

MINUTES OF THE OKOBOJI CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON DECEMBER 14, 2021

Mayor VanderWoude called the meeting to order at 6:00PM on December 14, 2021. Councilmembers Andres, Delperdang, Hentges, Mendenhall and Robinson were present. Others present were City Administrator Michael Meyers, Deputy City Clerk Jill Verdoorn, Police Chief Jason Petersen, City Engineer Brad Beck, City Attorney David Stein, Fire Chief Chris Yungbluth, Sara Anderson, Steve Anderson, Blain Andrea, Joe Andres, Darwin Bishop, Brad Bormann, George Bower, Seth Boyes, Collin Clark, Barb Clayton, Joe Clayton, Julie Delperdang, Steve Dulin, Mike Ehret, Bob Faulkner, Daryn Fischels, John Franken, Jen Haning, Mike Hoepfner, Doug Holle, Kae Hoppe, Tony Lazarowicz, Todd Huju, Aaron Jones, Tom Kuhlman, Keith Marra, Martin Marten, Melina Marten, Alyssa Massner, Brock Massner, Connie Mataloni, Dick Mataloni, Dick Mau, Susan Mau, Craig Miner, Greg Mulder, Greg Mulder, Joe Newlin, Denise Norland, Butch Parks, Phil Petersen, Erin Reed, Herman Richter, Carolyn Rossic, Dave Rowley, Kris Rowley, Dan Sanders, Dakin Schultz, Steve Schwaller, Paul Sieh, Jim Sikora, Kath Slater, Neil Slater, Chrissy Soole, Jeff Soole, Lee Sorenson, Cathy Thee, Jeff Thee, Bob Thoreson, Rob Tvedte, Shane Tymkowicz, Rachel VandeBrake, Jill Verdoorn, Garret Vugteveen, Kevin Vugteveen, Kim Wermersen, and John Wills.

NEW BUSINESS

Mayor VanderWoude opened a public hearing to consider bids for the Bobcat rims. There were no bids. No action taken.

Mayor VanderWoude opened discussion with the Iowa Department of Transportation pertaining to the proposed Highway 71 reconstruction project. VanderWoude thanked the IDOT for attending the meeting and looked forward to a collaborative effort between the City, the IDOT, and those in attendance.

Doug Holle, presenting with the IDOT, provided an initial walkthrough of the project along with four options for staging and traffic direction. The proposed project would extend the length from the south end of the City of Arnolds Park to just north of Brooks Golf Course. Holle explained that certain commitments have already been made, including no construction between Memorial Day and Labor Day, traffic restoration over the summer months as well as winter months, through traffic detoured, access to properties, and minimization of traffic delays.

Holle explained all factors that come into play when discussing phasing opportunities. These factors included property access, right-of-way impact, traffic delays, contractor access to the worksite, construction duration, utility impacts, and overall project cost.

Holle presented four options for potential staging within the City of Okoboji. Those four options were: Option 1: Maintain two lanes of traffic; Option 2: Two-way traffic using one lane traffic signal; Option 3: Short-term full closures; and Option 4: One lane, one way traffic. Option 4 was the original scope of the project which included a southbound one-way route on Highway 71.

Holle explained option 1 would include southbound traffic in the northbound lane with 11' of temporary paving past that to allow for two lanes of traffic. The following construction season the lanes would switch. In order to add temporary paving there potentially could be conflicts including several utilities, retaining walls, transmission poles, and the like. There could also be drainage issues and runoff issues associated with it. Additionally there could be challenges of access at all locations.

The favorable aspects of this would be a direct route between the cities and easy to direct non-local traffic through town. The challenges would be crash potential, property impact, traffic back ups, delays in EMS, narrow lanes, extended timeframes, rain runoff, and increased costs.

Holle explained option 2 would include breaking the project up into segments to utilize one lane and use a signal to work traffic through. The construction would happen in phases and move along the corridor. In this scenario driveways to impacted properties would need to be temporarily closed. The favorable aspects of this would be direct route between the cities and easy to direct non-local traffic through town. The challenges would be no driveway access in construction zones, large traffic delays, vehicles stacking through adjacent signaled intersections, and extended construction time.

