

CITY OF STERLING HEIGHTS
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL
SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 2022
IN COMMUNITY CENTER

1. Mayor Taylor called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
2. Mayor Taylor led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and Judy McHale, Clerk Coordinator, gave the Invocation.
3. Council Members present at roll call: Deanna Koski, Michael V. Radtke, Maria G. Schmidt, Liz Sierawski, Michael C. Taylor, Henry Yanez, Barbara A. Ziarko.

Also Present: Mark Vanderpool, City Manager; Marc D. Kaszubski, City Attorney;

Judy McHale, Clerk Coordinator; Carol Sobosky, Recording Secretary.
4. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**
Moved by Koski, seconded by Ziarko, to approve the Agenda as presented.
Yes: All. The motion carried.
5. **REPORT FROM CITY MANAGER**
There was no report from the City Manager.
6. **ACTION ITEMS PRESENTATION**
 - A. **Expectations and Outcomes**

Mr. Vanderpool stated they are excited to present the follow-up to the Strategic Planning Session held in January. He explained the outline for today's meeting and noted that all the initiatives speak for themselves. They will also talk a little about looking ahead at the 2040 Visioning Plan, looking ahead the next ten to fifteen years as a progressive city to make sure they are doing all they can now to prepare and advance the City for the next generation. The point of the follow-up meeting is to look at the items the City Council brought up in January and to

prioritize them. He estimated the meeting will concluded at approximately 1:00 p.m.

Mr. Vanderpool provided some review on the Strategic Planning Session which took place in January, noting City Council identified approximately thirty-one action items for follow-through by Administration. The Administration felt they had very good direction on sixteen of them, they were aligned with City Council, and they have not wasted any time in forging ahead with them. He explained they are either underway or will be in the upcoming fiscal year beginning July 1. They are not necessarily new items, but they were identified as priorities moving forward. He informed that there are another fifteen items they did not feel they had clear direction on, and that is what they would like to focus on today, hoping that City Council will help them prioritize the remaining fifteen items so they can produce a "top five" of those items they feel they can realistically get started on. He introduced Assistant City Manager Jeff Bahorski to talk about the 2030 Visioning Plan.

B. 2030 Vision

Assistant City Manager Jeff Bahorski explained that, although each of the fifteen projects they will be looking at today have potential and merit to improve Sterling Heights in some way, the reality is that not all of them can be successfully implemented on current resources available, so in order for Administration to assist City Council in evaluating and prioritizing these fifteen proposals, they are recommending that City Council view them from the lens of Visioning 2030's Guiding Principles. He stressed that the City has been incredibly

successful in utilizing Guiding Principles to realize their shared vision for Sterling Heights as a vibrant, inclusive community that is safe and progressive, active, and distinctive. He noted that some of the proposals have great potential for creating more desirable neighborhoods and successful, vibrant commercial centers, and better municipal government, while other proposals are less aligned with the 2030 Vision. He pointed out that some of the proposals are cost-prohibitive and others may produce results that affect city operations in a negative way, but he assured this is ultimately a subjective process and there are no right or wrong outcomes. He hopes they provide Council with the information they need to make informed decisions.

C. Developing our 2040 Vision

Mr. Vanderpool stated he is pleased to introduce Ms. Becky Davenport, who helped them in January with their Strategic Planning initiatives. She has extensive experience helping organizations through strategic planning and visioning initiatives and has worked extensively with both public and private organizations across Michigan.

Ms. Becky Davenport stated she is pleased to be here, and she explained there are two parts of the agenda she will help facilitate, with the first being a little more visioning and dreaming about what 2040 will look like. They need to look at mission alignment with their 2030 Vision, pointing out that 2040 is not too far off. She recalled they did a "Wordle" exercise in January where they talked about what their future vision will look like, and how they would describe success, with words like "inclusive, safe, innovative, vibrant, fun, connected, competitive,

innovation, growth.” They also talked about trends, with the most important being green spaces, followed by the 15-minute city model convenient for pedestrians and cyclists, inclusive services and planning, sustainable buildings and infrastructure, automated city operations, smart healthy communities, and innovation-driven ecosystem and a hyper local economy.

Ms. Davenport talked about BHAGs, which is an acronym for Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAGs), first coined by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in their book, “Built to Last.” She explained a BHAG offers a focus and, while they are big and broad, there is also a finish line, so they know they achieved it. She stressed if they articulate a goal, they are much more likely to achieve it. A great BHAG will also be easy to understand for all stakeholders in the organization. She stressed that they will not be completing the defining of the BHAGs because they need to be developed over an extended period so they can think about them and reflect on them.

Ms. Davenport led a brainstorming session, asking for long-term goals for the city in 2040, and the following ideas were expressed:

- Quality of Life – a benchmark for quality of life; being recognized as “best in class;” known for an exceptional place to live.
- A Safe Community – a place where people do not have to worry about crime or their neighborhoods; feel protected; continue to be one of the safest cities in the country; strive to always be at the top of their comparable cities.

- Employment Opportunities – employment opportunities that provide income for housing and accessing community services for all income levels.
- Inclusivity – a place where all people feel welcome.
- Education – education for all, including youth and adults; offering training in skilled trades and opportunities to get into an apprentice program so they can provide skilled trade workers; it needs to be diverse and is not just about degrees.
- Connected and Engaged Community – where residents want to connect with the City in non-traditional ways, such as recreation, programming, etc.; placemaking; making connections with the residents; need to meet the residents where they are.
- Innovative – need to find new ways to connect people, attract new residents, provide better quality of life, provide better employment opportunities, provide ways to combat climate change (which could be ways to provide more charging stations for the anticipation of more electric vehicles), innovate ways to improve Parks and Recreation; look at new technologies to deliver services more efficiently; addressing challenges with projected age distribution and attracting young families. Mention was made that the last couple of years with Covid required innovation for how the City continued to provide services to its businesses and residents, conduct meetings, etc. Concern raised about

how innovation can make the elderly generation feel “left out,” such as “going digital” versus providing information in hard copy, such as the Parks and Recreation magazine, which is costly to print and mail. It was noted that the resident survey reflected that sixty percent of the respondents indicated the hard-copy magazine is the first place they go to get information about the City, and it is not necessarily age-related but is a preference.

- Communication – it is important to continue to communicate with all people, whether it is one-on-one or a group; actually, part of “Connected and Engaged Community.”
- Community Wealth Building – critical and encompasses all these points; continue to be known as a “model government,” continuing to be transparent, implementing best practices, and be on the forefront of all these issues. Innovation is not just about technology but is rethinking the way services are delivered. Mr. Vanderpool cited example of the City Council recently approving the hiring of the City’s first social worker, which is paying huge dividends; people who need assistance should be able to get it here in Sterling Heights; possibly one day the City will need a certified health department with multiple social workers and other resources that help with the challenges of the community; this can fall under “Quality of Life”; technology like Zoom meetings and QR codes for ordering food during Covid were implemented.

Councilwoman Ziarko pointed out that there is a cost involved in all these goals, and she questioned where the money comes from when they are considering these goals.

Ms. Davenport replied that is where the resource allocation comes in, and it is important to prioritize the impact of the programs. She cautioned when they consider doing new things, they also must think about what they are going to stop doing, which is a hard decision. She further cautioned that they cannot always do all the new things, either, but she pointed out that they have time to consider their roadmap for 2040. She noted that eighteen years, while it is around the corner, still gives them some time for planning.

- Evolution of a built environment – a vast amount of this community was built fifty years ago, and today’s society does not always react well with that environment; has an impact on attracting younger families.
- Identity – concern that Sterling Heights does not have much identity outside of Macomb County; when people travel and talk about where they are from, they mention Detroit, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Traverse City, and others, but not many mention Sterling Heights; would like people to think of “high-quality life” or “safe community” when they hear “Sterling Heights”; the City needs a very positive identity.

