

CITY OF NORTON SHORES
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
October 27, 2015

A regular work session of the Norton Shores City Council was held on Tuesday, October 27, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, 4814 Henry Street.

Present: Mayor Nelund, Council Members Beecham, Dolack, Flanders, Hylland, Jurkas, Martines, Moulatsiotis and Ostrom; also Mark Meyers, Carrie Pierce, Mike Huston, Jerry Bartoszek, Jon Gale, Bob Gagnon, Ted Karnitz, Lynne Fuller, and Doug Hughes

1. Grand River Restoration Project

City Administrator Mark Meyers introduced Wendy Ogilvie, Director of Environmental Programs for the Grand Valley Metro Council. Ms. Ogilvie provided information on the Grand River Restoration Project. The project is an estimated \$27 million effort to restore the rapids in the Grand River.

2. Cemetery Status Report

Public Works Director Jerry Bartoszek reported that with approximately 200 standard grave sites and 300 cremains grave sites available for sale, Norton Cemetery could be sold out of graves in three to four years. Typically 50 to 60 graves are sold each year with most being standard graves. Staff is looking for Council direction on whether the City should develop another cemetery and, if so, direction to begin searching for property to develop. A second location would require additional equipment and personnel. Mayor Nelund asked how the cemetery is funded. Finance Director Mike Huston explained that there is a perpetual fund to be used only for capital purchases. Revenue from the sale of grave sites is deposited into the perpetual fund. Staffing costs (salaries, etc.) are paid through a General Fund supplement of approximately \$50,000 per year. Council discussed the cost of acquiring another cemetery site which would include property and infrastructure. There is currently approximately \$680,000 in the perpetual fund for those costs. Council Member Martines asked if there was any City-owned property that could be used. Mr. Meyers explained that there are properties large enough but they are zoned and purchased for industrial purposes. Council Member Ostrom said expansion would be desirable if there was available property adjoining the current cemetery but there are a number of other cemetery locations and the trend has shifted from standard burial to cremation. Council Member Beecham pointed out that a consideration for people wishing to purchase burial plots is the difference in rates based on residency.

Council Members Moulatsiotis and Hylland would like to see a proposed budget before making a decision. Council Member Flanders also requested information on any environmental assessment or permits required for cemetery development.

3. Reconsideration of Rental Inspection Program

Mr. Meyers presented information from previous discussions regarding establishment of a rental inspection program. An ordinance was drafted in the spring of 2014 and proposals were accepted from potential inspection service providers. After receiving objections from area landlords, the proposed ordinance failed by a vote of 3-5. The City's housing stock includes approximately 2,800 rental units. There is no formal mechanism in place to ensure that the units meet national property maintenance code standards. Under the previous proposals, rental units would be inspected once every three years and also upon a change in tenants. Inspections would be phased in over three years.

Council Member Ostrom asked why the ordinance requires a landlord residing more than 30 miles outside the city to designate a responsible local agent residing within a 30 mile radius. His concern was that many landlords may live in Grand Rapids and the 30 mile radius could appear intentional. City Attorney Doug Hughes explained that the intent of the language is that compliance concerns can be addressed in a timely manner. Discussion included the fact that most landlords own rental property as their primary business and the cost is minimal. Council Member Moulatsiotis pointed out that owners of large apartment complexes hire outside maintenance companies and refuse to make repairs. Council Member Jurkas said the program would actually protect landlords as well as tenants. She also reported that since the City of Roosevelt Park has had a rental inspection program the Tiffany Woods complex is gradually being repaired and improved.

Council Member Hylland was concerned that enforcement of the ordinance under the property maintenance code could include requiring repairs and improvements not required for owner occupied dwellings. Mayor Nelund asked how many complaints the City receives from tenants about the condition of the unit they are renting. Fire Chief Bob Gagnon said the City receives very few such calls. Mayor Nelund also asked how many structure fires occur in rental units compared to single family owner-occupied homes. Chief Gagnon did not have information regarding those statistics.

Council Member Dolack asked for information from Roosevelt Park and Muskegon Township on the impact their rental inspection programs have had. In attendance at the meeting was Mr. Mike Camron, retired inspector from the City of Muskegon and Muskegon Township. He was involved in their rental inspection programs and assured the Council that the property maintenance code is not complex and provides minimal standards. The City of Muskegon used their own property maintenance code as opposed to the international code. Mayor Nelund asked who is responsible for correcting violations such as smoke detectors removed by tenants. The response was that rental agreements address those questions.

Before taking any further action on this matter, staff was directed to provide data regarding the Mayor's questions, including determining how many rental properties are single units established by residents who had to relocate during the recession but couldn't sell their homes so they took on renters. Mayor Nelund also asked about the cost of the program and Mr. Meyers explained that the program is designed to be revenue-neutral without general fund subsidy. Mr. Meyers will meet with Muskegon Township to determine if they are willing to honor their previous proposal and with landlords to review the program.

Comments

Mayor Nelund reminded Council that the next Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 2nd due to the General Election.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.


Lynne A. Fuller, City Clerk