



**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL
OF THE CITY OF WHITE BEAR LAKE, MINNESOTA
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2022
7:00 P.M. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Mayor Dan Louismet called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The City Clerk took attendance for Councilmembers Kevin Edberg, Steven Engstran, Heidi Hughes, Dan Jones and Bill Walsh. Staff in attendance were City Manager Lindy Crawford, Public Works Director / City Engineer Paul Kauppi, City Clerk Kara Coustry and City Attorney Troy Gilchrist.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting on February 8, 2022

It was moved by Councilmember **Walsh** seconded by Councilmember **Engstran**, to approve the Minutes of the February 8, 2022 City Council meeting as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Minutes of the City Council Work Session on February 17, 2022 Minutes of the Regular City Council as presented.

It was moved by Councilmember **Jones** seconded by Councilmember **Engstran**, to approve the Minutes of the February 17, 2022 City Council Work Session as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

3. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mayor Louismet explained that the Fire Chief was occupied with a nearby fire and as a result would not be able to make his presentation as planned for the night.

It was moved by Councilmember **Walsh** seconded by Councilmember **Hughes**, to approve the Agenda with removal of the Fire Chief's report.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Resolution accepting a donation from the White Bear Lake Lions Club Foundation. Resolution No. 12939

B. Resolution approving an off-sale liquor license and tobacco license for Bao Vang at Birch Lake Liquor. Resolution No. 12940

C. Resolution approving use of Railroad Park by the Ramsey County Library. **Resolution No. 12941**

It was moved by Councilmember **Walsh** seconded by Councilmember **Jones**, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

5. VISITORS AND PRESENTATION

Nothing scheduled

6. PUBLIC HEARINGS

- A. Resolution ordering improvements, approving plans and specifications and authorizing advertisement for bids for the 2022 South Shore Boulevard Sanitary Sewer Extension, City Project No. 22-08

City Engineer / Public Works Director Kauppi stated that this project is being done as part of Ramsey County's South Shore Blvd reconstruction and trail project for completion of the trail around the lake. He explained that while the road is torn up, the City is taking the opportunity to extend 750 feet of sanitary sewer to 13 residences along South Shore Blvd, which are still on septic systems. He mentioned that property owners would still need to connect to that line.

Mr. Kauppi estimated the improvement costs at \$166,400 and in working with an independent appraiser determined the estimated assessment per property of \$11,000 to provide that access. He stated the proposed assessment period is 15 years at 2% interest above the City's bond rate (2021 was 3.29%), and would be payable on 2023 taxes.

Mr. Kauppi relayed the project schedule in which if Council approves the plans and specifications tonight, Ramsey County would take the lead on opening bids for this work in April at which time the City would enter into a cooperative agreement authorizing Ramsey County to proceed with the project. He stated that an assessment hearing would be held in September once final costs are known and the project is expected to be substantially complete in October.

Mayor Louismet opened the public hearing at 7:08 p.m. There being no members from the public wishing to speak, Mayor closed the public hearing.

In response to Councilmember Edberg, Mr. Kauppi stated that two, possibly three homeowners have already expressed desire to connect to the sanitary sewer during this project. He explained that once the contractor is known, options for adding private connections can be addressed at that time.

It was moved by Councilmember **Engstran** seconded by Councilmember **Jones**, to adopt **Resolution No. 12942** ordering improvements, approving plans and specifications and authorizing advertisement for bids for the 2022 South Shore Boulevard Sanitary Sewer Extension, City Project No. 22-08.

7. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Nothing scheduled

8. NEW BUSINESS

A. Resolution opposing the proposed Purple Line (formerly Rush Line) Bus Rapid Transit route

Mayor Louismet stated this resolution to the Metropolitan Council opposes the Rush Line project in no uncertain terms. Having been born and raised here, Mayor Louismet explained that he campaigned on preservation of the small town feel of White Bear Lake. Digging further into the economics, he believed the ridership numbers used to justify this half-billion dollar project were aspirational at best. Describing a visceral reaction to this project by many in White Bear Lake and surrounding communities, he relayed overwhelming response against this project by his constituents. A 48 hour tally of emails and phone calls to the Mayor underscored his observations while campaigning and since being in office, with 36 oppose and 7 support the Rush Line. He urged the Council to adopt this resolution and send a strong message to the Metropolitan Council that the Rush Line just is not right for White Bear Lake, and we oppose it.

It was moved by Councilmember **Walsh** seconded by Councilmember **Hughes**, to adopt **Resolution No. 12943**, opposing the proposed Purple Line (formerly Rush Line) Bus Rapid Transit route.

Councilmember Walsh noted ongoing discussion on this topic. He lamented a 2017 vote in which the Council was tasked with a micro-decision of picking the locally preferred alternative route, which was later mischaracterized as cities providing their approval for this project. He explained that the Council was never provided an opportunity to vote on whether the City wanted the project. He explained that municipal consent is not required in bus rapid transit lines, however, the Metropolitan Council is required to listen to communities along the route and he hoped this, along with Gem Lake's strong stance against this project, would amplify the message and encourage other cities to join in. As part of the Comprehensive Plan, Councilmember Walsh highlighted a 2017 Community Survey in which "small town feel" scored high to describe White Bear Lake today, and well as the vision for the future of the City.