Councilman Radtke pointed out other notable cities have downtown areas and places that draw people to those cities. He also commented that some of the residents have the attitude that this City “will never be anything” and sometimes

act like they do not deserve nice things. He cited the public art or the addition of something nice, he has heard comments, "But it's just Sterling Heights!"

Councilwoman Schmidt disagreed and felt that a lot of families moved to this community because they were looking for that "sleepy bedroom community" and they do not want the urban setting. She explained in considering what everyone wants to see in their city, they have to try to please everyone.

Ms. Davenport agreed it is a balancing act. There are historical reasons why people have moved here, but they want to attract "the next group," which is the challenge and there is not an easy answer. She concluded this section by stating she will type up the brainstorming ideas written down, and appreciated the input from everyone, adding it is a good start.

D. Setting Priorities for the next 12-18 months

1. Projects 1-5: Sustainability Oriented

Ms. Davenport explained that the fifteen proposals have been divided into three categories: sustainability oriented, development oriented, and community oriented, with five proposals in each category. She explained that they would like Council members to hear a brief overview of each project, followed by about ten minutes of discussion for each project, and then they are to rate those projects according to what they feel the importance is. She explained the rating scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being a tied closely to the City's long-term goal and a priority. She noted a 2 meets long-term goals but it may be a medium to high priority. She explained a 3 is a medium to low priority, 4 is not an immediate priority, and 5 is not really tied to the City's long-term goals at this time. If they

are not interested in a project, they can rate it a 6. She clarified they can rate them all 1's or all 5's, so they do not have to rate each one a different number. She stated that, at the end of each category, they will collect the sheets for that category. Those will be tallied to provide some averages for later discussion.

Project 1: Requiring Trees to be Planted in Right-of-Way

Public Works Director Michael Moore explained this project is to require trees to be planted in the right-of-way. As they consider trees an important part of Sterling Heights, over the next three years they anticipate having hundreds of thousands of dollars of grant money to plant trees. He reviewed the pros, including adding beauty to the area, having traffic-calming ability, increasing property values, cooling temperatures, and aiding in storm water mitigation. He explained the trees come with a one-year warranty and are approximately 2-1/2 to 3 inches in diameter. He added there is typically no maintenance for a tree for the first ten to fifteen years of its life, after which time the Department of Public Works (DPW) will prune the tree every five to seven years. He outlined the challenges, including needing help determining where all these trees go. He explained the process of locating a street for the trees, contacting MissDig, sending a letter to all the residents on that street, only to find out some of the residents do not want trees. He noted they try to encourage the residents of the benefits, but when they are very set on not wanting a tree, DPW must then pick a new area and start the entire process again. This can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and become a very difficult task for staff. They fully support trees, but it comes down to finding the right space.

Mr. Vanderpool noted the challenge is not over the next few years because they have a lot of grant funding available, but the challenge is that there are areas of the City where the streets are barren due to the loss of thousands of trees due to the emerald ash borer disease. He noted their tree canopy is lower compared to other communities, and they know that trees increase home values, create traffic-calming, and they are good for the environment, so the question is whether Council would like Administration to look into more meaningful ways to require trees in the right-of-way so these neighborhoods can be transformed in twenty or thirty years with beautiful tree-lined streets. He explained that when Council members rank this, they need to think about what they want to see in the next twenty years, and if it is a high ranking and they need to move forward, City Administration will come back with plans on how to require it throughout the community.

Councilwoman Ziarko commented that many times people are not saying they do not want trees for the reason they do not want to rake leaves, but they know that in ten or fifteen years, they may have to replace their sidewalk adjacent to the street because of root growth. She felt this is something Council would have to consider as well regarding what they can do to alleviate the cost of that sidewalk replacement if the trees are required.

Mayor Taylor questioned whether this planting of trees in the right-of-way would apply to businesses or to the city-owned properties. He further questioned how many trees would be required, and where they would be required to be planted.

Councilman Radtke noted that the City of Clawson is starting to build a downtown area at the corner of 14 Mile and Main Street, and he emphasized that if they want to encourage a walkable community, they cannot take pedestrians “through deserts”. He stressed that tree-lined streets cool the area, and they slow traffic in the area. He agreed with Councilwoman Ziarko’s concern about sidewalks, and he felt the City’s sidewalk program needs to be changed. Mr. Moore explained they have a list of trees that cause those issues with sidewalks, so moving forward, there is an accepted a list of trees that are deep-rooted and will typically not cause problems to adjacent sidewalks.

Project 2: Reducing Lawn Mowing

City Development Director Jason Castor stated there have been discussions on reduced lawn mowing, and the City has established a reputation over the years of well-maintained and desirable neighborhoods and maintaining attractive commercial centers over the years. There are some advantages to potentially reducing some lawn mowing activities, including increasing pollinators, increasing plant diversity, reducing gas emissions, lower maintenance costs, and provide longer, healthier lawns more resistant to drought and weeds. He explained there are disadvantages as well, and residents in their recent residential survey indicated a very high emphasis for code enforcement over the next two years to focus on residential and commercial center property maintenance, including grass mowing. It can create confusion with some of the residents, leading to additional complaints and heavier workload for code enforcement, who already receives a lot of complaints on tall grass and weeds

in the community. He noted that long grass can harbor ticks and rodents, and it can be difficult to cut for residential lawn mowers when it is left to grow longer. Lawn cutting contractors sometimes do charge more because they have to double-cut or triple-cut the lawn. There may be additional maintenance in containing a yard from the spread of the natural lawn over to the neighbor's property. He referred to Mr. Moore for comments on how this might affect public uses.

Public Works Director Michael Moore stated they are conducting a pilot program in retention basins where they are changing the schedule of grass cutting from weekly to bi-weekly, which will not only reduce the cost for the City but will increase storm water filtration and effectiveness. The goal of the taller grass is to act as more of a filter for the pollutants coming into the retention basin. When the grass is cut short, it is not as effective. They have not been receiving any negative feedback from residents on this pilot program to date, but they will continue to monitor it. The longer grass promotes some natural wildlife such as bees and butterflies.

Councilman Yanez does not feel this proposal is referring to letting grass grow so long that it becomes a nuisance. He suggested that they can reduce the amount of lawn that needs to be cut by planting attractive landscaping that does not require a lot of lawn, and this can be done by the City as well. He agreed this allows for pollinators and allows for the absorption of rainwater, so it does not run into the roadways. He stressed they are looking at two things: education and budget. He compared front lawns as an extension of "the living room

carpet” and he felt citizens need to be educated as to why they need to go to a maintenance program that requires less lawn cutting. He emphasized that lawn maintenance equipment is incredibly impactful to the environment, stating that one gas-powered leaf blower puts out more emissions than four motor vehicles. He recalled it was reported to Council that the City spends \$1 million each year on lawn and pond maintenance. They fertilize, which flows into the ponds and creates algae growth, then they pay for treatment to kill the algae. He does not know why they are growing lawns in road medians and then paying to have them cut.

Mayor Taylor questioned whether Councilman Yanez wants to see the City change its policy on their public spaces to reduce the amount of lawn that needs to be cut. He understands that, but he questioned the policy objective for residential property and whether it is educating them so they make good decisions, or whether he is looking at policy that would require residents to do something.

Councilman Yanez does not feel they should mandate anyone to do anything with their private property other than maintain their yard for the rest of the neighborhood. He felt it is more of an education campaign, noting that if a certain type of landscaping is planted, it results in less mowing, less watering, less pollution, and saving more time. He cited an example he recently saw where the residents did an incredible job with a very small strip of well-maintained grass, and the rest of the front yard was filled with trees, shrubs, and mulch. He pointed out that reduced the environmental impact, and he stated that for

residential and businesses, it is more of an educational campaign rather than mandates. He stressed, however, that the City needs to be a leader in this area. Councilman Radtke agreed with Councilman Yanez. He noted that Sterling Heights is known for its front lawns, but other communities such as Ann Arbor and Royal Oak allow residents to be more creative in their front yards, such as having ponds, and growing sunflowers. He suggested they may be able to loosen restrictions on what can be done in the front yard. He talked about the banning of leaf blowers in other communities.

