

2.02: Discuss Policy Statement on Nowthen Boulevard Access and Exterior Development Boundary for Harvest Estates; Case of N.I.K. Management, Inc.

Community Development Director Gladhill noted the attendance of Planning Commission Chair Levine.

Community Development Director Gladhill reviewed the staff report, three alternatives for consideration, and explained the purpose of this case is to confirm policy direction of the Planning Commission and Parks & Recreation Commission for Sketch Plan for Harvest Estates, a proposed 45-lot detached, single-family subdivision on the former Municipal Center campus located at 15153 Nowthen Boulevard NW.

Community Development Director Gladhill advised of Nowthen Boulevard outcomes should it be closed, noting it may still be worthwhile to have a trail connection from the proposed development to Nowthen Boulevard. He displayed aerial views depicting the driveway constructed in place and another with the driveway realigned to better connect with the street to the west. He advised that both have implications with right-of-way acquisition and County Road improvements such as turn lanes.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated if the roadway is closed, all streets would operate at acceptable levels of service that comply with engineering standards. He addressed the significant cost to leave this access open and the Anoka County Highway Department's recommendation for full closure of this access.

Community Development Director Gladhill presented the project proforma, noting this site is subject to a Purchase Agreement between N.I.K. Management and the City. He pointed out the proforma goes negative, in varying degrees, to keep the access open depending on type of access and County Road enhancements. Staff is currently researching the use of HRA dollars to cover part of the costs.

Community Development Director Gladhill advised of staff's additional discussions related to Highway 47 and requested Council direction whether it supports staff exploring additional options for that node.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated the second issue addressed by the Planning Commission was the development boundary to address density transition even though it is not required by Code. He indicated the Planning Commission recommends the City not close the existing access to Nowthen Boulevard and that the proposed development modify the northern exterior development boundary as illustrated in the document and outlined in red.

Community Development Director Gladhill advised of the discussion by the Parks and Recreation Commission relating to whether a park should be located within this project or nearby area. He stated the Parks and Recreation Commission has found that park needs are met and recommends the City require cash in lieu of land and not require a City park within the proposed development.

Councilmember Development Director Gladhill reviewed the policy questions open for Council direction and asked whether staff should explore options related to Highway 47.

Councilmember Kuzma asked if the access is closed, would the City have to acquire property.

Community Development Director Gladhill answered in the affirmative and used a slide to point out the private property that would need to be acquired for right-of-way purposes under both driveway alignment options. He explained that property owner has indicated the asking price would be approximately \$65,000 for that parcel.

Councilmember Riley noted that would be to access a building the City does not intend to use beyond a year or two.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that is correct; however, there are utilities in that temporary access easement that would have to be relocated or abandoned.

Councilmember Riley stated the Park and Recreation Commission has consistently recommended no City park in this project, which he supports.

Councilmember Johns concurred, noting the close location of Solstice Park. She stated that 'park' may mean a trail or other amenity.

Councilmember Shryock concurred.

Mayor Strommen stated she does not necessarily disagree with that recommendation but at this point in time, the neighborhood has a lot of small children and there is no place for them to go on their own. She agreed that will change over time, but felt it was worth discussion in how to provide opportunities for children to have outdoor play time without a scheduled visit accompanied by an adult. She asked if the Council wants to provide those opportunities or if that is being provided in another way.

Councilmember Shryock stated she lives off Emerald Pond Park in an urban area where a lot of residents, because they are busy, have their own play equipment so children play in that way. She felt it was almost an automatic given that people provide their own play equipment in their yards. She stated there is other infrastructure to be considered, such as trails, noting most of the proposed yards will be of reasonable size and able to accommodate private play structures. Councilmember Shryock felt that should suffice at this point, so she does not support requiring a dedicated City park within this development.

Planning Commission Chair Levine stated the Planning Commission wrestled with that point and came up with the same conclusion and that the Elementary School is across the street and provides a larger-sized play area for younger and up through teen-aged children. He noted the school has very nice play equipment.

Mayor Strommen agreed the Elementary School is an incredible resource and the Council will need to address how to assure safe crossing of Highway 5 to access that play equipment. She stated if that is supported, she would want the City to address that concern with the County.

Councilmember Johns pointed out that Solstice Park is not that far away and does not involve the need to cross Highway 5. She suggested using resources to create safe access to Solstice Park, creating connection for a park experience for younger children.

Community Development Director Gladhill noted the location of a City-owned outlot that could be used to increase pedestrian connectivity to Solstice Park.

Councilmember Williams stated she respects the thoughtful recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Commission, noting the City's larger parks provide a recreational experience for its residents.

Councilmember Kuzma stated because his children are older, he had not thought about the issue of park experience for younger children and he also respects the recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau noted that requiring park land may also impact the financial feasibility for the developer to move forward with this development.

Councilmember Williams asked about staff's comment on an encroachment use of private property.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that was a discussion topic raised at the meeting, that the City maintains the stormwater pond at the old Municipal Center. He stated the idea was more than maintaining the stormwater pond but whether additional density transitioning could be created.

Councilmember Riley stated with density transitioning, it most often involves going from large lots to small lots but in this case it is the opposite. He noted the abutting lots would be larger so he thinks it odd that this is even being discussed. Councilmember Riley stated those property owners could have that discussion with the developer.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau stated the consensus of the Council is that the City not change the development boundary as presented by N.I.K. Management. He asked the Council to next discuss access to Nowthen Boulevard.

Councilmember Williams supported closing the access completely as having fewer driveways would be better. In addition, if the traffic goes to 157th for access, there will be school crossing guards in that location. If left open, she supported aligning it with the existing roadway.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau asked about the benefits of keeping the access open versus closing it.

