

**PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Public Works Committee conducted a regular meeting on Tuesday, June 18, 2024, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Chairperson Debra Musgrove
 Councilmember Chelsee Howell
 Councilmember Michael Olson

Also Present: City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby
 Assistant City Engineer Joe Feriancek
 Civil Engineer IV Leonard Linton

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Musgrove called the regular meeting of the Public Works Committee to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

There was none.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Chairperson Musgrove requested to move Item 6.01 to be considered after approval of the minutes.

Motion by Councilmember Olson, seconded by Councilmember Howell, to approve the agenda, as amended.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Musgrove, Councilmembers Olson and Howell. Voting No: None.

4. APPROVE MINUTES

4.01: Approve May 21, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Motion by Councilmember Howell, seconded by Councilmember Olson, to approve the following minutes:

Regular Meeting Minutes dated May 21, 2024

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Musgrove, Councilmembers Howell and Olson. Voting No: None.

6. COMMITTEE / STAFF INPUT

6.01: Receive Updates on Improvement Projects, Studies, and Items of Interest

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby provided background information on DNR wetland 114P. He explained that when lots abutting the wetland were platted in the early 1990's, the properties were developed to protect homes from flooding. He commented that this is currently the fifth wettest spring on record and that the wetland is obviously full of stormwater. He stated that the City has been working with the DNR for years to manage the water level in this wetland and last year came to an agreement on an outlet structure that would help to manage the water level within the wetland. He recognized that the last few years have been incredibly dry and therefore the level of the wetland has been low and having water in portions of backyards is most likely new for some homeowners. He played a video showing how the new outlet control structure functions, showing that water is freely flowing through the structure and downstream of the structure. He stated that staff are monitoring things to ensure that the structure does not become plugged, and no one should have water inside their homes.

Councilmember Olson asked the level of the outlet control.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby provided additional details on the outlet structure.

Civil Engineer IV Linton stated that the elevation of the weir was set using information from the DNR based on the historical ordinary high water (OHW) level prior to development. He stated that around the time the homes were constructed an outlet pipe was installed without regard for the historical OHW level, and that pipe was approximately 1.7 feet below the OHW level. He stated that in the Spring of 2023 the City installed the new outlet structure with a weir elevation of 857.9.

Jenny Larson, 5790 145th Court NW, asked when the old outlet pipe was installed. She stated that they built their home in 2004 when the water level was similar to what it is now. She stated that as the years have progressed the wetland was drier and drier and filled with vegetation. She believed that there should be accountability as the lower outlet pipe was in place for the past 20 years. She stated that people have purchased homes with a false sense of what their land is because the wetland has been dry and now has returned to its original level, leaving yards wet that have not been wet.

Donna Wippler, 5770 145th Court NW, commented that she lives next door to the Larsons, and the water is very high. She stated that they have lost a lot of lawn and many of their trees are in standing water. She commented that there is basically a river going through their backyard. She recognized that the water is nice but there is also risk to their trees.

Mark Bollman, 14600 Junkite Street NW, stated that he took a stick to the culvert today. He stated that he has been walking that path for 24 years. He stated that today the water level is at 36 inches, which means 5 inches are above the threshold. He estimated that the old threshold was about 10 inches. He stated that the creek having 3 feet of water is way too high. He commented that yards

were flooded long before the threshold is reached. He believed that the threshold should be lowered 12 or 13 inches. He commented that his daughter also lives in the neighborhood and at her rear lot line the water level is 12 inches. He believed that the DNR was going to raise the level of the wetland by 4 or 5 inches, and this is much too high.

Civil Engineer IV Linton commented that before all the homes were built the DNR established the normal water level of the wetland, which is the OHW mark. He stated that the new outlet structure matches that OHW mark. He stated that because of all the rain there is extra water coming through the structure.

Mr. Bollman asked why the structure was not built with more flexibility such as flashboards that could be pulled out to drop the water level accordingly.

Eric McBroom, 5771 145th Court NW, agreed that a few weeks ago was probably the best reading that they have had. He was unsure when the water level was increased.

Civil Engineer IV Linton commented that the outlet structure was constructed in Spring of 2023.

Mr. McBroom asked if all the increased water is then a result of the rain this Spring.

Civil Engineer IV Linton replied that is true.

Mr. Bollman commented that the threshold is too high.

Mr. McBroom commented that he was losing yard a few weeks ago when that reading was done.

Ms. Larson asked if the wetland could be dredged to create more storage room. She commented that with the higher water the wildlife is coming back, which is great, but perhaps dredging would assist to keep water in the pond and not in yards.

Civil Engineer IV Linton replied that he is unsure the purpose that dredging would serve at this point.

Chairperson Musgrove asked if a wetland could legally be dredged.

Civil Engineer IV Linton replied that it is not legal to dredge a wetland.

Chairperson Musgrove stated that she spoke with Becky Wozney from the Anoka Conservation District who provided additional input on cattails noting that if the water level stays high the cattails will not survive into the Fall.