Councilman Yanez cautioned they need to be careful because one person's idea of a beautiful front yard could be a neighbor's nightmare, noting seeds can blow onto neighboring properties, creating unwanted flowers or weeds in a neighbor's yard. He agreed the City could be more flexible with what they allow in front yards.

Councilwoman Ziarko stated that for some new developments, this may work; however, if someone has lived in their home for many years and they are being told to change their landscaping to make it more environmentally sustainable, there is a cost involved. She does not feel it is something they could mandate. She sees it as something restrictive to someone who has been in their home for a long time.

Councilman Yanez felt they can give people an option and have an ordinance that allows them the option, which is where the education comes in.

Ms. Davenport felt the next topic, as well as Project 5, which would allow native wildflowers, clover, and vegetation waivers for yards, may be somewhat intertwined with this topic.

Project 3: Prohibit Paving Front Yards

City Planner Chris McLeod explained that this is an issue they have in the City, and they need to limit the amount of paving within the front yards so they can allow for the beauty of lawn and/or landscaping. By limiting the amount of pavement, they would be able to limit the amount of stormwater runoff. They would also limit the amount of parking in a front yard and would increase the amount of greenspace along the roadways and creates uniformity in the neighborhoods. He cautioned there would be challenges, including the ability to accommodate a horseshoe drive through turnarounds or for those people who back out onto some of their more major roadways, so they would have to take that into account. If the City is contemplating to allow for accessory dwellings on residential properties, those additional family members living in those dwellings would have to have a place to park, so an additional driveway or paved surface may be necessary to accommodate that type of use. He explained this ties back to the 2030 Visioning Plan, which is well-maintained and safe, desirable neighborhoods. Mr. McLeod also noted they currently receive complaints from people whose neighbors have five to seven cars, and they question how large the City is going to allow their neighbor to build his driveway. He explained it is currently policy-based on how they regulate driveways, but they would need more direction for having a finite decision. He

stated that their current policy bases the width of the driveway on the size of the garage door, and horseshoe drives are considered on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood decision.

Councilman Radtke questioned how often they receive requests for driveway expansions.

Mr. McLeod replied they receive those requests multiple times each day. He stated approval is on a case-by-case basis.

Councilman Radtke complained that this is a big issue in his neighborhood, and almost every house has horseshoe drives taking up so much of their front yards.

He pointed out that is almost no place available to plant any kind of street trees.

Mr. McLeod clarified the rationale given to them by the homeowners is so they can accommodate more vehicles and not for the parking of campers and boats.

Councilwoman Schmidt questioned how many front yards are totally paved.

Mr. McLeod replied it is not generally a request to pave the entire front yard, and there is a generalized standard that can be found, determining the appropriate amount of driveway area to more than accommodate vehicles in a normal situation. There may be those who claim they need to park their eight cars, but if they have a hardline stance, they can tell them, and those people will have to find another place to store their excess vehicles.

Councilwoman Schmidt agreed they need administrative control on this, but she is in support of prohibiting total front yard paving.

Mr. McLeod stated this would be a matter where they would develop some ordinances, but he explained the ratio would be vetted out through the

Planning Commission public hearings and would ultimately come before City Council.

Councilman Radtke questioned the ratio used in other communities.

Mr. McLeod replied the ratio is generally a maximum of thirty to forty percent of pavement.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned whether the width of the driveway can be the same as the width of the garage door, or the width of the actual garage.

Mr. McLeod clarified they do not have ordinances, only a policy that he inherited when he started with the department, but the policy contains a formula that the width of the driveway can only be slightly wider than the width of the garage door.

Project 4: Mandate Business Recycling

Public Works Director Michael Moore felt that while a mandate on this is tough stance to take, it would be better to encourage recycling. He added that, of all the neighboring communities they contacted, none of them actually mandate recycling, and only one encourages business recycling. He pointed out it is difficult to mandate a business recycling if they do not yet have a citywide residential recycling program. He mentioned other challenges, including the fact that the City's refuse hauler is not the hauler for all city businesses, and there are many other companies that perform the same service within the community for those businesses at different costs. He questioned how they would track who is offering recycling and how would they monitor who is using the recycling offered to them.

City Attorney Marc Kaszubski noted there is a clear interest in the public to present greater opportunities for recycling, but when it comes to mandating business recycling, the challenges, and costs in doing so would trickle down to residents or tenants of these buildings. He pointed out that landlords in commercial centers and apartment complexes would need a budget for expansion of additional trash receptacles to allow for the recycling to occur. They would have to pay a hauler to take the recycled materials away. He pointed out there just may not be sufficient room for this process, especially in apartment or condominium complexes that are built out. He added that some larger corporations have recycling programs in the City, but this would have a greater impact on the smaller businesses and strip centers. He added that businesses are generally the greatest producer of recyclable materials and the ability to recycle because many receive their shipments in cardboard boxes that ultimately ends up in the landfill. He explained the question is whether they can get businesses to start doing this through incentives, or whether it should be mandated.

Councilman Yanez did not feel they should be mandating businesses for this. He cited a recent experience when he was visiting the Chaldean Foundation, and Mr. Manna was picking up trash that blew onto his property. He indicated that with different trash haulers, they have different trash pickup days, and many times, the cardboard boxes are not even broken down, taking up space in the dumpster so the actual trash is overflowing. He agreed there is a cost to this, but if they enforced their codes and tickets were issued, businesses may think twice

about paying for recycling. He felt a lot of this is an education issue and did not know if it should come from the Chamber of Commerce or the City, but he felt they need to have a conversation with the businesses, especially the smaller ones, about the benefit of recycling.

Councilwoman Ziarko agreed there is a need, adding that she lives across the street from a shopping center, medical facility, and a bank. She ended up with a lot of masks that blew into her yard during the Covid pandemic, as well as other trash. She felt they need to monitor the dumpsters, and she pointed out there is a lot of illegal dumping because when the businesses are closed, people feel they can use those dumpsters for their own personal use. She does now know about placing a mandate on businesses, adding that it seems to be discriminating against them because there is not a mandate for residents. She knows they will have a contract coming up in the next couple of years with their company who will be supplying their refuse pickup, so possibly they can negotiate something.

Councilman Radtke claimed Sterling Heights is the only city of this size in the state that does not have curbside recycling. He pointed out that was a choice this body made years ago, but he did not see waiting another seven years to talk about what they can do beyond residential is too long to wait. He did not feel businesses should be made to recycle everything, but they should offer it. He stated that cities like New York and Ann Arbor require businesses to offer recycling. He felt they need to start moving forward on this.

Councilwoman Schmidt questioned when the current refuse contract expires.

Mr. Moore replied the current contract expires in 2024, so they will be starting that process in about a year.

Councilwoman Schmidt pointed out, even if they have residential curbside recycling throughout the City, it is not to say that everyone is going to recycle. She felt that to mandate businesses to recycle when residents may not embrace it is wrong.

Project 5: Allow Native Wildflowers, Clover, and Vegetation Waivers for Yards

City Development Director Jason Castor explained they touched on this earlier, but the additional component is the waiver to allow this activity. He explained there are advantages discussed earlier about wildflowers and clover lawns, increasing pollinators and diversity in neighborhoods. There is lower maintenance cost, although there is some cost, and if they are well-maintained, they can be very aesthetically pleasing. He outlined some of the disadvantages of the waiver program, which would be the staffing availability on the creation, monitoring, review, and follow-up for this type of program, which could ultimately lead to more complaints from neighbors if those areas are not maintained well. It could result in more code follow-up, and when native wildflowers come in a seed pack, there is the possibility of introducing a non-native species to the area, which could introduce an invasive weed or species into the ecosystem. He stated they have not received many requests for this type of activity, possibly only one or two. The waiver program, and determining the guidelines, may require some ordinance changes and amendments.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sierawski questioned whether there is currently a program where residents can obtain a waiver.

