

Aiken City Council MinutesWORK SESSION

September 28, 2020

Present: Mayor Osbon, Councilmembers Brohl, Diggs, Girardeau, Gregory, Price, and Woltz.

Others Present: Stuart Bedenbaugh, Gary Smith, Kim Abney, Sara Ridout, Charles Barranco, Gary Meadows, Ryan Bland, Mike Przybylowicz, Marya Moultrie, Joy Lester, Colin Demarest of the Aiken Standard, and 10 citizens.

The work session was held in the Council Chambers at 214 Park Avenue SW; however, the number of citizens that could attend at one time was limited to 22 persons because of the COVID-19 virus and social distancing.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Osbon called the work session of September 28, 2020, to order at 6:01 p.m. He stated there were two items on the work session to discuss: Hitchcock Woods Stormwater and Stratford Hall Traffic Signalization.

HITCHCOCK WOODS STORMWATER

Mayor Osbon stated the first item was a presentation and update about the Hitchcock Woods Stormwater Project.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the Hitchcock Woods Stormwater Task Force Committee has been working on a proposed design for retention to minimize erosion in Hitchcock Woods. City staff has been working with the consultant, McCormick Taylor, on a plan that meets the intention of the Mayor's Task Force. We will receive an update and work with Council on a desired path forward. He stated the task force was set up by the Mayor in 2016, and in January, 2018, City Council approved moving forward with the options. He stated they are now ready to present what they think will best address the stormwater issues in Hitchcock Woods in the Sand River Basin. This has taken a lot of discussion and compromise and negotiations on both sides.

Mr. George Grinton stated the project was conceived through a Task Force Committee consisting of: City residents, elected City officials, City staff, Hitchcock Woods Foundation members, and engineering consultant McCormick Taylor. This group helped develop the approach they are presenting to solve the Sand River erosion problem which the City has been wrestling with since 1956. The project being presented is a great opportunity to solve the stormwater problem once and for all and at half the cost of implementing the project plan as was presented and accepted by Council in January, 2016. He stated it is a great opportunity for the City and the Hitchcock Woods Foundation to set a foundation for a new partnership of cooperation going into the future that he feels will benefit the City, the Foundation, and all of the residents of the City. He feels there will be other opportunities to further enhance how the Hitchcock Woods are seen and presented to the City and tourists. He stated they would provide a project status update, discuss funding, and discuss forward action items.

Mr. Grinton stated the headwaters of the Sand River are almost entirely within the City of Aiken jurisdiction. Within this 1,120-acre urban watershed, there are minimal stormwater management practices. The City commissioned a Stormwater Task Force in 2016 and Council accepted a Sand River Implementation Plan in 2018. Two Best Management Practices (BMPs) from this plan are being proposed for construction as one project. Through stormwater volume reduction, this project reduces the flow and velocity of stormwater into the Sand River. This will reduce erosion in the Sand River and provide water quality benefits such as decreasing nonpoint source pollutants, turbidity, litter, and fecal coliform found in urban runoff. The two BMPs they chose were chosen

because they will represent half the cost of implementing the Sand River plan and the proposal will eliminate the need to build 20 smaller BMPs, which are throughout the City and different jurisdictions. They are strategically located near the discharge point for maximum effectiveness and they will stop the damage. They are strategic also from the sense that they will be installed on City and Hitchcock Woods Foundation property. That will allow for a much easier project since the parties of interest are controlling the placement. The initial project will create three underground stormwater infiltration/detention vaults capable of storing up to 25 acre-feet of stormwater runoff. The objective of the implementation plan called for 58 acre-feet of detention to be installed. With this system, there will be two integrated Opti control systems which will be installed on the two BMPs that will multiply the effectiveness of the storage control an estimated two or three times increase in effectiveness due to the intelligent control. The City has been awarded a 319 Grant totaling \$326,000 to help fund the installation of the Opti control system. The City will match the grant at 40%. He stated they included a two-year evaluation so they can measure the effectiveness and will know exactly what the effective control of the Opti system is.