Tim Hoyt, 5741 145th Court NW, commented that he is thankful that the residents have the opportunity to speak tonight. He asked if there would be documentation of the conversations the City has had with the DNR related to the water level that could be shared with area residents. He commented that he reviewed the original Council minutes and it seems that the City made the decision to raise the water level four inches higher than the level of record and the DNR approved

that, but did not require it. He asked how the City is allowed to damage properties, noting that if a resident were to cause that damage to a neighbor, they would be required to mitigate it by code. He commented that his backyard is inundated when it had been dry for the last 6 years. He stated that the portion of his backyard that is wet is not within floodplain or even an easement. He stated that if he brings fill in to his property, that would cause more damage to his neighbors' properties. He then referenced the trail on the east side of the wetland which, according to Councilmember Specht last year, the trail is being raised to prevent the trail from flooding due to raising the water elevation in wetland 114P. He asked why residents are being told that the water level is due to rain when the trail project was completed in order to mitigate for raising water levels with a new outlet structure. His final request was for the City to revisit the decision to raise the outlet structure as it has negatively impacted his private property. He stated that it seems that the City listened to people downstream that requested higher water levels and not those that did not want it. He requested that the City make changes to the outlet to lower the water level in the wetland, or provide residents with funds to mitigate and alleviate what this has created. If funds are being used to raise a trail due to the negative impacts of raising the outlet, it is only logical that funds should be available to assist negatively impacted property owners as well.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated that staff will work to provide the requested documentation but it will take a little time.

Ali Bollman, 5731 145th Court NW, commented that she now has over half of her yard under water with up to two feet of standing water, which includes vegetation and trees. She stated that she just purchased their home in September and the property value was assessed based on the land that was there. She stated that she was also denied flood insurance because of the historical data provided by FEMA. She stated that the water is currently about 15 feet from her home and is concerned with the flooding that is happening. She stated that it seems that the project was completed without survey and input from the residents that are directly affected. She stated that she also spoke with Ms. Wozney who stated that precipitation levels are only a few inches above average so if we have a typical winter she would have concerns with future water levels. She felt that not all aspects were considered when completing this project and therefore the increased water level is a result of negligence of the City. She did not believe that there should be standing water in her yard.

Mr. Bollman commented that ducks and geese require dry land to nest and with the current elevation there is no dry area to nest.

Mr. McBroom commented that it has forced the ducks and geese into yards.

Ms. Bollman asked if sandbags could be provided to prevent flooding should the rain continue at its current levels.

Mr. McBroom recognized that the water level change was made last year and asked if it naturally took this long to fill.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby commented that there have been three years of drought conditions prior to this year, so there was very little water to start with. He commented that the heavy rains began in March of this year.

Diane Anderson, 5750 142nd Avenue NW, commented that she has lived in her property for 50 years and where the water is now is where it was when they first moved in and was like that for several years. She stated that the water has fluctuated over wet and dry conditions throughout the years. She recognized the frustration people would have that have not seen this water level in the past. She stated that in the early 1990's the whole pond changed, and a lot of wildlife left the area. She stated that they had always been told that the ponds to the north drain into this wetland. She asked for details on the drainage patterns on the ponds to the north. She recognized that it is hard when some people want water and others do not.

Ms. Bollman commented that she likes the water, but within the basin and not her yard.

Ms. Anderson commented that they have had seedlings get 20 feet high near the water line but then are lost when the water levels increase again. She stated that the outlet is functioning as it should be. She asked if there is something preventing the water from flowing as it should.

Mr. Bollman replied that the outlet is preventing the water from leaving as it should.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained how water flows from the north to the south through the wetland complexes. He stated that there are not defined, maintained swales that connect the wetlands and instead the water overflows from one wetland to the next.

Mr. Hoyt asked if anyone has been at the City since all the decisions were made with the DNR.

Civil Engineer IV Linton commented that he spoke with the DNR but they were unable to attend this meeting on short notice.

Mr. Hoyt commented that he has not found any documentation that the City had to construct the outlet.

Civil Engineer IV Linton commented that he has correspondence from the DNR stating that the City had to construct the outlet structure. He stated that he does not have record of when the old outlet pipe was installed and upon checking by the DNR, the pipe was found to be incorrectly located. He commented that the government does not always keep the best records.

Mr. Hoyt commented that is untrue because records should be stored on Laserfiche. He stated that perhaps that is unique to Ramsey, but there are cities incorporated a long time ago that still have accurate records. He asked who required the pipe and who agreed to the pipe location. He stated that someone from the DNR has to be able to provide the answer.