Mr. Castor replied no, and if it were the desire of Council, this program would have to be created. He added that residents could currently have clover in their lawn if it is maintained at a height of less than six inches.

Councilman Yanez questioned whether it is a violation for a property owner to allow their lawn to go dormant.

Mr. Castor replied no.

Mayor Taylor questioned whether someone could tear out their lawn and plant flowers if it remains under six inches in height.

Mr. Castor replied they monitor to make sure it is well maintained and weed-free with no trash and debris. If someone chooses to install a native landscaping area, they will not cite a violation as long as it is maintained.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sierawski questioned that if someone opted to plant an entire field of sunflowers, those would be over six inches in height and would be in violation.

Mr. Castor replied that would not necessarily be in violation, and although he has not seen an entire field of sunflowers, it is difficult to imagine, but if it is well-maintained, it would not necessarily be cited.

Mayor Taylor inquired as to whether there are any restrictions that prohibit residents from using their front yards as gardens.

Mr. Castor replied no, but they would look at it, and if it is maintained and they are actively keeping it up, they would not have an issue with it.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned whether plans would have to be submitted before it is planted. She questioned whether there would be similar restrictions in rear yards.

Mr. Castor replied that if there is a concern from the resident as to what they want to do and make sure it complies, they can show the City what they are planning. He replied to further inquiry that the same regulations would hold true to the rear yard, and they can have large gardens or wildflower islands, but if it were traditional plantings, they would hold to the six-inch height requirement.

Mayor Taylor questioned what would change with this project.

Mr. Castor replied the question is the waiver program, which would serve as more of a notification to the neighbors. It would be noted that they are doing something that is non-traditional, and it would involve developing that program and monitoring it. He clarified that people could add clover to their lawns now and a waiver is not needed. Landscaping and wildflowers can be added to the front yard without a waiver.

Councilman Yanez felt this is the perfect opportunity for the City to take the lead to show what front yards could potentially look like.

The meeting recessed at 10:35 a.m. and reconvened at 10:51 a.m.

2. Projects 6-10: Development Oriented

Ms. Davenport explained they will now be addressing development-oriented projects, but the rating scale will be the same.

Project 6: Create a South Pathway to Moravian Park

Ms. Davenport noted that the presenter for this item stepped out, so they temporarily skipped this item to go on to the next.

Project 7: Add Mid-Block Crosswalks

City Engineer Brent Bashaw explained the 2030 Visioning that this would fall under would be abundant pathways for biking and walking. He explained that mid-block crossings are pedestrian crossings that occur between the signalized crossings. They are typically push buttons with alerts that tell when it is time to cross, with the latest technology offering the countdown to zero so the pedestrian knows exactly how much time they have to cross and when the traffic signal will turn green. He explained the City has been enhancing their mid-block crossings with their major road projects, and he cited M-59 as an example, where they added three new crossings in the area between Van Dyke to Hayes Road. This allows people to safely cross back and forth. He noted that the crosswalks along 19 Mile Road, between Clinton River Road and Schoenherr, have been enhanced, and that was for a school crossing. They can put striping on the pavement as well as the push button strobe lights which flash when pushed, enhancing the driver awareness that something is happening at that location. When this Community Center was constructed, they installed the same type of push button strobe lights to go across Dodge Park Road. They recently installed a mid-block crossing along 19 Mile Road, between Dequindre and Ryan as part of the trail program. This year, they will be enhancing the Riverland crossing, which is a high traffic pedestrian crossing across two lanes of traffic, and they will be installing a mid-block crossing along 15 Mile Road, between Van Dyke

and Carlton due to some new hotels in the area. Mr. Bashaw showed pictures of a single mid-block crossing, and he pointed out they create a pedestrian island so when they cross, they have a place in the center turn lane dedicated to pedestrians. Cars cannot access it, and it allows pedestrians to focus on one direction of traffic at a time when crossing a major road. They are currently undergoing a pedestrian study for Utica Road and Van Dyke, and he anticipated that they will have short- and long-term improvements based on that study. He explained the cost for each of these crossings is the beacon strobe light, which is about \$20,000 to \$25,000 each. He added the 15 Mile Road crossing he mentioned will cost about \$100,000.

Mayor Taylor asked whether the 15 Mile Road crossing will end up costing \$125,000.

Mr. Bashaw replied that it will cost about \$100,000. He explained the study for the 15 Mile Road crossing indicated the strobe light was not necessary, so they do not have to add the \$25,000 to that.

Project 6: Create a South Pathway to Moravian Park

Parks and Recreation Director Kyle Langlois explained there has recently been a push to create a third entrance to Moravian Park for residents residing south of the park property. There is no direct access from the park to that location, which can create a very long walk for those people who could ultimately enter from their back yard if there was not a fence there. He noted this entrance would come off Maisano Drive, and he showed on the aerial map the three potentially viable locations for this access. He noted the first is to reestablish the catwalk

that is now private property (designated as a blue line on the map). It was originally created as an access point by Warren Consolidated Schools to what was going to be a future school development but never occurred. The catwalk was vacated in the 1970's into the two residences abutting it and has been on the tax rolls since 1978. He cautioned the cost for this route would involve purchasing that property if the residents are agreeable, then moving the fence, clearing trees and brush, and installing a section of path. The second option is to work with DTE to obtain an easement under their lines to a path extension the City installed when resurfacing the park a few years ago (represented by a yellow line on the map). He felt this would be the easiest, least expensive, and most logical option for the amount of path needed, as well as the location. He cautioned this could be the most challenging due to the fact it is a public utility easement they would be trying to acquire. He added this could also pose issues if the path becomes inaccessible in the future due to DTE maintenance on their lines or any damage that occurs from heavy equipment on the path at times due to DTE maintenance. Mr. Langlois reviewed their third option, which would be to purchase property from the resident at the east end of Maisano to create an extension to the path (shown as a red line on the map). He anticipated this would likely have the costliest implication because they would have to purchase land at the point requiring the lengthiest path through trees and brush. This is an action item in their most recently adopted Parks and Recreation and Non-Motorized Five-Year Master Plan, so it is endorsed by the Parks and Recreation Department. This meets 2030 Visioning principles by fully utilizing parks as well

as being an inclusive community. All three of these options would require some form of land-clearing, path installation, and legal expense for easement or purchase of property.

Councilman Radtke inquired as to whether DTE has been amenable to an easement for a path.

Mr. Langlois responded that, based on initial conversations, DTE is willing and interested in partnering with the City. He added they have not gone through due diligence at this point, but he has all the paperwork they would need to explore this option further.

Councilman Radtke stated he does not have a preference between the first two options; however, he felt the third option (the red line) is not as viable. He emphasized this is a number one priority for all the residents living in that neighborhood, and many of them are using the catwalk even though it is not legal at this point. He understands the two neighbors who currently own the catwalk would most likely not be happy, but he stressed the lack of a path results in the residents having to legally walk a mile-and-a-half to a park they can see from their yards.

Mr. Langlois replied to inquiry that the catwalk was vacated in the late 1970's.

Mayor Taylor inquired as to the process for getting this catwalk back. He questioned whether there is a gate or fence at the end of the "blue line."

Councilman Radtke replied the pathway is still there.

Mr. Kaszubski replied they can approach the homeowner and ask to purchase it. He did not feel the homeowners would be too much in favor of that idea, so they

would have to show public need, and it would be a challenge, but they could do a public taking although they would have to give reasonable compensation and it would take circuit court action to do so.