Mr. Jason Hetrick, of McCormick Taylor, stated they are excited about the new Opti system. It is a relatively new technology. There are over 130 installations of this automated control system across the country. He stated Opti acts as an intelligent control at the outflow end of the stormwater vaults. It keeps the low flow, or if it's closed, so that it captures all of the runoff coming in from that 1,200 acres of Aiken and forces it to infiltrate into the ground eliminating the runoff from Sand River causing the erosion. It is constantly monitoring the weather and three days out of a forecasted rain event. It calculates how much rain is going to fall, how much stormwater volume will result from that rainfall, and then looks at the available space in that vault. If there is enough space, then the valve will remain closed. If it calculates that it needs additional volume in the stormwater vault to store the incoming rain, it will open the local orifice and allow for controlled dewatering of the vault at a managed event, which will allow enough room for the next rainfall to come in. He continued to explain the slides in his Powerpoint presentation which included the operation of the system, how the system looks, and its layout. He stated BMP6 is to be located at the corner of South Boundary and Laurens Street on a parcel that is partially owned by the City and the Foundation. BMP6A is to be located in the canyon adjacent to the existing pipe on a parcel that is split between the City and the Foundation. It is truly a joint solution. BMP6 will catch runoff from South Boundary and Laurens Street as well as runoff from downtown through a diversion pipe. Once BMP6 fills up, it over pumps and fills into 6A. Whatever stormwater falls beyond the volume available in those facilities will then outflow into the Sand River. Currently the models show it will not manage a 10-year event. Mr. Hetrick explained the effectiveness of the units. He stated there are still several items that need to be completed. They need to finalize the final design, the bid book specifications and contract, fine tune the engineers estimate, apply for permits, and finalize the easement acquisition with the Hitchcock Woods Foundation and the Turnquists.

Mr. Grinton spoke about the potential construction schedule. He stated Mr. Hetrick is targeting to complete the design and bid books. The Hitchcock Woods Foundation is committing to trying to get the easements signed and delivered so that by January, 2021, they will be in a position to advertise the project and put it out for bid. Basically, notice to proceed, going through the process of bidding and awarding, would put construction beginning in May, 2021, finishing by the end of the year, and then starting in 2022 they will monitor the results for at least a year and a half. Part of the 319 Grant is to continue to have McCormick Taylor available to do the monitoring, calculations, verify the effectiveness of the BMPs, and report to DHEC. The project should be closed out by the end of 2023.

Mr. Grinton stated there are some issues related to funding. They need \$10.5 million for the project. Capital Sales Tax II and III budgets that have already been approved and allocated for stormwater work is about \$4.3 million. He has discussed funding with Mr. Bedenbaugh and Mayor Osbon, and they believe that Capital Sales Tax IV may be able to allocate \$2 million. The 319 Grant has been awarded and approved by EPA and that leaves \$4 million. He stated his proposal has been that an SRF loan could be taken out and that would bring them to the total. They applied for an SRF loan so they are on the

priority list. They are eligible for it. The interest rate would be 1.3% because it qualifies for a nonpoint source reduction project. The potential on this project is for a 30-year loan period because this asset will last much longer than 30 years. He stated there is something brand new on the Governor's desk. The Senate and House of Representatives passed a change to the Hospitality Tax stating that tax revenue could be used for control and repair of flooding and drainage within or on tourism related lands. He believes Hitchcock Woods would qualify because it is something the City of Aiken is known for and people are interested in seeing. That is another potential source of funding. There are also monies potentially allocated in the budget. There is \$528,000 from the last stormwater tax revenue increase that is available for capital. There may be other options, but he wanted to show that it would not be hard to come up with the \$4 million to complete the project. He said the next steps are to finalize the CPST 4 allocation, accept the 319 Grant, decide if we are going to do an SRF Loan Application. We can complete the easement/permits/right of way acquisition right away. We can complete the design/bid package.

Mr. Grinton stated he had mentioned that the City has some opportunities to turn something that is done for a regulatory reason into an amenity for the city for the two sites.

He stated they have site enhancement opportunities for these two sites. When the project is done they have basic landscaping funding for \$38,000 to do site stabilization and plant a few trees and grass. Then there would be two flat areas in these two spots. They created a group of people that are also part of the parkway, trail, and enhancement designs and started brainstorming as to what they could do to make those two areas better and how they could make them something that would be a gateway to bring people from the parkways and make the area into something more than a bunch of trees. He said to discuss what could be visualized in the future for the area, Steve Silver is present.

Mr. Steve Silver, of the Aiken Land Conservancy, stated the goal is to give them a sense of what is possible for the site after the project is completed. He noted that the suggestions are a thought starter, not a plan at this point. The goal of the site enhancements is to capitalize on the stormwater project to create a community asset that encourages visitors and residents to experience the history and natural beauty of Aiken. They want to create a visible gateway to Hitchcock Woods to draw attention to the primary entrance to the Woods and its proximity to downtown. He stated there is a connectivity aspect to the Woods as well. One can walk from downtown to the entrance into the Woods. They would be close to the County Museum. There could also be educational and recreational information at the site. There could be a site for small lectures or school groups to learn about the Woods. He stated the goal is to restore this site to its natural beauty and not disrupt the surrounding neighborhood. He stated he is really excited about what is possible. There is a lot that can be done to attract people to the Woods and learn about them and ultimately enable them to move down to the Woods.

