

CITY OF ROCK ISLAND
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3rd Floor,
1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island, IL

7/24/2023 - Minutes

1. Call to Order

Mayor Thoms called the Study Session to order at 5:15 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

2. Roll Call

Mayor Thoms asked City Clerk Samantha Gange to call the roll.

Present: Alderpersons Moses Robinson, Randy Hurt, Judith Gilbert, Jenni Swanson, Dylan Parker, Mark Poulos, Bill Healy, Moses Robinson, and Mayor Thoms.

Absent: None.

Staff: Assistant City Manager and Parks and Recreation Director John Gripp, Attorney Allison Wright, City Clerk Samantha Gange, and other City Staff.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Thoms noted this and the following item would take place during the regular meeting.

4. Moment of Silence

5. Public Comment

Mayor Thoms asked if anyone in the public wished to speak. Nobody was signed up to speak.

6. Presentations

a. Downtown Rock Island Presentation

Mr. Andrew Dasso of Streamline Architects addressed Council and provided an overview of the budget for the downtown project. He noted the presence of Jason McKenzie and Kristina Robinson with Veenstra & Kimm, and Saloni Sheth and Manushi Dayani with Streamline Architects. He discussed survey results regarding the renovation plan, noting the most consistent suggestion was adding greenspace in the area. He pointed to the

number of local partners involved in the project, as well as the proposed sources of funds totaling \$7.3 million. He discussed the projects per their funding sources, and reviewed the scope of the full proposal.

Mr. McKenzie addressed Council. He said downtown Rock Island has great architecture, and is already walkable, but the plan is to enhance it with modernization. He reviewed a number of design concepts, including outdoor dining structures, landscaping, infrastructure, new lighting, planters, and other amenities. He displayed concepts for the WHBF-TV tower, which would light up at night with different colors, and noted that the antenna would need to be removed while the work was being done. He said the tower has the ability to be an icon for the downtown Rock Island area. A video simulation played for Council showing a procession through the proposed renovation. He showed an aerial view of the proposed renovation, highlighting a roundabout as the focal point of the area. He noted that studies of roundabouts show increased safety for pedestrians and help with the flow of traffic.

Ms. Sheth discussed survey results about whether or not a playground was needed in the downtown. She said the results showed there is not support at this time, and discussed the submitted user comments. She provided information regarding public feedback about the need for green space, and a rendering showed a proposed green space at 2nd and 18th Streets. This space can be programmed for a variety of uses, and the goal would be to create a multi-use green space in the heart of downtown that is more organic as opposed to infrastructure-related. Additionally, they are suggesting string lighting that provides a nice look and another level of safety.

Ms. Sheth discussed the removal of the current Rock Island signage, which is now being moved to the green space on 2nd and 18th. She noted a proposal for multiple outdoor dining locations at local businesses, along with planters to create a buffer between the dining areas and traffic. The goal is for the restaurants and business owners to have flexibility to set the outdoor spaces per their needs, but also to have consistent aesthetic in the downtown area. She noted that the 2nd Avenue renovations are intended to balance vehicle and pedestrian traffic, and said murals would be sprinkled around downtown to showcase the arts in other areas than Arts Alley. A video simulation played for Council showing a procession through the proposed renovation of 2nd Avenue. She discussed survey results surrounding the 2nd Avenue portion of the renovation proposal.

Mr. Dasso discussed possible outdoor markets on 2nd Avenue. This area would have incubator space for businesses, creating a business ecosystem. The outdoor markets could be used for a variety of items, and the takeaway is to provide an inviting space and a daytime and nighttime experience for residents. A video simulation played for Council showing a procession through the proposed outdoor market spaces. He discussed survey results regarding outdoor markets.

Mr. McKenzie discussed the proposed dog park at 3rd Avenue and 20th Street, pointing to renderings on the slides. He said dog parks promote walkable neighborhoods and a sense of community. One feature to reduce maintenance would be the installation of synthetic turf, which would not require mowing, and only needs to be rinsed and disinfected a few times each year. Additionally, parking in front of the park would be installed, which would mirror the parking on the other side of the street. The sidewalk around the perimeter of the park would also be redone. The budget also includes a redo of the alley from 19th to 20th Streets.

Ms. Sheth discussed the design concepts for Arts Alley along 2nd Avenue. She said the plan would be to maintain string lights in this area and stain the concrete, with colors tying into the logo and design elements. QC Arts will again be a partner in creating the murals. Structures would be added on both sides of the alley to

support rotating outdoor galleries, and various interactive events could take place within the alley space. A video simulation played for Council showing a procession through the alley space. She discussed survey results regarding Arts Alley. Mr. Dasso discussed the comments received from the public survey on the overall concept and designs. He said the goal is to bring life to the downtown area and create a vibrant daytime and nighttime atmosphere.

Mr. McKenzie detailed the overall design elements and what would be typical of all sections of the proposed renovation. He said light spacing would be at 50 feet but will alternate throughout the area. He discussed other amenities that would be found throughout the downtown streets and sidewalks. He reviewed the proposed budget for the final project concepts, which has been updated with changes in project design scope since the initial estimate.