Mayor Taylor felt that DTE would be the most reasonable.

Mr. Langlois agreed that is probably the best option, noting that in his various conversations with them, there have been no red flags, but they will have to see how quickly they can get the paperwork processed and go through DTE's legal review and ultimately their approval process, which is a challenge.

Project 8: Allow Detached Dwelling as Ancillary Use

City Planner Chris McLeod explained that in terms of accessory dwellings, and provisions within their zoning ordinance, single-family residential property only allows for one residence to be located on a single property. He stated some communities have allowed "granny flats" located either attached or integral to the main unit, or otherwise provided for in the rear yard or top of garage. He explained this allows for a type of housing not currently allowed in the City and may allow for some additional use of property where the property may currently be underutilized. It would allow the potential for a lower rental unit. It would also allow families to age in place, so elderly family members may be able to be brought to one of these smaller units to live where they would be close to their family for the care they need. As part of this conversation, they also need to look at parking for additional cars, especially when discussing possibly allowing less pavement in front yards. They would need to look at overall congestion of residential neighborhoods with additional families, the allowed size of accessory

dwelling units, whether attached or detached in the rear yards, and the need for additional water and sewer taps, updating or upgrading of existing accessory buildings to allow for this. There is also a concern that a person would buy a house for the sole purpose of renting the main dwelling and renting out an accessory structure, resulting in absentee landlords. They would need to assure proper separation between a main unit and an abutting accessory living space, and they would also have to consider whether a detached unit would then take away their ability to have a stand-alone garage or shed. He stated they have had occasional inquiries about this. They also have had a few people calling to complain about too many people living at a certain address on their street. Mr. McLeod stated they would have to look at what areas this type of use would be appropriate and work with their legal team to change ordinances if this is to come about.

Councilman Yanez appreciated the concerns about how many people are living in one residence, but he stressed this may be a safer option rather than having a lot of people living in the basement of the main dwelling. He stressed that having worked for the Fire Department, his worst nightmare is going down into a basement because there is no ingress or egress other than the stairway.

Councilman Radtke stated there are other communities such as Birmingham that allow this, which is a way to use their space more efficiently. He felt this is a way where multi-generational families can live together, and he did not feel this would be used for multiple unrelated families to live together. This is a more affordable housing option for regular people.

Councilman Yanez agreed the City is becoming an older city, and more people are opting to have their mom and dad live with them. He felt this would be a great way to provide that option.

Councilman Radtke stated these are already built in the City, noting one on Utica Road near 17 Mile, where they turned their garage into a pool house. He commented it looks beautiful, but it is currently illegal. He cited another home that has a barn on the property with a nice living space above it.

Project 9: Tattoo Parlor Restrictions

City Attorney Marc Kaszubski stated there are three tattoo parlors operating within the boundaries of Sterling Heights, and there are fifteen additional tattoo parlors located within a half mile of the City, in Shelby Township, Clinton Township, Utica, Macomb Township, Warren, Roseville, and Troy. He clarified they are different than microblading because they are not generally dependent upon the surrounding neighborhoods for their market but draw customers from a large region based on the body artist's popularity, skill, and artwork. The current tattoo parlors, or "body art facilities," are in the C-2 zoning districts as a Special Land Use, reviewed, and approved by the Planning Commission. They must be in a shopping center of at least 100,000 square feet, no closer than 500 feet from any residential district, and 1,000 feet from any church, school, park, pawn shop, or other body art facility. They must maintain all the required local and state licenses. There have not been any notable complaints about the three existing locations. Tattoos are a growing industry and additional tattoo parlors could generate additional revenue, licensing, and inspection fees. Changing the

regulations could allow tattoo parlors to fill some of the vacancies in some other C-2 and C-1 locations. He cautioned that the challenges are that there is still a stigma about tattoo parlors, and residents do not want to see them in their local C-1 districts or in C-2 centers located near their neighborhoods. The Office of Planning has not received any inquiries in the last five years from prospective tattoo parlors looking to locate in Sterling Heights, nor has anyone inquired about the City's zoning and licensing requirements to do so.

Councilwoman Ziarko questioned how many tattoo parlors have closed within the last five years; she believes there were some that moved out of the City.

Mr. Kaszubski replied he has not researched that topic.

Councilman Radtke felt this is about cutting red tape, and he commented that a lot of their regulations on this do not make sense. He stressed they need to make it easier for people to do business in their City, especially because tattoos are becoming very popular. He suspected the stigma is with the older generation, adding he does not have a stigma for tattoos. He categorized it as "a solution in search of a problem," and he assured if it becomes a problem, they can regulate it, but it is not a problem at this point.

Mayor Taylor does not feel it is necessary for the City to have restrictions on where these can go in commercial areas, especially the requirement that they cannot be within 1,000 feet from a church or school. He suggested if they are going to look closer at this, he would suggest removing the restrictions that it can only be in a large shopping center, and it cannot be near a pawn shop. He

does not feel a body art facility/tattoo parlor should be treated any differently than any other business such as a salon.

Project 10: Need More Low-Income Housing

City Planner Chris McLeod stated that housing options are a very popular topic in the City, and they need to have the conversation as to whether it is true that “low- to moderate-income qualified housing,” funded in that matter, is needed rather than someone who needs “affordable options.” They have several of the low- to moderate-income housing developments in the City, with several proposals over the last several years. He noted some have gone in and some have not, based on funding and scoring by Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). He added that the most recent application did not qualify so it was not built, but there is a wide variety of housing types and ownership levels available in the City, and the more they can offer, the more sustainable and viable the community becomes. This would allow for the City to create unique partnerships, but some of the challenges include the potential stigma of low- and moderate-income housing, although he commented that they can be some of the nicest housing options they have seen. They have had about four of these going in, with more coming, and it ties into their 2030 Visioning plan. The City has not actively participated other than Schoenherr Towers. It is market demand, and they are looking at one that is formulating now and will be coming to light in the coming months. He clarified they cannot create this market. They have to look at developing ordinances to further regulate this, policy revisions in terms of how they are processed, funding and

whether they create those unique opportunities to become involved, as well as the reduction in taxable value. He added that their process has been that the City receives its money, but it is in a different way.

Councilman Radtke understood they are talking about stand-alone development, but he questioned whether there are options with Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) to create density bonuses so they may get some set-aside units for low-income. He stated other cities are handling it differently, possibly creating bonuses or ways to facilitate more housing options across the economic spectrum.

Mr. McLeod replied affirmatively, noting they can do that by project size, citing the example that if a project is 100 units, they would have to dedicate ten percent of dedicated low-income housing, or they can offer options for additional density if they go above and beyond. He indicated there are different ways to achieve that goal.

Councilman Radtke commented that is the best method of going forward. He pointed out they have a lot of developers with large properties, and if the Lakeside Mall redevelopment comes to fruition, they will have even more development. He felt they should start talking about density bonuses, or ways to facilitate these being integrated into every project, rather than having "low-income" areas in a specific place, so it would have less impact in one area.

3. Projects 11-15: Community Oriented

Ms. Davenport indicated that they are slightly ahead of schedule, so she suggested they continue to spend the next twenty minutes beginning to discuss the last five projects that are community oriented.

