Medina to amend the quad city agreement for the Otten

development. It is going on tonight's agenda. He said he has a meeting with Mayor Brad Johnson today for Greenfield. Loretto is still a wild card since they are most at stake. Their share is \$130k. I need to get the other communities to agree, then we are in business for Bridgevine. One thing that motivated them was Town Line. We talked to Medina and Orono about upgrading. Medina wanted to partner on that since they have residents on half the road. It has been in poor shape for a long time. The city of Orono has said yes. Medina wants to split it. We programmed to spend the money but said we would pull out if they weren't going to approve Bridgevine.

Spencer asked what the cost was. Kaltsas said it is \$353k is the feasible amount. No one knows where asphalt is coming in at right now. Johnson asked if any fees were collected for the road when the development was put in. Kaltsas said we have \$25k for Deer Ridge. McCoy asked if this is more than an overlay. Kaltsas said it is a reconstruct.

c. Fire District Discussion and Update – Loretto/Hamel JPA Update

Kaltsas said that the JPA got approved for Western Suburban Fire District. He said he talked with Jeff about it and we have a 3 fire department model. Loretto was always a partner we had talked to. They pulled Hamel in. The bigger the fire district, the more efficient it becomes. He asked if there is any interest in modifying our fire boundaries. He said that Kroells has had interest in getting rid of Delano Fire because of the County Line issue. Maple Plain and Loretto also has a better working relationship. With the new update, there is an opportunity for Independence to look at a fire district model vs. a contract model. He said he talked to Maple Plain and their understanding is that their council is definitely interested in a fire district as a model. Independence pays Delano \$70k per year for services. If we eliminate and divide that in Maple Plain and Loretto, there is a \$50k savings. It gets broken back into the formula and that's not going to cost as much. Delano is a hiring full-time fire chief. They are going a different direction all together. Bob Vanlith is retiring this year. It would be a better plan long-term. If we could get Maple Plain to go into that district as well, it would be better for all. For Maple Plain to get into it, the big issue is the retirement plan. When Loretto and Hamel joined, they had to increase the retirement amount. Loretto fire bought in to the Hamel retirement allocation. They agreed on an amount and put a large sum into PERA. Maple Plain is way below that. It is almost double the increase for what fire fighters get from retirement. We are talking about \$1million. I don't see Maple Plain being able to do that. Jeff said we could do this on a timeline, like 5-10 years where you could fold into their retirement. That wouldn't be day one. You wouldn't be eligible right away. Jeff thinks he could cover most of the Delano district. Delano and Maple Plain split County Road 92.

Denneson said in recent past, he has mapped a lot of this with times. Delano is in a tough spot for where they put the fire station downtown. There are traffic issues and getting onto the highway takes a while. Somewhere between Nelson Rd and Copeland Rd is of equal time. Kaltsas asked if there a small lag in the dispatch. Denneson said there is. McCoy said we did extensive mapping and Nelson Rd was that equal spot. For us to go out Hwy 12 and Loretto to go out County Rd 11, Loretto had the same advantage to jump on the Hwy faster. Kaltsas said the JPA offers less expense for staff and other things. It would be an easy way for us to think about more territory with Loretto and Maple Plain. There is a lot of savings potential. Spencer said we talked about this years ago. This makes sense. Even if you left Delano in for County Line. Denneson said eliminate the contract hassle. Kaltsas said Delano didn't give him a budget number and they don't have numbers anymore. McCoy said they have a mandatory 65 out. They are losing 3 or 4 fire fighters. He asked at what point do we want to talk with Maple Plain. Kaltsas said he thinks now is a good time. He would want Jeff and Julie there as well. He asked if Maple Plain would want to be a part of the JPA long-term. Medina wants in to the JPA. It would be Loretto, Medina, Hamel and Independence. He said he thinks Corcoran may play

into that as well since they are losing Rogers. The Rogers chief said they aren't servicing outside the Rogers city limits.

d. Public Works Capital Equipment Planning – Tractor and Ditch Mower Quotations and Discussion

Bode said that the PW staff has driven both pieces of equipment. He said the New Holland is very expensive to maintain every year. The Case worked better for turning radius and to be able to turn on the road would be very beneficial. He said we needed the larger tractor for the mower we are looking at. There is a lot of side leverage, and the larger tractor would keep the tractor on the road and do what they need to in the ditch.

Kaltsas said we have a 2024 capital purchase of a new tractor. If we want to get it, we need to order it now. We would get it next year though. We would take our existing tractor and trade it in and replace it with a new, bigger tractor.

Betts asked if that was the one that was used in the park.

Bode said no, they have used the ditch mower on the sledding hill but have kept it enough to use the mower. Kaltsas said we want a better ditch mower that reaches out. The tractor we have isn't heavy enough to handle that.

Spencer asked if we are still getting good value on trade.

Bode said they agreed to math whatever John Deere would give us on a trade.

Kaltsas said we would still be under budget with our trade. John Deere is further out than Case to get one. It wouldn't come in until January at the earliest. We would bring this back to council for a formal approval.

Grotting asked what the deck size is of the mower.

Bode said it is 72". It's "beefier" than smaller cutting knives.

Johnson said he better take them up on it.

Spencer said that the budget is right. The city has done a good job at forecasting these costs.

Kaltsas said the way we are doing our ditch mowing now is dangerous.

e. Miscellaneous Project Updates

Kaltsas talked about a property that sold recently in Lyndale. The road was vacated in the 1980's. The owner doesn't have an easement to go across the property. The property to the North is being very difficult such as blocking access. The owner to the South gave an easement. The city maintains the gravel road there now. The owner of this property wants to pave it at their own costs. He asked if this is something we should maintain. He said we could pave it and have maintenance agreements with all owners. He hates to give up the ROW, if we could keep it and they just maintain it would be better. If they are willing to do it and we got agreement of the other two property owners, that would be a win. It would cut down on dust. McCoy said it is really odd that it got vacated. Kaltsas said we have looked at it with our attorney and their title and attorney did the same, but it did get vacated. It's up to them to go to court to get an easement. We could keep the ROW to a licensed private street. We wouldn't touch it, plow it or maintain it. We would want the other owners to agree to it being paved though.

4. Adjourn

The Workshop adjourned at 8:42 a.m.

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Respectfully Submitted,  
Amber Simon/ Recording Secretary