Mr. Grinton stated he feels they are at a point to wrestle with a problem that has faced the City for decades. He feels there is an opportunity to make it more than just a project. The approach the City and the Hitchcock Woods Foundation have taken this time in solving this project has created a very cooperative relationship between the Foundation and the City to the point where when we implement a project such as this, it does not have to be the only project we do with the Hitchcock Woods Foundation. He spoke with some of the members, and after this, why can't we talk about creating some walking or biking trails on the edge of Hitchcock Woods that would tie into what is being done now. He is very encouraged by this.

Mayor Osbon thanked Mr. Grinton for his commitment to help facilitate where they are. He gives a lot of credit to the Hitchcock Woods Foundation, City staff, and citizens that are a part of the task force who are committed to fix the problem. He feels the solutions are much more palatable to both the City and the Hitchcock Woods Foundation than suggestions have been in the past.

Councilwoman Diggs thanked Mr. Grinton for his dedication and lending his expertise to the group. She asked if some of the site enhancements would be included in some of the

funding requested. Mr. Grinton stated they only requested the funds to do the basic project. The \$10.5 million is to do the project and basically stabilize the ground. The site enhancements would be additional money, and City Council would have to come up with additional funding. It would be eligible for the same funding by which the parkway enhancements were done. The scope of what needs to be done can be decided as we move forward. Enhancements can be done in phases.

Councilwoman Brohl stated when she first came onto Council, Mr. Grinton made a presentation and there were so many areas that had to be involved in this. She stated this project makes sense. She feels this will take care of the issue, and it also has other benefits for learning and beautification.

Councilman Woltz stated this is the best thing that has come up in 20-25 years. He said it is time to do something. He stated when looking at the funding on this, he would like to add 5% to it in order to do enhancements. He would like to see this accomplished.

Councilwoman Gregory stated the proposed project is a solution to a very long time problem that is affecting not only the Woods, but the City of Aiken and the surrounding communities. We cannot lose sight of the issue of contamination. The contamination issue is extreme. It is not fair nor humane to our adjoining communities that are affected by this issue. She stated she agrees with Councilman Woltz about adding an enhancement component makes sense for an overall project. She thanked those who gave her the tour and the education.

Councilman Girardeau stated he grew up in the Woods and he remembers the river that was shown in the pictures provided. He stated it was pretty level with some banks on the side. He stated now it looks like a mini-Grand Canyon. He feels this project will make an impact and make a difference on the drainage, but he's more excited about the idea of having the parkways and the ability to have a gateway to get in there and give the citizens some sort of ownership and experience of the Woods. He liked the idea of a gateway and a pathway making the Woods a destination point for tourists. He would like to hear Mr. Bedenbaugh talk about the change in Hospitality Tax that can be used for control and repair of flooding and drainage on tourism related lands. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the bill is on the Governor's desk and it passed the General Assembly last week. It will allow the Hospitality Tax, State Accommodations, and Local Accommodations Tax to be used for stormwater projects that are for tourists or visitors. They define visitors or tourists as someone that lives outside the City limits. Should the Governor sign this, it would provide a potential revenue source to pay the \$4 million that is lacking. Councilman Girardeau stated as important as the project is for drainage in the Woods, it is just as important with the parkway portion. He stated he agrees with Councilwoman Gregory and Councilman Woltz.

Councilwoman Lessie Price thanked everyone involved in the project. She asked how much has been spent on this project in the last ten years. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated in the last ten years it has been about \$4 million. The work in the parkways was about \$3.4 million of that. Councilwoman Price asked if it was going to cost an additional \$12 million and hope we find a solution. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated if you add in the 5% it would put the cost at a little over \$11 million. Councilwoman Price asked how much land the City owns in Hitchcock Woods. Mr. Grinton stated it is close to 50/50. The City may own a little more. Councilwoman Price stated with these wonderful plans and enhancements that had been described, based on some ownership by the City and the Hitchcock Woods Foundation, then there would be no problem having people come in to enjoy the Woods. Mr. Grinton stated they allow visitors to access the property in the Woods. Councilwoman Price asked if the project would be completed in 2023. Mr. Grinton stated no, that is after everything is evaluated. His goal is for the project to be completed next year if they can get the funding. Councilwoman Price asked that it be stated where the funding would come from. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the funding for the project would come from CPST II and III is approximately \$4.2-\$4.3 million. That is cash on hand from the 2010 referendum. In CPST IV there is \$10 million for stormwater and a portion of that is for downtown stormwater which is \$2 million. The Sand River Basin that this flows into is downtown. There is a grant that was received from DHEC and our match is \$200,000. Then we would propose a State Revolving Fund loan of \$4

million to come up with the balance. If Council directs staff to include additional money for enhancements, he would have to find a funding source for that amount of money, which is about \$600,000 on top of that. Those are the proposed funding sources. He stated he would recommend that staff come back to Council at a future meeting in the next month or so with some proposals for Council's consideration for the \$4 million funding. Council could direct staff where to go from there. Council would decide if they want the City to proceed or not. Staff would make a recommendation on funding options and Council would either agree or say to fund it, but use different sources.

