

Special Wahpeton City Council Meeting with the Wahpeton Park Board
March 12, 2020
5:15 p.m.

Council Present: Mayor Dale, Bajumpaa, Bohn, McNary, Miller, and Remily
Absent: Wateland

Park Board Present: President Gripentrog, Klocke, and Schreiner
Absent: Grochow and Tobias

Staff Present: Beyer, Broadland, DeVries, Huwe, and Lies.

Community Recreation Center Committee and Members of the Public: Robert Schuler, Jay Schuler, Mike Yaggie, Stacia Henningsen, Korey Skovholt, Collette Barton, Scott Nicholson, Kory Kaste, Tyler Gripentrog and Frank Stanko

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order by Mayor Dale and President Gripentrog.

PRESENTATION OF THE THREE RIVERS ACTIVITY COMPLEX COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTER

Robert Schuler reviewed a powerpoint presentation describing the project to include two sheets of ice for hockey and figure skating, a community play park designed for young children, an indoor turf training area for multiple sports, a gymnastics area, a walking track, two basketball courts and art rooms. The project is intended to address three primary goals: provide a destination for families and individuals to move here, a community center that provides a destination that serves people ages 1-100+, and a destination for creating a sense of belonging, creating relationships and a sense of community. Two sheets of ice would alleviate the need for hockey and skating practices from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. The proposed site location is on MN Hwy. 75 facilitated by a donation from Mike Yaggie utilizing the former Mycogen Building. The total proposed investment is \$15+ million in public money in addition to \$5-\$7 million in private funding/donations.

Jay Schuler provided a handout depicting population loss of North Dakota cities 1990-2015 noting Wahpeton incurred significant losses while the larger metro areas gained population. Schuler reiterated the importance of population growth/sustainability to maintain and attract workforce. Schuler further remarked the value of community amenities in measuring the quality of life and the attraction of young residents to rural communities. Schuler believes Millennials and Generation Z look for a desirable place to live then seek jobs. He has met with management of St. Francis Medical Center, Wil-Rich and ComDel who all feel likewise.

Mike Yaggie stated a recreation center is an unmet need in the Wahpeton-Breckenridge community, and the donation of the former Mycogen site is intended to initiate a long term investment in the community. Adding, the site donation has attracted other local donations for site development. The Yaggie Family is committed to provide site and dirt work. Mike said he grew up in Breckenridge and raised his family in Wahpeton and considers us a single town.

Wayne Gripentrog expressed he is a strong supporter of recreation programs and facilities in the two communities. He questioned the consequences of moving hockey and figure skating from the Stern Arena, stating the original donation from the Stern Family included a reversion clause that it be turned over to the Bureau of Indian Affairs should the facility fail to serve as an ice arena.

Don Bajumpaa questioned City Attorney Steve Lies if Wahpeton sales tax funds could be used to finance debt for a facility constructed in Minnesota. Lies replied, it is an unanswered question at this point. An additional question was posed regarding the current revenues from charitable gaming in North Dakota utilized by the hockey and gymnastics programs ó would they be able to follow the groups across the state line. Devry Klocke asked if the Breckenridge City Council has discussed this yet. Robert Schuler responded they adopted a resolution on Jan. 30, 2020 to proceed with a 1% local sales tax. Schuler also explained the Minnesota legislative process requires approval from the state level prior to a local vote on levying a sales tax.

Wayne Beyer distributed an itemized list of projects, amenities and improvements related to public recreation; the list includes 40 items ranging from zoo exhibits, campground improvements, a recreation center to ball field renovations. Beyer explained current priorities in the Park Board's strategic plan include 1st and 2nd Street sanitary and storm sewer projects, John Randall Baseball Field parking lot and Chahinkapa Park roads. Beyer thanked the volunteer citizen group for initiating a ground swelling movement to improve recreational amenities in our community.

Joe Schreiner questioned the cost share allocations, observing if Wahpeton is expected to fund a majority of the complex why would it be located in Breckenridge?

Don Bajumpaa encouraged exploration of partnerships to leverage any funds dedicated to the project. Bajumpaa also reiterated the need for correct, accurate information regarding project details, impacts on current facilities and operating plans. (Bajumpaa exited the meeting at 5:55 p.m.)

Kelly McNary supports the recreation center concept and would like to see it proceed.

Schreiner asked about the plans for funding ongoing operations, repairs and maintenance. Robert Schuler explained the financial plan includes user fees and a reserve fund for operating shortfalls or future improvements.

Tiana Bohn asked about identifying obstacles and opportunities. Bohn is concerned about the liabilities of a \$14 million sales tax bond issue and potential opportunity costs. Maintenance of current facilities are not adequately funded. Bohn reiterated the combination of sales tax and users fees may not be enough to keep the facility sustainable. Dale added, planning for operating expenses and revenue shortfalls needs to be addressed. He confirmed with Beyer that parks and recreation departments in North Dakota manage their respective Recreation Centers.

Jeremy Remily inquired about the estimated useful life of the Chahinkapa Park Pool and future plans. Beyer explained the current pool is 40 years old, it may last another 20 years or it could experience a catastrophic repair in two years. Gripentrog stated one of the best performance years in recent history showed the pool expenses exceeding revenues by \$20,000. Gripentrog also added the Park Board levies the maximum number of mills allowed now; they cannot manage additional assets without additional revenue.

Perry Miller asked what are the hurdles to proceeding with the project. Lies explained building ownership in another state on land not contiguous with the city may require North Dakota Legislative action. Lies referred to Huwe on the current status of bonding. Huwe responded Wahpeton's debt obligations cannot be determined until ownership and operational funding commitments are defined.

Korey Skovholt explained Three Rivers Gymnastics is dependent on gaming revenues, they were informed by the State of North Dakota if they move to Minnesota they would lose their North Dakota charitable gaming revenue. Beyer added the arena user groups also utilize charitable gaming revenues.

Jay Schuler thanked everyone for their enthusiasm ó they will continue to work on issues for clarification as the project proceeds. Schuler would like to see this to a vote of the people as soon as possible. Mike Yaggie added the project needs to be a joint partnership of the two towns as one community working together or the population will continue to decline. Robert Schuler explained the Minnesota Legislature wants to see a letter of support confirming Wahpeton will move forward with the project.

Miller asked if Mike Allmendinger could do the feasibility study. Gripentrog asked if it was built in Wahpeton would it be an easier process. Beyer explained the Dickinson Recreation Center was presented to voters seven time before it passed. Beyer asked if the planned facility could be expanded in phases to add amenities such as indoor tennis, pickle ball, and swimming. Chris DeVries added the Wahpeton Community Development Corporation in willing to donate land for a Wahpeton facility.

Mayor Dale and President Gripentrog thanked the participants for their time, next steps are to be determined.

Adjournment

Motion by Bohn, to adjourn to adjourn City Council and motion by Schreiner, seconded by Klocke to adjourn the Park Board Meeting at 6:20 p.m.

Mayor Steve Dale

Darcie Huwe, Finance Director/Auditor