

Memorandum

DATE: March 26, 2010
TO: Mayor & Council Members
FROM: Joel Walinski, City Administrator
RE: Friday Memo for the week of March 22-26, 2010

There will be a road closure next week on 5th Street Bridge near the downtown area. A concrete approach panel on the West end of the 5th Street Bridge will be replaced. East and west traffic will be reduced to one lane for 10 days during the project.

As a follow-up to the Council's discussion on the State's funding reductions, City Department heads have been working collectively to analyze the core services provided within each department, identifying them as essential, important, or desirable and the associated community expectations. This information, along with additional service analysis information from all Departments, will be shared with the City Council at the Council meeting of April 6, 2010.

One issue that gains publicity during budget restriction times are the unfunded mandates initiated by federal and state government and agencies on local government. In last week's Friday Memo, the Street Division identified a newer mandate requiring the installation of new signs throughout the City, a \$40,000 cost to the City over 4 years. This week the State Legislature is considering House File 3512. Although the City currently does monitor current indoor air quality at the arena, this bill would require the City to move and reinstall the current air monitoring system to a new location within the building by Jan. 1 2015. Estimated cost for this move would be around \$5,000. Another option for the City would be to replace the current Zamboni and edger with electric models. Replacing both of these would cost around \$120,000. Indoor air quality is important, especially at public arenas; hence the ongoing monitoring that is currently in place. The statistical information associated with the Return on Investment for these types of "improvements" has yet to be provided.

Below is information on city activities and information provided by the department directors and managers for the week of March 22-26, 2010:

CITY CLERK

Submitted by Deb Little, City Clerk

Approximately 30 City Council and boards/commission members participated in the open meeting law/data practices training on Tuesday, March 23, 2010.

The Mayor hosted a community events meeting on Wednesday, March 24, 2010 to gather feedback and input on the draft events application and policy from the volunteers that host and organize Northfield's many wonderful community events. The meeting was attended by approximately 22 events organizers representing 11 different organizations, as well as city council members and staff. There were many good questions, suggestions and comments regarding the proposed policy as well as discussion on encouraging community events and collaboration. The group would like to meet again to review and discuss the next

draft of the proposed policy. It is anticipated that this item will be back before the council in mid April with a May 15 deadline for events applications.

Census Information:

Blank census forms are available at City Hall. Beginning March 30, there will be blank forms available at the Welcome Center reception desk at the NCRC (1651 Jefferson Pkwy, north entrance). The forms are available at these locations in English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Vietnamese. They will remain at these locations through April 15.

A Census Bureau staff person will be on site at the NCRC to assist with completing forms from March 30 to April 15 on the following days and times:

Tuesdays: 4 pm – 7 pm

Wednesdays: 8 am - noon

Thursdays: 3 pm – 7 pm

Saturdays: 8 am - noon

Residents who will not be back in Minnesota before April 15, can find the nearest Census Bureau question assistance center to obtain a blank form at the following website:

<http://2010.census.gov/2010census/take10map>

Marj Evans-de-carpio is also available to answer questions at 645-3068 or 664-3504.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Building

Submitted by Jim Kessler, Building Official

The department is continuing rental inspections and enforcement. We have sent almost 30 letters to property owners requesting they contact us regarding rental status. We have inspected 12 new rentals this week. We are still dealing with 4 properties from last year that have court orders requiring compliance before mid June.

This week we have issued building permits for 3 commercial projects and 3 residential projects, along with a few mechanical and plumbing permits. We have been doing inspections of the three new houses being built along with the numerous smaller projects. We have met with Carleton regarding some of their proposed projects.

We have been working through our files to close out open permits from both contractors and homeowners. We currently have about 400 or 500 open permits. Some of the open permits are still under construction but a large majority are projects where the final inspection was not requested. We are scheduling the final inspections as needed.

We have been in contact with the insurance company responsible for the Lockwood house that burned last June. Progress is slow. We have also been in contact with property managers for a foreclosed house that is currently blighted on the west side of town. A couple of other blight complaints are in process for owner occupied homes.