Holle explained option 3 as a hybrid approach including full closures. The project would be broken up in segments which would allow the contractor to get in there as quickly as possible which would help with scheduling and construction duration. This would rely on local access roads to get around. Certain areas could be signaled and some would be fully closed. The favorable aspects of this would be one time disruptions in front of businesses, reduction in construction duration (compared to option 1 and option 2). The challenges would be no driveway access within construction zone, increased traffic on local roads, and vehicles stacking through adjacent signaled intersections.

Holle explained option 4 as to first construct the intersections then start the mainline of the highway starting one way access from Sanborn Avenue moving south. The favorable aspects of this would be shorter construction season, free left turn/right turn movements, reduced backup, and reduced cost. The challenges would be the necessity to utilize Highway 86 and other local routes to traverse around the lakes.

Holle advised that moving forward, the IDOT was looking to build consensus and finalized the preferred phasing.

Councilmember Delperdang asked how the road would change regardless of the direction which the Council took. Holle explained that the footprint of Highway 71 significantly would not change in Okoboji and that it is strictly reconstruction.

Councilmember Hentges asked if this project involved redoing the entire road bed. Holle advised that there would be subbase restoration but largely the roadbed would not be changing.

Councilmember Andres advised that there was a lot of concern pertaining to the bridge. Andres inquired about two way traffic on the bridge and create flexibility in each City for routing. Andres expressed concern about EMS responses if the only route were to take Highway 86. Andres felt there were solutions to everything if we could figure out the causeway.

Holle explained that if potential delays in construction are something the communities can handle and work with, they were open to brainstorming ideas.

Councilmember Andres again advised the bridge is where the heartburn is specifically referencing landscapers, construction crews, electricians, and all the working individuals in the Iowa Great Lakes during the months it would be shut down.

Shane Tymkowicz, presenting with the IDOT, advised there are all sorts of options. Tymkowicz advised that the idea of going southbound was it would help EMS respond quicker to all points to the south adding the longer would be on the way back when things would be stabilized more.

Councilmember Hentges inquired about signals with EMS sensors. Tymkowicz advised that those certainly are an option but cars would still need to work through the one lane and hard to tell where the EMS vehicle is stacked in traffic.

Butch Parks advised that he felt the IDOT should do nothing and that the roads were fine.

An audience member inquired about why the IDOT was doing this project. Tymkowicz advised on the pavement condition and the repetitive patching that has been done to date.

Kim Wermersen inquired if things would be one-lane in the summer months. Tymkowicz advised that summer would be open reminded that construction was planned for available windows in the fall and spring.

Joe Andres asked if there were penalties in place for getting things done on time. Tymkowicz advised that yes there was.

Kae Hoppe felt that liquidated damages can sometimes backfire and that the State should not rush the contractor or the contractor feel like they have to cut corners to make deadlines.

Dan Sanders inquired about doing phases with one-way signals and then doing each lane at a different time wondering if then it could open back up to two lanes. Holle advised possibly, but would need to allow enough room for contractor to work but something they could look into.

Dick Mau asked if blacktop could be considered for Highway 71. Tymkowicz advised that the moisture under the asphalt would not provide for good life expectancy and that drainage would be a challenge.

An audience member asked if the IDOT had considering just continuing it's patching program on Highway 71. Tymkowicz advised that it would be a repetitive cycle of cost and disruption only to have the patches get bigger and bigger and harder to accomplish.

Kevin Vutgeveen asked if you could asphalt the bridge to make it last longer and allow for two-way traffic. Tymkowicz said you could do that, however it was not confident this was a good idea and that the lifespan of the asphalt would be significantly lowered based on conditions and would put the IDOT into a cycle of continuous work.

Mike Hoepfner pushed for flaggers advising he drove Highway 86 all summer long while it was under construction going north and south without issues. Hoepfner discussed the need for police, fire and EMS to move freely.

John Wills asked if the cities moved forward with option 3, how long would sections of the highway be closed for. Tymkowicz advised to expect a 2-4 week closure depending on weather.

Greg Mulder, presenting with the IDOT, was favorable towards option 3 as it would be safe for the workers.

Wills commented that we all want less disruption and that option 3 felt like the least disruptive. Wills asked if businesses would have access. Mulder showed a map with local access roads.