Councilmember Hughes campaigned on this issue and this vote is a matter of her integrity and a response to those who voted her into office because they were not being heard. While not against transit, she is against this plan. Councilmember Hughes said, the efficiency gained by running 35E as the trunk line, and moving more quickly to local routes, far outweigh the federal dollars being chased. She believed the Purple Line to be a strings attached, substandard route, noting a 50% federal match of the projected spending, however, when spending balloons, local tax payers will be left to make up the difference.

Councilmember Hughes said, in order to get that money you must have dedicated lanes, for which there is no space downtown. She expressed frustration that buses will prompt signal lights to encourage their movement at the expense of others. She believed there to be no compromise on the number of buses per day (89) and did not feel Highway 61 was an appropriate route – 35E is the trunk-line. Councilmember Hughes said, "Rather than making bus stops along Highway 61, we should upgrade the park and ride at Vadnais, include a stop before the bus goes past Highway 36 and add a park and ride near Hugo. Then not only can people go to Union Depot in St Paul, they can also go to Minneapolis, to Medtronic or 3M, the Rosedale Mall, or many other useful locations in the metro area."

Councilmember Hughes mentioned that part of this development is adding local buses through neighborhoods to bring people to the Purple Line, which is not part of this federal grant. She suggested building those now and moving people to 35E with many more resources and locations for riders, and increase riders in an organic way. She will continue to thwart this bus line every chance, and let the federal government know that the people living in White Bear Lake do not want its money (our taxpayer money) spent on the inadequate route being proposed.

Councilmember Jones believed there to be an abundance of misinformation about the Rush Line. Noting the long-term implications of no BRT, he stated the City and the entire northeast corridor could be cut off from future development opportunities. He said the northeast corridor is already at a disadvantage compared to other quadrants relative to jobs, businesses, population, and transportation links. He did not believe that an average of five electric buses and hour, or a small terminus west of Highway 61, would ruin White Bear Lake on a state highway that carries 34,000 vehicles a day. Councilmember Jones believed it naïve to think that stopping this bus line will save money because the federal government has already spent it, if not here, somewhere else.

Agreeing that ridership is debatable, Councilmember Jones said he would leave that assessment to the yet-to-be completed federal application process, along with the University of Minnesota study and the experts. He understood this is a build it, and they will come project, but if it is never built, they will never come. Or they will come by car and exacerbate parking issues downtown. Councilmember Jones stated, none of the arguments in the resolution are supported by facts, only sentiments, and not enough to support cutting this off in its planning stage without providing a consistent hourly form of public transportation to White Bear Lake.

Councilmember Jones questioned 150 years of history of transportation decisions making White Bear Lake what it is today. He shared some quotes, the most notable by former Mayor, Harry Mares, "Cities should exist as efficient instruments providing the greatest possible living conditions for the inhabitants and visitors. Without a great plan, one that is steadfastly held as the guide for the City, efficiency is lost, opportunities are lost, and dreams for what could be are never realized." He noted the Rush Line has been in the planning stages since 1999 and was a part of the last two, 10-year Comprehensive Plans.

Councilmember Edberg opposed this resolution as he did not agree with the resolution's assertions about the detrimental impacts to the City. He said, Highway 61 is a State Highway carrying tens of thousands of vehicles to which the addition of a few buses is inconsequential. He asserted this will not decrease the walkability of the City, and it will not massively increase the traffic either. He added, the buses are electric and therefore do not create sound nor a diesel smell. He did not believe there to be an issue with public safety as he confirmed by the White Bear Lake Police Chief. With display of a Metropolitan Council regional transit map, he noted that elimination of the purple line would leave the north-eastern portion disconnected.

Councilmember Engstran said he is against the bus line, believing it should be on I35 from the beginning. He could not support the resolution as written, noting there is no way to tell whether the bus line will impact the walkability, and if intersections are improved, that will actually improve the walkability.

Councilmember Engstran read aloud provision (j) as the only argument he supported within this resolution: "The City Council understands that a great deal of work goes into planning a BRT project and selecting a route. Nothing in this Resolution is intended to criticize Ramsey County, the Met Council, or anyone else that has worked on this Project. Instead, the City Council is expressing its desire, supported by a large number of its constituents, to not have White Bear Lake be part of the BRT Route." He explained that the resolution has no feet and the Metropolitan Council will do what they want regardless.

Mayor Louismet acknowledged that the resolution has no legal standing as this transit project does not require municipal consent. He was open to amending the resolution down to "j", however, such a resolution truly has no teeth as it would eliminate the rhetoric, which highlights the community's stated opposition to this project.

Councilmember **Walsh** made a motion to table resolution to the next City Council meeting, seconded by Councilmember **Hughes**.

Roll call vote:

Edberg nay
Walsh aye
Jones nay
Hughes aye
Engstran aye

Motion carried 3:2.

9. DISCUSSION

Nothing scheduled


10. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CITY MANAGER

A. Redistricting Commission Public Hearing at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, March 7, 2022.

11. ADJOURNMENT


There being no further business before the Council, it was moved by Councilmember **Edberg** seconded by Councilmember **Engstran** to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:49 p.m.

Motion carried unanimously.



Dan Louismet, Mayor

ATTEST:



Kara Coustry, City Clerk