Councilwoman Price asked if there were a flood, based on what they are expecting to do with the engineering, would this project help tremendously in the event of a flood. Mr. Grinton stated flooding is a very local thing, and this project will not be changing the infrastructure of the watershed. There are projects that were part of the implementation plan that they could look into implementing. He stated Beaufort Street is a street that has a lot of flooding. Perry Park has flooding occasionally. He said in the implementation plan there is the opportunity to look at those projects and develop them. They are not included in this project, but they could be included and added at any time Council wishes.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated from a directional standpoint does the path he proposed meet Council's approval from the standpoint of looking at various alternatives for the \$4 million funding. He said he would present it back to Council within the next several meetings.

Mayor Osbon stated he feels everyone would appreciate that. Councilman Woltz stated he thinks it needs to be \$4.5 million to do the enhancements. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated it was more than the aesthetics enhancements, but the work that was done along Park Avenue from Newberry Street to the Railroad Depot was about \$800,000, but a portion of that was for stormwater abatement work, not just the aesthetic pathways. He feels this would be a little less in terms of aesthetics. Councilman Woltz stated one thing he did not see in the project, but that he would like to see, is adding some lighting. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff could have a lighting proposal and would work with the Foundation to make sure it would meet everyone's aesthetics. Councilman Girardeau stated lighting was part of the Park Avenue project and was very important. Councilwoman Brohl stated one of their points was to minimize disruption to the surrounding neighborhood, design the park including the new plantings, and decisions on lighting and parking to assure that the site is accessible but not obtrusive. She feels they have already been thinking along those lines.

Mayor Osbon asked Mr. Bedenbaugh to prepare several financing options that would include different things. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he will present options and will have a staff recommended option for Council consideration.

#### STRATFORD DRIVE/WHISKEY ROAD/POWDERHOUSE INTERSECTION Traffic Signal

Mayor Osbon stated the next item was a discussion about the Stratford Drive/Whiskey Road, Powderhouse Road intersection.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated as part of the second reading of the proposed concept plan at Whiskey Road and Stratford Drive, we will have a discussion of the proposed three-phase signaling system at the intersection of Whiskey Road/Powderhouse Road/Stratford Drive. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the City has been working with DOT because the City believes the best solution is the phased traffic signal which is identical to the signal at Price Avenue, Silver Bluff Road, and Whiskey Road. It would have the same effect on Stratford Drive, Powderhouse Road, and Whiskey Road. He has asked Jennifer Bihl, the on-call Traffic Engineer, to make comments about the Stratford item.

Ms. Bihl stated they looked at a couple of different options. They looked at signal timing and improvements to the intersection. Working closely with the DOT, they have come up with a recommendation of doing a split phase signal. They looked at metrics, such as, level of service of the operations, the volume and capacity ratio, crash data, and queuing data, and presented it to DOT in a detailed form for all the different alternatives. The

first one we looked at was realignment of the two side streets of Powderhouse Road and Stratford Drive and how that looks, then the split phase, and the last alternate was looking at putting a green arrow for Stratford Drive. In looking at the metrics, they came up with the recommendation of the split phase operation with also the recommendation of the realignment and reconfiguration of the intersection to be put in when they do the level of service study and looking at that for potentially a future intersection improvement as well to get the side streets lined up a little bit. The DOT has reviewed this, and they have agreed with the split phase operation. The next steps are updating the traffic signal plan and working with the traffic signal system to get that implemented.

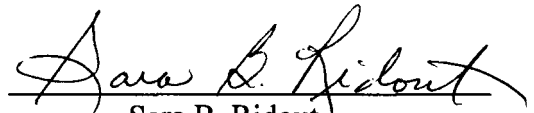
Mayor Osbon asked what timeframe are they looking at for the signalization to be updated. Ms. Bihl stated about four to six weeks. There are a couple of different steps and couple of different reviews that need to be done.

Councilman Girardeau asked what the expense would be for updating the traffic signal. Ms. Bihl stated they have to wait for the completion of the signal plan to be done. She stated it would not be too bad because they are not doing any roadway construction. They are changing signal heads. She did not have an estimate, but she can get one for Council. She stated they are working with the contractor Rhythm Engineering that does the contracted signal system work, and our own Public Safety personnel on getting the timings implemented and then updating the signal plan and change a couple of lights. It is very minimal.

Mayor Osbon asked if there was confirmation from DOT. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated yes it was received in a written email.

Councilwoman Brohl asked if Ms. Bihl was recommending Alternative 2. Ms. Bihl stated that was correct.

There being no further business, the work session ended at 6:56 p.m.

  
Sara B. Ridout  
City Clerk