Councilmember Andres asked how closing and reconstructing at the causeway would work. Holle advised that EMS could be a concern. Mayor VanderWoude felt that staging equipment during this timeframe may help.

Sanders asked how one community's decision might impact another. Tymkowicz advised that each City has their own ideas. Sanders felt that north bound traffic made more sense.

Fire Chief Chris Yungbluth advised that he felt northbound would be better.

Neil Slater advised that the IDOT should have reached out to the police, fire, and EMS first.

Joe Andres commented wondering if anyone had inquired with the schools. Jo. Andres did not feel that Highway 86 was a safe route for school kids especially after dark.

Parks advised that a couple of years ago there was an incident at Hattie Elston State Park where some snow mobiles went through the ice. Parks said that had the emergency responders not been there in time those individuals could have died. South-to-north access is critical.

Steve Andresen, Superintendent of the Iowa Great Lakes Sanitary District, advised that the idea of only going south would not work for the District. Andersen commented that the District's largest lift station is north of the bridge and that he could not stage equipment to facilitate it. Andersen said if a lift station goes down the District has 30 minutes to respond. Andersen advised that it was no feasible to go to and from the waste water treatment plant in the event of an emergency and requiring them to go around the lake may put waste water into the lake and fill people's basements. Andersen advised that he was not once talked to about this and felt if it was not two-ways it could be a threat to public health and water quality. Andersen said a bigger conversation with all entities needs to happen.

Tymkowicz advised that the IDOT was not able to have the usual public information meetings that they generally have due to COVID. Tymkowicz advised there is no substitute for gathering people together.

Wermersen commented that COVID has been devastating to the Lakes Area and shutting down the highway could not come at a worse time.

Blaine Andrea wondered if you shut down the causeway for construction can you leave it open to EMS traffic. Tymkowicz said it would be challenging. Mulder felt that most of the time, in the event of an emergency, EMS could get through. There would likely be a few days where it would need to be permanently closed however.

Daryn Fischels commented that this project will disrupt habits and hurt businesses. Holle said it could be an opportunity for communities to help promote businesses. Hoppe advised that promotion is not going to help businesses survive.

Mulder advised that the construction period would be about 6 weeks in the spring and 8 weeks in the fall. Mulder said that the IDOT has done a good job at explaining possibilities. Mulder felt that the City Council has the hard job of making decisions. Every year that you wait, the harder the decisions

are. Mulder said the Council needs to hear what people have to say so they can make an educated decision.

Fischels advised to keep the bridge open and that he would rather sit in traffic than go around on Highway 86. Slater agreed.

Councilmember Hentges advised that when this was done last time there was a traffic light at the bridge. Hentges advised a lot has changed since 1998 but wondered why it could not be done again. Tymkowicz advised on different circumstances with the sheer volume of traffic. Tymkowicz said there are formulations of lengths of single lane traffic and traffic volumes. Tymkowicz advised of large delays and would potentially create signal backups. You would need to be cautious.

Parks advised that each spring and fall up to 5000 boats and hoists use the highway and he could not comprehend trying to do it on Highway 86.

Wills commented that he believed what he is hearing is that there should be two-way traffic and he felt option three might be the best solution. Wills felt the causeway would be a problem but felt there was potential for solutions utilizing the pedestrian bridge. Wills felt option 3 maintained two way traffic but also allows the IDOT to move as quickly as possible.

Councilmember Andres said it felt like we were in position now where a few can convene to try and hammer through something that will make it happen. Andres asked the audience to please text, email, and voice your opinions so that the Council can be a voice for everyone. Andres thanked everyone for being there and felt like we were in good position to hammer out a good plan.

Tymkowicz felt that a group with stakeholders would be productive but advised work needs to be done quickly.

Jeff Thee commented to listen to the people of the Iowa Great Lakes to make it as seamless and as safe as possible.

Hoppe asked if they were still trying to make a February bid letting. Tymkowicz advised it would not happen and that it would be month-to-month at this point.

Mayor VanderWoude commented that the Council has work to do and thanked everyone for being a part of this. VanderWoude asked if you are interested in being a part of a group to email City staff.

Herman Richter thanked the City of Okoboji for making this meeting possible.

ADJOURNMENT.

Mayor Mary VanderWoude

City Administrator Michael Meyers