

Birmingham City Commission - Special Workshop Meeting Minutes
Monday, April 12, 2021
6:00PM
Virtual Meeting On Zoom
Meeting ID: 655 079 760

Vimeo Link: <https://vimeo.com/event/3470/videos/527622821/>

Workshop Session

This will be considered a workshop session of the City Commission. No formal actions will be taken. The purpose of this workshop is to participate in a discussion regarding Unimproved Streets.

I. Call To Order

Pierre Boutros, Mayor

II. Roll Call

Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk, called the roll.

Present: Mayor Boutros (location: Birmingham, MI)
Mayor Pro Tem Longe (location: Birmingham, MI)
Commissioner Baller (location: Birmingham, MI)
Commissioner Hoff (location: Hilton Head, SC)
Commissioner Host (location: Birmingham, MI)
Commissioner Nickita (location: Birmingham, MI)
Commissioner Sherman (location: Birmingham, MI)

Absent: None

Administration: City Manager Markus, City Clerk Bingham, Finance Director Gerber, City Attorney Kucharek, Consulting City Engineer Surhigh

III. Presentation & Discussion

CM Markus provided an overview of the workshop's topic.

A. Funding for Unimproved Roads

Finance Director Gerber presented the item.

Commissioner Host said improving roads in the City will be more fair since residents on unimproved roads are paying the same taxes as residents on improved roads. He said he wanted the City to explore bonding options further. He also said residents of an unimproved street should have the option of opting-out of road improvements.

Commissioner Baller said that the City will have a better sense of the costs of the project once the roads are ranked by the Engineering Department. He said it is unlikely that all 26 miles of unimproved roads in the City will need to be improved. He said maintaining the 85%/15% cost split for improving roads makes sense if the City can afford that, and that if the City could afford to pick up more of the cost for improving roads that might also be beneficial.

Commissioner Hoff said changing the cost split for road improvements from the 85%/15% split would be unfair to many residents who already paid to have their roads improved at that cost. She said it would be especially unfair for the residents of some improved roads who had not wanted their roads improved in the first place and who lost out to the majority on their street.

Mayor Pro Tem Longe agreed with Commissioner Baller, noting that different unimproved roads have different conditions.

B. Planning for Infrastructure Improvements

Consulting City Engineer Surhigh presented the item. He asked the Commission to weigh in on whether they wanted to apply a proactive approach to unimproved streets and whether they wanted to review a "Master Plan" for the Unimproved Streets.

Mayor Pro Tem Longe and Commissioners Baller, Host, Hoff, Sherman, and Nickita all answered yes to both of Consulting City Engineer Surhigh's questions. Both Commissioners Sherman and Nickita specified they were answering yes to both questions based on the AHUSSC's findings.

Commissioner Nickita said the master plan should integrate the AHUSSC's findings.

C. Design Standards for Improving Unimproved Streets

Consulting City Engineer Surhigh presented the item.

Mayor Pro Tem Longe and Commissioners Host, Baller, Nickita said they were not in favor of only allowing concrete for improving roads.

Commissioner Host was in favor of allowing residents a choice of asphalt or concrete.

Commissioner Baller said he was not sure residents needed to be given the choice, but that the City should possibly have it. He said the City would need to determine what the standards are. He also said he would want the Commission to review the design standards.

CM Markus said the City would look into different types of asphalt, or a different base for roads, to try and expand possible road improvement options beyond concrete. He said that as the resistance to concrete is sometimes cost, the City could also look at installing concrete but assessing residents for the price of asphalt. He said the projects would also be bid out to keep costs lower. He clarified that these design standards would only be in regard to material, curb profile, and other facets of road design the City has not yet decided on. He stated the topic would not be revisiting road widths or similar standards the City now has in place.

Commissioner Nickita stated that the character of a street is affected by the choice of asphalt or concrete.

Mayor Pro Tem Longe said that residents should be informed by the City from the outset of a potential road improvement project how wide their street would become if the project is completed.

Commissioner Sherman noted the AHUSSC recommended that only concrete be used given the increased maintenance costs the City would likely bear over time if asphalt were installed.

D. Policy on Special Assessment Districts

City Attorney Kucharek presented the item. She asked the Commission to opine whether they wanted the City to initiate projects for improving unimproved streets, and whether they desired to review a new ordinance for Improvement of Unimproved Streets.

Commissioner Baller and Mayor Boutros answered yes to both of City Attorney Kucharek's questions.

Commissioner Hoff said it would be beneficial to revise the ordinance language. She said the ordinance should clarify a threshold for what qualifies as an 'expression of interest', how many streets nearby would get asked, and any other similar details.

CM Markus said it would likely be difficult for the Commission to move forward with any recommendation to improve a road if more than 50% of the residents on the street were not in favor.

Commissioner Baller said that if road improvements are a high priority for the City that the City should consider restricting spending in other areas for a time in order to prioritize spending on the road improvement project.

There was consensus that the ordinance should allow for a petition process for improving roads to exist, but should not require it.

Commissioner Host said he would like to see the roads improved within 10 years.

Commissioner Hoff said it was unlikely that the roads would be improved within 10 years. She noted there are many differences of opinion. She said this process was, however, a step in the right direction.

IV. Public Comment

Robin Boyle said he wanted the City to pay attention to the unimproved roads that are more heavily trafficked in terms of how they are funded and prioritized.

Matthew Carmona said he was glad that the option for asphalt might be preserved. He said he was concerned about tree removals resulting from improving roads. He also said he was glad that the Commission was interested in resident opinions regarding road improvements.

Jonathan Hofley said he was surprised to learn that unimproved roads are assessed at the same rate as improved roads. He said he would write a letter to the Commission about it. He said he could not imagine unimproved roads continuing to be assessed at the same rate as improved roads for however long it would take to complete the entire road improvement project.

David Lurie stated that when Lakeview was improved 94% of the residents on the street wanted asphalt for aesthetic reasons and not cost reasons.

Andrew Haig agreed with previous comments that the quality of the road improvement, and not the material itself, determines the life of the road. He said he also wanted to hear more about Commissioner Nickita's stated that the character of the road is impacted by the choice of asphalt or concrete.

Dominic Police said the discussion was getting waylaid by too much focus on details, like concrete versus asphalt, before a general strategic vision was decided on. He echoed Mr. Hofley's and Commissioner Host's comments about equal assessments of improved and unimproved roads being inequitable. He said the Commission must determine a clear strategic vision, determine its goals, and then iron out the details of road improvements.

V. Adjourn

Mayor Boutros adjourned the meeting at 7:29 p.m.



Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk
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