Community Development

Submitted by Brian O'Connell, Community Development Director

Work on the Land Development Code continues. The first "chunk" of the Land Development Code related to the residential built area of the City will be presented to the City Council for the Council work session of April 13, 2010. As part of this effort, staff in the Department have worked or create a different organizational format for the Land Development Code with the goal being to have the Code be as easy and understandable for the user as possible.

Given the tight budget situation, the Community Development Department has initiated a new approach to managing escrow payments made to the Department by developers where the escrow payment is needed to pay for outside design review services from engineering and other review staff. This new approach will emphasize the importance of the financial relationship between the City review service and the responsibility of the developer applicant to pay for review expenses. In the past, the general fund operating revenues have been used, to some degree, to pay for development review services provided by the City. This practice will not continue in the future, as a much higher degree of reliance on escrow funds paid to the city will occur. All of this is due to the extreme budget shortfall that is being experienced by the City and also to more fully reflect the general policy that staff believes the City Council expects where the developer should pay the costs associated with development.

Economic Development

Submitted by Jody T. Gunderson, Economic Development Director

The Economic Development Authority held its regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday and evaluated a micro-grant that the owner of **digs** submitted for consideration. **digs** is a specialty retailer located in downtown Northfield. The retail operation offers products in everything from home decor to greeting cards, fabric to jewelry, table-top to vintage goods. **digs** also offers custom services that include furniture and window treatment design and construction, as well as design consultation to homeowners and architects. The retail store has been recognized in local and national print media. With the downturn in the housing economy, **digs** has experienced a reciprocating decline in their design business. Recognizing a new market for appliqué t-shirts in 2009, the owners launched the LeendaLoo brand of t-shirts for adults, children and infants. The Company has grown the brand during 2009 and is now expanding their channel of distribution to include local art fairs, festivals and to specialty retailers. With the anticipated increase in demand, **digs** required an equipment upgrade to improve operating efficiencies. The EDA Board believed the company met the eligibility requirements of the program and awarded **digs** a micro-grant in the amount of \$5,000.00 for the purchase of equipment necessary to expand their clothing production line.

The Economic Development Director has also working with the EDA's consultants, Hoisington Koegler Inc., in preparation for the public meeting scheduled on April 29, 2010, at the Community Resource Bank (South), from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. This will be the first opportunity for the public to provide input on the concept plans that the Master Plan Steering Committee have been working to refine for both business park sites.

Housing

Submitted by Michele Merxbauer, Housing Manager

NAHRO

Housing Staff is a board member of the state's NAHRO organization, or National Association for Housing and Redevelopment Officials. Staff serves on the Legislative Committee for MN NAHRO and this week has been full of updates on bills in our legislature affecting housing development projects and renter and landlord rights.

Legislation was heard this week calling for the issuance of "Challenge Bonds" for housing development projects. The Challenge Bond concept is to authorize the issuance of bonds to be used for the same housing and development purposes currently authorized under the Challenge Program. This would redirect general fund appropriations currently in the Challenge Program to pay debt service on the new Challenge Bonds. This is troublesome on two sides: currently, the Challenge Program provides a lot of flexibility in meeting a wide variety of housing needs; attempting to direct more funds to the Challenge Program has been a high priority for MN NAHRO.

However, converting Challenge Program general fund appropriations to service debt on "Challenge Bonds" locks in these funds for housing development purposes. Given the revenue shortfall the state is facing for

the 2012-13 biennium, it is certain that there will be very deep cuts to general fund programs across the board – not exempting the Challenge Program. The Challenge Bond bill is alive in the House but may not be heard in the Senate.