Alderman Swanson asked who made the decision on 3rd Avenue from 17th to 18th Streets. Mr. McKenzie said the City's Public Works advisors supplied that suggestion. Alderman Hurt asked how safety issues regarding parking and outdoor seating would be addressed on 3rd Avenue, considering the potential traffic. Mr. McKenzie replied the speed limit in the downtown is 20-25 miles per hour, and designs such as this have been consistently implemented in other cities since the COVID-19 pandemic. He added they could look into adding larger concrete elements for additional safety measures. Jack Cullen, Executive Director of the Rock Island Downtown Alliance (RIDA) said for that specific site, outdoor seating is not a confirmed location. He added that internal conversations have led to the seating locations being proposed for the 19th Street side instead of the 3rd Avenue side. He noted large metro areas that are busier than Rock Island have outdoor dining areas similar to the proposal, but there are ways to create barriers between traffic and dining.

Alderman Swanson said she experienced this situation in the city of Grand Rapids, MI, and as a result of the experience, is opposed to the idea in Rock Island. Alderman Gilbert concurred. Alderman Hurt asked if any concrete barrier would be more expensive to replace or repair than a regular piece of framed sidewalk. Mr. McKenzie said replacing the picture frame sidewalk as seen in the video rendering was an easy process, and described what would be done. Alderman Hurt asked if there would be waste receptacles and bags available at the dog park. Mr. McKenzie replied affirmatively.

Alderman Robinson remarked on the presentation and asked how the design concepts will be able to accommodate food trucks and current food vendors. Mr. McKenzie said 2nd Avenue between 18th and 19th Streets could be closed, and extra electrical boxes would be installed to accommodate vendors. Alderman Robinson asked if the plan would be to consistently close that street for food vendors. Mr. McKenzie said there was no specific plan for food trucks, but rather accommodating for brick and mortar, although 2nd Avenue's design would allow for food vendors. Alderman Robinson said that the proposed amount of string lights in the downtown plan seems excessive. Mayor Thoms opined the lights make it seem more pedestrian-friendly, and is similar to what Moline currently utilizes.

Alderman Poulos commented he was concerned about safety with the proposed roundabout, as there is a high risk for accidents. Mr. McKenzie discussed reasons why the roundabout would be more pedestrian-friendly. Alderman Swanson asked what the cost difference would be if a 4-way stop was in place instead of a roundabout. Mr. McKenzie said the difference would be minimal. Public Works Director Mike Bartels said additional roundabouts are being considered in the City for the future as potential safety measures. Alderman Gilbert noted that residents have been against the roundabouts at each public meeting, and she is as well. Alderman Healy asked why the parking was not uniform on the west side of 2nd Avenue. Mr. McKenzie said the attempt was to maximize outdoor pedestrian and dining space. Alderman Healy

suggested using turf in the green space, similar to what is outside of Wrigley Field in Chicago.

Alderpson Gilbert asked if all parts of the plan would be bid separately. Mr. McKenzie replied affirmatively. Alderpson Gilbert commented that one waste receptacle per block was insufficient, as she often receives complaints about the trash. She asked what the current light spacing was in the downtown. Mr. McKenzie said he believed it was 80 to 100 feet currently, and the proposal would minimize that to 50 feet. Alderpson Gilbert opined that parklets near the street are too much of a safety issue. Mr. Cullen said businesses would have the option for a dedicated outdoor dining structure. He added that with the City owning the parklets, there is a uniform design, and each parking stall would equal one dining structure, and businesses would apply for a permit to operate in the spaces.

Alderpson Gilbert asked if other choices could be presented for the proposed Rock Island sign. Mr. Dasso indicated they could provide additional options. Alderpson Gilbert said she did not see many historical themes and touches presented. Mr. Dasso said the gateway structure of the architecture has been integrated into the design. Alderpson Gilbert opined she was against a roundabout and reiterated that many were also against it at the public input meeting. She stated the roundabout survey question was biased, and the dog park proposal should be the least prioritized, as it does not generate any revenue. She noted she was not in favor of the City owning the dog park or maintaining it. Alderpson Hurt expressed concern over liability regarding the dog park. Alderpson Parker said he was very much in favor of the dog park. Mr. Bartels said most elements of the proposed design originated with the existing 2015 plan, and staff would take Council's comments into account for a future presentation.

Alderpson Parker expressed his support for the proposal. Alderpson Gilbert said the presenters did a good overall job, but wanted to note her personal thoughts on the project.

b. CivicClerk Demonstration & Training for City Council

This presentation was unable to take place due to time constraints.

7. Adjourn

a. Motion to Adjourn.

Motion:	Motion whether or not to adjourn.
RC	Roll Call vote is needed.

MOTION:

Alderpson Parker moved to adjourn; Alderpson Poulos seconded.

VOTE:

Motion passed on a 7-0-0 voice vote. Aye: Hurt, Gilbert, Swanson, Parker, Poulos, Healy, and Robinson. Nay: None. Absent: None.

The meeting ended at 6:30 p.m.

Josh Adams, Deputy City Clerk