**Project 11: Improve Direct Communication With Residents –
Door-To-Door Interns**

Community Relations Director Melanie Davis stated she is a huge fan of improving communication, and a part of it is a door-to-door component. They would need the help of Human Resources, and if they use interns, there would be a considerable cost. Their other option is to use volunteers, but the challenge with that option is the current struggle to get enough volunteers for regular tasks for which they need volunteers, such as SHINE Day, so this would place an additional burden on getting volunteers. She does not believe they have the capacity within their current staffing to be able to manage such a program, so there would be a cost to find someone who could manage the program. She felt there are a lot of other opportunities to improve their communication with residents. They have talked about using their existing commissioners as ambassadors to connect with their neighbors, whether it is in person or on social media. They recently began using their text alert system to create specific groups for residents so they can have more direct communication. She cited the successful example of the local road programs in the neighborhoods, here they have specific groups for people on individual streets who can subscribe to a text alert program, and they are able to receive direct communication about only the project going on along their street. They have budgeted in the next program

year to expand the amount of mobile phone numbers that they can add subscriptions to through Civic Plus. They have an existing door-to-door methods they use for alerting neighbors about things like the sidewalk program, local road improvements, etc. She assured there are other opportunities they can leverage. She cautioned some of the disadvantages of going door to door is not being able to put anything in or on mailboxes, and there are "No Solicitation" signs, so they have to be cognizant that, even though they are not selling anything, residents do not want people coming to their door, whether it is to educate or sell something. She advised that there may be a cost related to making sure individuals going door-to-door would be outfitted with the proper apparel, so residents know they are representatives of the City. She noted there is a lot of distrust about who is coming to their door.

Councilwoman Schmidt commented that all the members of City Council have walked these neighborhoods, and she felt it is not realistic to have interns or volunteers go door-to-door. She felt if they put it in the hands of volunteers, it will not happen. She appreciates the new avenues for communication, but she did not feel they should be considering door-to-door at this time.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sierawski agreed with Councilwoman Schmidt. She has done door-to-door campaigning, and she felt the person going door-to-door needs to be an actual stakeholder. She felt an intern or a volunteer carrying the message may not relay it correctly, and the City is at a bit of a risk if the message is incorrectly conveyed. She stressed this is the fourth largest city in the State of Michigan, so she did not feel door-to-door would be an effective way to get a

message out. She referred to it as “playing the Telephone game,” and it would not be a safe, effective way to get the message across.

Mayor Taylor questioned how many people sign up for the email newsletter.

Ms. Davis replied they have over 25,000 subscribed to their semi-monthly newsletter. She replied to further inquiry that they do not have as many who have opted for text alerts, and estimated they have about 5,000; however, she added that number is growing because they have been actively letting people know it exists.

Mayor Taylor inquired as to how many Facebook followers the City has.

Ms. Davis replied they have over 75,000 followers. She stated Facebook is the largest following as far as social media accounts. She added that they receive dozens of calls that come into Community Relations on a daily basis.

Mayor Taylor felt communication is a high priority, but he is not interested in seeing a door-to-door campaign and does not feel it is an effective way to reach 135,000 people. Communicating what is going on in the city gets to the heart of what they should be doing. He suggested possibly having a table set up at Farmer’s Market or the Music in the Park evenings to explain to people how to sign up for the online newsletter. He inquired as to the most effective way the City is currently getting information out to the residents.

Ms. Davis replied they have talked about “meeting people where they are,” and she emphasized it depends on what is being communicated. From a programming standpoint, she felt their magazine is a great place, but for people who like to receive their information digitally, either social media or email is the

best option. She added that the text alerts are the best to provide information on emergencies.

Councilwoman Schmidt questioned whether they could take out a full-page ad in the Century that would promote signing up for text alerts or the online newsletter.

Ms. Davis replied that is an option, and they have been trying to get more people to subscribe, especially for the emergency alerts.

Councilwoman Ziarko stated that there will now be monthly water bills, so they can possibly include information with the bill. She suggested they include a form so that if someone has a concern, they can include it when they mail or drop off their payment. She pointed out that not everyone has the same problem, questions, or concerns, and this would be a way to address them one-on-one.

Councilman Yanez noted that there is a significant number of residents who speak English as a second language. He felt it is hard to knock on doors, pointing out that many people have no soliciting signs and do not want people coming to their doors. Elderly people have a hard time getting to their doors. He suggested that possibly students taking marketing classes or political science may be willing to volunteer to go door-to-door. He did not feel they can judge whether it will work until they have tried it, especially in the south end of the City where a lot of residents speak English as a second language. He added that they can leave a doorhanger if they cannot talk to the resident.

Councilman Radtke agreed that including information in monthly water bills is an excellent way to talk with their residents. He agreed with Mayor Taylor that it is difficult to have someone going door-to-door who is not invested in the message. He added there are 50,000 residences in the City, so that would involve a lot of time and people. He agreed that a table at the Farmer's Market would be good. He emphasized that their website needs to be streamlined, adding it needs to be a place for people to gather information. He commented that a lot of the material currently on the website does not need to be there, and it is confusing to people. He stated he strongly advocates getting information to the people in the language that they use, which could be Arabic in the western portion of Sterling Heights.

Councilwoman Koski liked the idea of the City having booths at every special event to ask people how they like to receive their information about the City. She indicated the people should choose how they like to receive their information. They could use the opportunity at these booths to provide instructions on how people can sign up for digital newsletters and alerts. She liked the idea of breaking areas down into neighborhoods so they can receive information directly related to their street.

Ms. Davis stated they have talked about working with Parks and Recreation Department to hold some events throughout the year in neighborhood parks to engage the local residents. They have begun putting QR codes on everything and have uploaded those documents as a page on their website. Most people

who do not speak English have their website set up to translate into their language.

Mr. Vanderpool replied to inquiry that there is a strong consensus that door-to-door is not necessarily a desired option.

Project 12: Consider Wards – Requires Charter Change

Mr. Vanderpool explained there was some interest expressed about changing their charter to allow a ward system. He stated the City's current form of government is an at-large system, which provides for Council members and the Mayor to represent the entire community instead of one area. He noted it is the most common system across the country, and some of the benefits of an at-large system include seven elected officials focused on the entire community. He felt the answer to the question of whether this has worked well for the City is a resounding "yes" when looking at the community's overall progress over the decades. There has been no area that has benefitted based on where elected officials may have lived. Mr. Vanderpool cited the example of the Nature Preserve, which is in the northwest quadrant of the city, and that was pushed by Councilwoman Koski decades ago, even though she did not live in that area of the community but pushed for it. He also mentioned the recent Parks and Recreation improvements, which affected the entire community and not just one area. A dog park on the west side of the City was supported by the entire Council. Mr. Vanderpool stated there are benefits to a ward system as well, and he cited the communities of Grand Rapids and Ann Arbor that have the ward system. In those communities, they have elected officials that are specifically

focused in those areas, because they are elected to represent a particular ward. There are communities throughout the country that have a ward system, and there are benefits to that system as well. There have been some studies that have shown a ward system sometimes discourages economic growth because other Council members will give deference to elected officials who represent that ward on a given project because of NIMBYism. He concluded that there are pros and cons to a ward system but switching over to it would require a change to the City Charter through an election and education campaign, which would all require a budgetary adjustment. He estimated it could cost between \$50,000 to \$100,000.

Councilwoman Ziarko stated she is totally against the ward system. She feels the people who usually propose this have lost elections and they feel they can win a more concentrated area. She felt it divides the city, and instead of people concentrating on the whole, they are only concentrating on a part. She has seen where the council members in a ward system start to barter with other members of council to get their vote on something that is proposed in their part of the city. She sees this system as more of a problem than an asset, and she emphasized that the way it is currently set up, it does not matter if the problem is on her street or on the other side of the city, but it is still a problem with which she needs to deal with. She felt they all work in the same direction to solve that problem so working as a whole is much more beneficial.

Councilman Yanez questioned the size of the wards in Chicago.

Mr. Vanderpool stated he does not know the number but estimated it to be over fifty.

Councilman Yanez stated he was formerly in favor of wards, but he talked with Councilwoman Ziarko, and at the Michigan Municipal League conference, he also talked to someone who was serving in a community with a ward system, and she cautioned that he would not like it. He felt it may make sense for a community with a larger land map, but he appreciates the form of government they have now for a city of this size. He stressed he does not support wards.