The other issue NAHRO is addressing is capping the late fees that landlords can charge tenants. The Multi-Housing Association and Legal Services have moved toward a cap on late fees of 8% of rent. The concern NAHRO has, as it represents the public housing agencies across the state, is that the 8% cap will not cover costs Public Housing Agencies (PHA's) spend to secure payment of rent. PHA's already run on a shoestring budget and the cap on late fees would further impede their ability to run a financially stable organization. NAHRO is working with Multi-Housing Association and Legal Services to come to conclusion on this issue and not impose this regulation until 2011 or beyond. This is a fine line for NAHRO to walk, as their interests are representative of both the renter and landlord.

Home Matters

Staff met with the other planning members of the Home Matters project this week to discuss timeline and projects for the unveiling of the Cherry Street house. Construction is anticipated to be completed next week and April, May, June and July will have a variety of open houses, educational events, and learning opportunities for the public on green, sustainable and healthy living aspects of this home. Components will also include how the average homeowner in Northfield could incorporate some of these aspects into their own home. The City of Northfield Housing website will detail these events as dates are nailed down, and of course the Home Matters blog/website will also be updated and a good source for more information.

www.home-matters.org

Planning

Submitted by Dan Olson, City Planner

The Planning Commission met this week to continue its review of the draft Land Development Code (LDC). The Commission discussed the existing residential regulations that would be presented to the City Council at their Work Session on April 13th, and also began its discussion of the regulations for future residential areas. Staff also attended a training session on data practices/open meeting laws, and attended a Labor Management committee meeting, which was to observe an organizational meeting for several companies/organizations in Northfield to begin their own employee wellness programs.

PUBLIC WORKS

Facilities

Submitted by Bernie Shakal Facilities Maintenance Supervisor

The CDBG proposal for the heating and ventilating upgrade for the CAC food shelf area continues to move along, bid proposals for the selection of an engineering firm to aid in the design of the work was sent out on March 22,2010. The goal is to have construction completed by the upcoming cooling season.

The re-keying project at the Northfield Community Resource Center is progressing, we received a keying schedule from Best Locks this week and we are in process of coordinating meetings with tenants to draft a final plan.

The hazardous waste generated by the various facilities within the City was gathered and prepared for disposal, items such as lighting, ballasts, batteries, and electronics are examples of the items that need to be handled by licensed recycling companies. This is a task that we can normally take care of annually

Streets and Parks

Submitted by TJ Heinrich, Streets and Parks Supervisor

Street sweeping and pot hole repairs were the main focus within the department this week. Spring sweeping is 60% completed. The majority of pothole repairs are completed. However, we continue to receive reports. Spring turf equipment has been readied for next week. Staff will begin ball field preparations at Sechler and Babcock parks next week. Other parks will start seeing spring cleanup.

Wastewater

Submitted by Glenn Lindroos, Wastewater Superintendent

Wastewater staff spent about 40 man hours preparing the surface and coating the inside of the spill containment area under the ferric chloride tank. Ferric chloride is delivered in bulk and pumped into a 5000 gallon fiberglass tank. About 120 gallons per day is fed into the wastewater stream to remove phosphorus. A spill containment area is required for ferric chloride because it is highly corrosive and if a large volume of this material drained into the treatment system all at once it would cause problems with process equipment and effluent quality.

A leak did develop in the piping and by the time it was noticed the next morning this 200 gallon spill had started dissolving the walls of the containment area. The area was cleaned up before any further damage occurred, but it was obvious the material used to construct the containment area was not resistant the product it was supposed to contain. An epoxy coating was selected and a sample was tried in a test area to see if it would hold up to ferric. There was no noticeable breakdown of the epoxy coating after 7 days of exposure to ferric chloride, so the containment area interior was coated with the product.

Water

Submitted by Doug Lien, Water Superintendent

The Water Division received a call from Multek on Monday in regards to low water pressure at their facilities. Water Operator Scott Murphy checked on their water system and found that their 4" service valve only partially opened. Just recently Multek started a new process and with the valve only being opened partially they did not have the volume of water needed to serve the facility.

Street Mechanic Ryan Keifer and Street Operator Steve Malecha finished making the final alterations to the new Water Utility truck on Wednesday. Ryan and Steve did an excellent job on the truck.

cc: Department Managers