Mr. Bollman asked if it would be possible to get the overflow dropped by 12 inches, as that would significantly help with the issue of flooding while still keeping water in the pond.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby commented that staff will speak with the DNR, do a document search, and review correspondence from previous conversations. He stated that hopefully the rain will stop, and water levels will recede. He stated that the ground is saturated,

and the groundwater levels are up. He stated that this is the first time there has been a robust discussion on this and staff will research property records, noting that the permits for each of the homes that were constructed contain surveys. He recognized that records prior to 2000 can be spotty. He stated that perhaps a lower elevation could be agreed upon but staff will need to search available data to determine what a reasonable elevation would be to minimize standing water in yards. He stated that the structure that was installed is concrete and while it does not have removable boards, adjustments can be made to drop the water level, if that is approved by the DNR and City Council. He commented that the City obviously does not want prolonged periods of standing water in yards that will kill trees.

Mr. McBroom asked how residents will stay informed on this process.

Chairperson Musgrove stated that additional information can be brought back to the next Public Works Committee meeting. She stated that they will continue to monitor the water levels as they have not yet had a full year of data to collect.

Councilmember Howell recognized that some residents have been there a long time and have seen these kinds of conditions, while others have not. She was hopeful that there could be something that they could do but recognized that would depend on the data that they obtain, and information received from the DNR.

Jeremy Larson, 5790 145th Court NW, commented that for the last ten years the big pond has been low and filling with vegetation that takes up space. He stated that if that vegetation that has built up were removed, perhaps that would create additional storage space for the water, and it would act more like a pond. He stated that if the water were then kept at that level, it would keep the vegetation from reemerging and taking up space where water should be stored.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby commented that vegetation management is allowable, but dredging cannot occur in wetlands. He commented that even if the cattails were removed, there could still be excess water backing up into yards.

Ms. Larson commented that the damage was caused by whoever put the pipe in to begin with as that caused improper management of the water level. She believed that the damage was done by the City of Ramsey.

Ms. Wippler asked how long her yard and trees can be sitting in water before permanent damage is done. She asked if waiting for the next meeting would be too long.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby commented that depends on the species of tree but that staff will work quickly with the DNR to investigate options.

Ms. Bollman commented that she has had trees 40 to 60 feet tall that have been in standing water since May. She hoped that the City would remedy that issue if permanent damage is done.

5. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

5.01: Consider Recommending City Council Ordering a Request for Proposals for Sewer and Water Connection to Fire Station No. 1

Assistant City Engineer Feriancek reviewed the staff report and recommendation from staff to recommend City Council order a Request for Proposals for sewer and water connections to Fire Station No. 1.

Motion by Councilmember Olson, seconded by Councilmember Howell, to recommend City Council order a Request for Proposals for sewer and water connections to Fire Station No. 1.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Musgrove, Councilmembers Olson and Howell. Voting No: None.

6. COMMITTEE / STAFF INPUT (Continued)

6.01: Receive Updates on Improvement Projects, Studies, and Items of Interest

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby provided an update on current and proposed City, County, and MnDOT improvement projects and studies, and on other items of interest to the Committee.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby summarized staff's intentions to resolve the wetland 114P standing water concerns. Staff will move with all due haste to work with the DNR to resolve this issue to limit the amount of time that trees are sitting in standing water. If needed, the City could core a hole in the weir to reduce water levels.

Councilmember Olson asked and received confirmation that the weir in the outlet control structure for Wetland 114P is at the OHW mark specified by the DNR.

Civil Engineer IV Linton commented that the DNR wants the water at that level to provide better habitat for wetland plants.

Councilmember Olson asked how quickly the water would recede if the rain stopped.

Civil Engineer IV Linton commented that if you pull the plug on a bathtub, the water drains out but if the faucet is turned back on, that works against you.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby commented that if the rain were to stop, the water level should recede fairly quickly, within a matter of days.

Councilmember Olson asked if there is any idea of how high the water level is currently, above the weir.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby commented that the resident measured the front edge of the weir as the threshold and measured five inches above that.

Civil Engineer IV Linton commented that the upstream drainage area goes north of Alpine Drive, behind Ramsey Elementary and therefore all that will still flow down.

Councilmember Olson asked and received confirmation that the soil in this area is sandy and should drain quickly.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby replied that the bottom of the wetland is silty and therefore would not drain as fast.

Councilmember Howell asked if there is any chance that the DNR made a mistake or that different data points could be used to determine elevations.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby commented that it is most likely that the DNR used historical data. He commented that City staff's intent was not to have standing water in backyards at all times.

Civil Engineer IV Linton confirmed that staff will continue to work with the DNR in an attempt to resolve things.

6.02: Review Future Topics Calendar

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby provided an update on the status of some of the items on the list that could potentially be removed. He clarified no plans exist to raise the trail along the east side of wetland 114P to accommodate higher water levels as stated by a resident earlier, but confirmed that the trail is in need of repairs. He stated repairing this segment of trail is a low priority since it closely parallels streets therefore Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood plans to discuss options for repairing this trail, or removing it from the trail system, with the Park and Recreation Commission in July.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Howell, seconded by Councilmember Olson, to adjourn the Public Works Committee meeting.

Motion carried.

The regular meeting of the Public Works Committee adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Bruce Westby
City Engineer/Public Works Director

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.