Councilwoman Koski stated if she had not moved in 2002, she would have represented the southwest corner of the City. She pointed out that changes throughout elections, and it depends on where the elected officials live, noting they can move. She did not feel wards are a good idea.

Councilman Radtke stated he is a fan of wards, especially considering that all the Council members currently elected live east of Van Dyke, and he noted it has been this way for at least the last fifteen years.

Councilwoman Koski took exception to that comment, pointing out that former Mayor Notte lived west of Van Dyke, and she also lived west of Van Dyke, in the southwest quadrant.

Councilman Radtke clarified it has been that way in the last six years. He felt that wards work in smaller cities, and he cited Jackson and Battle Creek as other communities that have wards. He felt if they want to be an inclusive community, the at-large system denies people representation and denies the minority vote. He commented that the east side of the City is prioritized, and he worries about

the needs on the west side of the City, even though he does his best to get over there. He stressed there are different ways to form the government and felt they can do a better job to represent all residents of their city.

Councilwoman Schmidt stated she is against wards. She has helped residents on the west side of Sterling Heights with many issues over the years. She felt wards make the Council members tunnel-visioned to their ward and not solving the problems of the entire city. She could not recall ever having a resident say to her in nineteen years that they are not being represented because they do not have wards. She emphasized that the Council members are all very approachable and try to do the best to represent all members in the community, regardless of where they live. She stated there is no written rule as to who can run for an election, noting they all campaign the same way, so people from all areas of the City can run. If they do not get elected, it is not the fault of the people who live on the other side of the City.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sierawski stated when someone runs for a seat in a ward, they are running for that ward and obligated to represent those people. If there is a concern for those specific people, that person is required to specifically represent them. If there are concerns of residents in other areas, the representation of the person holding a seat in another ward is not needed for them. It places the Council members in a specific box, and it is not something that she would want for this City or Council. She commented that she knows what happened in Eastpointe, and she could see why the residents at the time voted in favor of it, but many residents, including African American residents, are

not happy with that type of system. She added that the City of Lansing does not have wards.

Councilman Yanez commented that they need at-large members, so even in a ward system, they can cross borders to indicate they need some help. He felt if they went to a ward system, they would have to have three wards with a representative from each, along with two at-large members; otherwise, he felt they would need to expand the number of City Council members.

Mayor Taylor felt they could have four wards with a representative from each, two at-large members, and a mayor, so there would always be four people representing everyone in the City. He felt that Sterling Heights is getting to the point where it is a large enough city with diverse population centers. He pointed out the northeast quadrant of the City is drastically different than the southwest quadrant. He is sure all Council members feel they feel they are doing the best they can, and want to do the best they can, but he felt it is something worth exploring.

The meeting recessed at 12:10 p.m. and reconvened at 12:21 p.m.

It was announced that lunch arrived, so there was a brief lunch break from 12:23 p.m. until 12:35 p.m.

Project 13: Responsible Contract Ordinance

Mr. Vanderpool stated there has been some discussion on the potential need for a responsible contract ordinance with safety factors and not requiring that the City always accept the lowest bidder for various purchases. He clarified the current city ordinance allows them to develop Requests for Proposals (RFPs), and

the City does not have to accept the lowest bid in those cases. It is a more qualitative process, and they can look at other factors, such as past work, references, and other factors that do not require them to choose the lowest bid. In recent years, they have used the RFP process more frequently than the alternative process, or Invitation to Bid (ITB), which is a far less flexible process. He added that process is reserved for more routine acquisitions where they list the specifications, the bidders bid on them, and if all the bidders are compliant, the City chooses the lowest bidder. He noted that if they write their specifications correctly in the ITB, they can assure that precautions are bid on and incorporated into their proposals and bids. If they cannot show they are meeting all the specifications required, those bids can be disqualified. The ordinance currently provides the flexibility, so at this point in time, they do not feel there is the need for another ordinance that may drive one process over the other. He added that if Council wants to focus more on the fees, they can do that, but they want the flexibility to use ITB on various acquisitions at times because it is often the most advantageous for not only the organization but also the taxpayers.

Councilman Yanez recalled they were talking earlier about how education is important, and when it comes to contracting, no one provides better education through apprentice programs than labor unions, including plumbers, sheet metal workers, electricians, etc. He felt they need to take into consideration not just a bottom-line bid number, but also what these companies are doing for the community. He cited the anticipated redevelopment of Lakeside Mall and

questioned whether the City will have any say in who the owner hires for contractors, and whether they will be local companies. He noted a lot of communities have this type of ordinance with very minimal impact on their budget. He felt it is a good idea.

Councilman Radtke agreed with Councilman Yanez, noting that the lowest bid is not always the best bid when it comes to safety, construction time, etc. He commented that they need to take a contractor's full record into account, not just how cheap they are, but whether they are protecting their employees and building a community.

Project 14: Creating Identity / Brand for Sterling Heights

Community Relations Director Melanie Davis explained her department has already had some significant conversations about this and, while they have an existing logo, tag line and vision statements, they have a great opportunity to create an overarching brand for the City that tells their story. She stated having a brand is good, but there are times when they may want to change the existing perceptions people have of a community. One challenge is that this is a very large and diverse city, and they need to work hard to determine their ultimate goal, which may be to attract more residents and younger families, or to keep the residents they have, or to attract more visitors through placemaking. She felt it will include all, but they need to focus on what they want the brand to be. Another challenge will be to update their existing materials, including some street signage. There is one at Hall Road and Schoenherr that still has the City's old logo on it, so if they want to change and update the identity/brand, there

may be some expenses. Paid advertising is generally part of a strong brand campaign, and they are somewhat limited with the existing communication channels they have. Their goal is to tell the Sterling Heights story beyond the borders and get people excited visiting and moving here. She cited the Pure Michigan campaign and how much money the state has spent on that campaign, but she added that it works.

Councilwoman Ziarko commented that periodic rebranding is good, and it is done all the time by businesses. She questioned whether they would go through a public relations firm that would help with this rather than doing it all internally. She pointed out an outside source would see things differently.

Ms. Davis replied that Council would probably want to seek the services of a branding marketing firm.

Mayor Taylor did not feel they need change their brand, logo, colors, or tagline. He wished the City had an identifying aspect to the community, but he agreed they need to work on who it is they are trying to attract, and until they know that answer, they will be "shooting in the dark." He recalled when they were starting the 2030 Vision process, they looked at SEMCOG data for Grand Rapids, where a lot of their residents in the 35-to-55 age group were leaving the city. The 2030 Vision was a way to look at how to keep those residents from leaving the community while still protecting and providing services to the rest of the population.

Councilman Radtke noted that other communities have tremendous orienteering and signage about the locations of their amenities. He stated that

Sterling Heights does not have a lot of that, and it is not designed for pedestrians only but also for motorists who may not be from the area. He cited Dodge Park, the Splash Pad, and the Iron Belle Trail as a few of the amenities that should be promoted through signage on the ground.

Ms. Davis noted that they have a lot of brands they are already using, such as North Van Dyke Avenue, the Sterling Innovation District, the Golden Corridor, and they need to talk about how all those distinct brands support each other and support an overarching brand for the City.

**Project 15: Business Licensing Update – Waive Fees
For Non-Profits and Small Businesses**

City Attorney Marc Kaszubski explained that business licensing plays an important part in the safety of the general public, responders, and business owners, and provides current contact information, disclosure of hazardous materials, and a description of the activities going on at their sites. He stated the current business licensing fee is \$60 annually and only applies to brick-and-mortar locations. Smaller home occupations, non-profits, associations, and other businesses that do not have a brick-and-mortar footprint are not subject to the licensing fee. He explained this fee was created to offset the cost associated with purchasing the business licensing software, daily input, staff follow-up, canvassing, and other City staff time associated with issuing the business licenses. The question of whether the City should waive the annual \$60 fee for non-profits and businesses provides both opportunities and challenges. The opportunity to waive the fee for a non-profit may be seen as a way to attract

more non-profits in Sterling Heights to help lessen the burdens of government. Others may look at this as a way to subsidize non-profits. Waiving a fee for a small business could be looked at as alleviating a post-covid burden; however, small businesses make up the majority of businesses in Sterling Heights and in many cases, take up more time than larger businesses because they change ownership more frequently and require more follow-through, increasing the burden on staff. They would also have to decide the definition of "small business" and waiving these fees will likely decrease revenue and have larger companies offsetting the licensing and costs of the City going forward.