Planning Commission Chair Levine stated the Planning Commission looked at traffic and decided using the frontage road would not be a viable option. They also addressed additional traffic on Highway 47 if the access to Highway 5 is closed. He pointed out that Highway 47 does not function well during rush hours and it was felt that adding traffic will worsen that situation. Because of that, the Planning Commission felt access to Highway 5, in some fashion, should remain. The Planning Commission also addressed whether closing the access would create additional safety issues.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau stated he reviewed the Planning Commission meeting minutes and did not see mention of the option to use Helium Street NW and Alpine Drive to access Highway 5, which he thinks may be a reasonable alternative.

Planning Commission Chair Levine stated that was discussed and it was felt the vehicles would go to Highway 47 anyway as most traffic heads east.

Mayor Strommen agreed drivers prefer to make right-hand turning movements.

Councilmember Johns stated it seems if they are using Highway 5, they are using it to get to Highway 47 so there will just be more vehicles stacking and merging whether at Alpine Drive or Xkimo Street NW.

Planning Commission Chair Levine stated the issue is that the stacking will start at Bills.

Councilmember Johns stated vehicles will also stack at the school entrances. She stated the other issue is with safety should there be two points of access.

Fire Chief Kapler concurred that most often, more points of access are better, noting there is another access on Helium Street NW. He stated with regard to safety, he advised it is an adequate route should access to Highway 5 be closed.

Councilmember Shryock stated with access on Highway 47 versus Highway 5, she thinks that if people are not comfortable with Highway 47, they will start using Highway 5 as traffic will find its own path. With regard to a driveway access to Highway 5, she noted that having another driveway that close to the school will create an additional obstacle, impacting student pedestrians. She favored closing the access, limiting access points and conflicts with students.

Councilmember Kuzma asked about emergency vehicle access and potential impact for City plows access should the access be closed.

Fire Chief Kapler stated there is no problem with access from the Fire Station.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer stated there is no problem with access for City snow plows/equipment.

Councilmember Kuzma stated the neighborhood supported houses over a data center and indicated they were comfortable if additional traffic was created. He stated that is a result of what the

neighborhood wanted so the Council needs to determine the best method to address safety. He supported closing the access.

Mayor Strommen stated most often she supports keeping access points open but in this case, Highway 5 is a safety challenge and as Councilmember Shryock pointed out, the school is in close proximity and has multiple access points. In addition, Highway 5 traffic stacks at the points of access, unlike stacking for Highway 47. She stated she is uncomfortable with an uncontrolled intersection and creating additional traffic at an access so close to the school unless the City has a conversation with the County in how to address safety.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau stated there have been many conversations about the importance of addressing the needs of Highways 47 and 5.

Councilmember Riley asked if Anoka County is totally opposed to an entrance but would allow a right-in/right-out at City cost.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated Anoka County strongly opposes a full access but if it were opened, it would need proper safety investments and the County may consider a right-in/right-out at the City's costs.

Planning Commission Chair Levine noted that a right-in/right-out option does not help the situation much and when the Planning Commission was talking about it, it was with full access.

Councilmember Riley stated the City wants to work with Anoka County, but the City has already pushed back on the option of having medians. He noted the Planning Commission's recommendation may not be possible if it is not supported by Anoka County.

Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama stated he talked with Anoka County who opposes any access whether full or right-in/right-out; however, if opened would select right-in/right-out. He stated Anoka County indicated a willingness to work with the City and the biggest issue with Anoka County is safety.

Mayor Strommen asked if a meeting could be held with the Anoka County Commissioners and Anoka County Highway staff prior to the Council making a final decision. She felt it would be worth the time investment to have a conversation on a solution that accomplishes the City's goals rather than only considering this highway corridor in a piecemeal manner.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated the City Engineer has started those discussions with the Anoka County Assistant Engineer and staff can come up with a 'game plan' going forward.

City Engineer Westby agreed that Highway 5 is an ongoing concern. He stated it is low on Anoka County's priority list; however, if the City requested a corridor study the County indicated they would consider it.

Mayor Strommen suggested this also be addressed with Anoka County Commissioners Look and Schulte to assure the corridor is addressed holistically rather than intersection-by-intersection.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau pointed out that the closing of the access is the only option in the sale analysis that shows a gain for the community in the sale of the property. He supported holding a broader discussion on having a corridor plan, noting however, that may not make the City want to move forward with the access.

Councilmember Riley asked if the Planning Commission reviewed the analysis on cost implications.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated they did but it was an early version without realtor commissions and contingency costs.

City Administrator Ulrich stated on Friday, staff will be meeting with Anoka County Commissioners Look and Schulte and can raise the need to better plan for this corridor to assure safety is addressed.

Councilmember Riley agreed the Council needs to consider the smartest ideas for the right outcome and one of those relates to the dollars. He stated there is a stark difference in how the City comes out depending on the option taken. If the Council supports closure, he thinks staff should look at Helium Street NW, which is inadequate at this time to accommodate additional traffic.

Mayor Strommen stated the financial piece is important but cautioned the Council that the City will get one shot at this access and in the future, if it is found to be important for the corridor, it will be much more difficult to get it back after the development is configured. Rather than solely being driven by dollars, she felt the Council needed to be sure its planning is solid and the best plan for the corridor.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau asked how many homes are being proposed.

Community Development Director Gladhill answered 45 homes.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau stated the discussion is how to mitigate access and safety issues for 45 homes, but this is not a gateway development that opens to additional neighborhoods.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated there is potential for future connections but it would involve additional right-of-way access. He stated staff will raise that conversation with Anoka County.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau indicated the consensus of the Council is to address the need for a larger corridor study with Anoka County and to move forward under premise it will be a closed access.