

REPORT OF THE COMMON COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: July 20, 2023

The Common Council met at 6:00 p.m. on July 20, 2023, in the Council Chambers at City Hall. It was also streamed live on the City of Wisconsin Rapids Facebook page and broadcast live on Charter Cable Channel 985 and Solarus HD Cable Channel 3. Members present included Alderpersons Shane Blaser, Ryan Austin, Tom Rayome, Dean Veneman, Matt Zacher, Dennis Polach, Jake Cattanaach, Jay Bemke, and Patrick Delaney; Also present were Planning Commissioners Jeff Marutz and Thad Kubisiak (via Zoom). Members of the public in attendance included Dominique O'Neill, Tom Mews, Jerry Bach, Brad Nurmela, and Caitlin Shuda; Scott Harrington and Sonja Kruesel of Vandewalle and Associates attended via Zoom.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Presentation regarding the Papermill Recovery and Redevelopment Plan by the Community Development Department and consideration of the Planning Commission's recommendation regarding adoption of the plan.

Community Development Director Kyle Kearns provided a history and summary of the project. He then summarized the three main sections of the plan including the economic opportunities report, site reuse report, and three-phased implementation plan. He emphasized that the City has limited control over any potential projects and timeline due to the fact that the site is under private ownership, but that this plan enables the City to be proactive with any potential opportunities as they arise. He then provided an opportunity for questions and answers.

Alderperson Cattanaach noted that with the extensive size of the site and project scale, the plan was well done. He noted that the plan calls for certain ordinances to be tightened up to prevent the site from falling into disrepair and asked what specifically this was in reference to.

Director Kearns replied that this references the City's salvage ordinance which is fairly current. He also noted that the Building Code enables the City to issue raze orders when properties become detrimental to public health, safety, and welfare.

Alderperson Cattanaach emphasized the importance of keeping codes up to date in the case that the property sits idle or takes undue time to redevelop. He also asked how realistic some of the uses and redevelopment opportunities are that are cited in the plan.

Scott Harrington replied and noted that there is ample opportunity for repurposing at the site. The overall vision is that a redevelopment company would scrap unnecessary items and prepare the site for redevelopment through reconfiguration.

Alderperson Cattanaach emphasized the hope that Sonoco (Sonoco Wisconsin Rapids Tubes and Cores) renews their lease.

Alderperson Veneman asked if it is a virtual certainty that the facility will not be used wholly for the paper industry.

Mr. Harrington noted that the site was expanded somewhat inefficiently over the years. However, he noted that a Fox Valley area machine similar to PM16 was converted to make paperboard. He did state that it is extremely unlikely that the entirety of the site would be utilized for a sole paper company.

Alderperson Veneman noted that it would be desirable if Billerud has at least explored the possibility of utilization of the site for brown paper.

Tom Mews stated that he is a resident who lives in close proximity to the subject property. He noted concern about the quality of the buildings for some of the redevelopment uses specified in the plan. He inquired as to whether the City has the ability to acquire any of the properties or require remediation through eminent domain or a similar process.

Director Kearns noted that given the size of the site, different governmental agencies oversee different portions of the property. FERC is an independent federal agency that oversees hydroelectric generation including the dam. Federal agencies also oversee the capped landfill and floodway. WI-DNR is the oversight agency for environmental remediation and building safety is regulated by local building codes.

Mr. Harrington noted that the BRRS is the WI-DNR online database that inventories contaminated properties and other cleanup and redevelopment activities. He explained that a more thorough environmental analysis will likely be needed for these properties.

Aldersperson Cattnach asked who the oversight body would be for environmental analysis.

Mr. Harrington replied that WI-DNR would be the oversight body and the City may have ability to get involved once contamination and remediation measures are identified.

Jerry Bach asked how the City plans to transition with the loss of tax revenue.

Director Kearns stated that the City intends to continue to take a proactive role by encouraging economic growth, promoting the community, building relationships, and ensuring that the transition leads to continued growth. A recent example is Matalco Wisconsin LLC's recent expansion.

Mayor Blaser noted that the document has been shared with Billerud management and the City is looking forward to a conversation in the near future.

Mr. Harrington noted that the two top priorities identified in the community engagement survey were creating jobs and reusing the property and that dovetails nicely with the opportunities identified. He went on to explain that there is extensive potential on site.

Aldersperson Austin referenced present operations and their tie to existing infrastructure and asked if there are measures that can be taken by the City to ensure that these entities (i.e. Sonoco) remain protected.

Director Kearns stated that the City has a good relationship with Sonoco and that they have begun steps to separate themselves and become more independent. The City will continue to explore ways to support and retain them. This likely is one of the more realistic opportunities at present.

Mr. Harrington noted that the City has done a great job of communication and support of Sonoco.

Mayor Blaser stated that he has been a part of wastewater conversations and is hoping to address wastewater in the future.

Director Kearns stated that staff will be making final changes to the plan in the next couple of weeks and once finalized, the document will be added to the City's website for public view. He encouraged Alderspersons and Plan Commissioners to forward any changes.

Motion by Aldersperson Bemke to approve the Planning Commission recommendation to approve the Papermill Recovery and Redevelopment Plan; second by Aldersperson Zacher.

Motion carried (8 – 0)

4. Adjourn

Motion by Aldersperson Veneman to adjourn the meeting; second by Aldersperson Polach.

Motion carried (8 – 0)

Meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.