Councilman Yanez explained the purpose of a non-profit is to do some type of charitable work, but there are some extremely large non-profits, but the majority of them are relatively small. He felt any non-profit that is small enough would qualify for the waiver, and he felt their ordinance should reflect that.

Mayor Pro-Tem Sierawski agreed there are some very small non-profits, and she felt the City should be waiving any fees, adding these non-profits do very good work. She is in favor of this and will rate it as a high priority. She does not know about waiving all small businesses and that may be something they need to discuss further, but she is in favor of it for non-profits.

Councilman Radtke felt this fee should be abolished and should never have been enacted.

Mayor Taylor questioned when the fee was implemented.

Mr. Kaszubski replied it was in 2020.

Mayor Taylor inquired as to whether there are any examples as to how the information from this has been used.

Mr. Vanderpool explained there were no fees the first year, so this is the first year they are collecting fees. They are still working with businesses to keep them all signed up. He estimated that over fifty percent of businesses have signed up for the program, and it has been streamlined without too many complaints or concerns. There have been a handful of complaints, but once they are explained the program and that the Police and Fire Departments have immediate access to important information should there be a need to address a broken water line or fire issue, is very valuable. Most businesses have recognized the justification for the program. He explained they have not yet started promoting the businesses online, which is ultimately a goal, but they would like to get to a higher participation level, which may take a couple more years. He emphasized they are quite satisfied with the rollout of the program. The non-profits are relatively small, with possibly thirty to fifty in the community, so he did not feel that is an issue for Council, and they would have to navigate through some of the legal issues with the City Attorney. He felt the program will pay dividends long-term for \$60 per business.

Councilwoman Ziarko noted they are supposed to rate this for non-profits and small businesses. She felt they should be able to rate each of these separately.

Mr. Vanderpool clarified the more viable option would be not-for-profits.

Mayor Taylor noted that is a problem if it says one thing but means both, and if they are going to rate this for small businesses, they are essentially “killing the program.” He suggested they treat it as not-for-profits only.

Ms. Davenport clarified they should rate it as “Business Licensing Update – Waive Fes for Non-Profits.”

Mr. Vanderpool stated it will take a few minutes to calculate the results of the ratings, so they went on to Communications from Citizens.

[Councilwoman Ziarko was excused from the meeting at 1:00].

7. **COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS**

The floor was opened for comments from citizens with no objection from Council.

- Stephen Bilan – resident and accountant, formerly the Chief Financial Officer for the State of Michigan’s VFW, so he is very involved with non-profits; understands what the City wants to do, and suggested ways to waive license fees for businesses that can file a 990-N, having income of \$50,000 or less; he offered to talk with anyone in the City who wants more information on non-profits.
- Brandy Wright – in favor of additional detached residences as an ancillary use on residential property; liked idea of having a certain number of affordable units for developments with over one hundred units, adding the City needs more affordable housing; liked Mayor Taylor’s idea of having a table set up at City events to get information out to residents; suggested people can sign up right then to receive digital information; understands how wards could be a benefit, but could not see the need in this City because the Mayor and Council members are all very engaging and look out for all.

6. **ACTION ITEMS PRESENTATION**

E. Results

Ms. Davenport showed a screen reflecting the results of the Council’s rating of the fifteen projects. She explained the items with the lowest numbers mean they were rated the highest priority. The top-rated were as follows:

- Trees in Right-of-Way
- Business Licensing Update – Waive Fees for Non-Profits
- Prohibit Paving Front Yards
- Create an Identity for Sterling Heights
- More Low-Income Housing
- Add Mid-Block Crossings

Mr. Vanderpool explained they will focus their time and effort on those top items over the next six months. They would like to report back to Council in January 2023 with significant progress on these items. He cautioned that some of them will require budget amendments, such as creating an identity for Sterling Heights, and those amendments will be seen by December 2022 if not before that date. He indicated the Council will have a couple of additional chances for approving these, either through a budget amendment, an ordinance amendment in some cases, or both. He pointed out the prohibition of paving in the front yards will require a zoning ordinance. He talked about the remaining items on the list and assured that does not mean they will not focus on them, but at this point, they are a slightly lower priority. He added that Council will continue to have the chance to champion some or all of these in which they are interested, including an opportunity at Strategic Planning in 2023. He concluded that this project has worked for them, and has helped them focus on priorities, adding that six items is far more realistic than fifteen items. He thanked the Mayor and City Council for going through this exercise, and they look forward to feedback they may have to tweak it.

Mr. Bahorski thanked Special Projects Coordinator Meghan Ahearn for the tremendous planning that went into this day. He also thanked the directors who

participated, and he is very impressed that their Council and top administrators can sit down and discuss these items. He thanked the Mayor and Council for their participation.

Mayor Taylor stressed he does not take that cooperation for granted, and he appreciated everyone giving them their time, efforts, and talents on a Saturday in the middle of summer to discuss how they can help the residents.

8. REPORTS FROM CITY ADMINISTRATION AND CITY COUNCIL

Councilman Yanez asked Fire Chief Edmonds as to the progress of hiring a couple of part-time Fire Inspectors.

Fire Chief Edmonds replied they will be doing that with the Strategic Plan next year. They hope to have it done before the next budget cycle.

Councilman Radtke stated that, without objection, he would like to see Administration prepare a report on what a change to the assessment for sidewalks would look like. He questioned cost and whether they need to go out for a tax or build it into their budget. He felt the current method is unfair to residents, noting they do not charge people for repairs or replacement to the street in front of their house. He expressed disappointment because they talked at budget hearings about how changes to the zoning map and master plan need to be create. He referred to a recent rezoning on Schoenherr as a spot zoning, noting it did not comply with the master plan or the zoning map and it created a new district. He stressed they need to think about the future of the City, not one property at a time as applications come in, but in totality. He commented

that updating the zoning map and master plan will help facilitate that process, and he added they need to collapse their zoning districts.

Mr. Vanderpool sensed what Councilman Radtke is requesting is a report on the benefits of continuing with the special assessment program they have in place for sidewalk repair/replacement, or transition to a millage rate-supported sidewalk program. He assured Administration would be happy to supply a report to City Council, outlining the pros and cons along with projected costs, and providing Council with as much information as possible to make a good recommendation. He agreed he and Councilman Radtke discussed the zoning upgrade or amendment, and they incorporated some of Councilman Radtke's thoughts with respect to the new zoning ordinance into some of the items discussed today, such as accessory dwelling permits and low-income affordable housing. He stated they did not talk about collapsing the zoning designations for commercial developments, although he felt that is something they should talk about, and the City Planner should also provide input. He indicated he and Councilman Radtke had talked about updating the zoning maps, and he assured they do plan to do that. It is a relatively minor thing to do, and they hope to have it done yet this year. He assured he would be happy to provide follow-up information.

Mayor Taylor thanked the administrators and employees for their input and their hard work on a weekend. He thanked Ms. Davenport for facilitating this discussion, and she did a great job keeping everyone on point and on schedule.

9. **CLOSED SESSION PERMITTED UNDER ACT 267 OF 1976**

There was no closed session scheduled following this meeting.

10. ADJOURN

Moved by Schmidt, seconded by Sierawski, to adjourn the meeting.

Yes: All. The motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 1:19 p.m.

MELANIE D. RYSKA, City Clerk