

# SLP set to divert sidewalk funds to address water main concerns

## Lining sewer pipes and maintenance holes can help prevent backups, according to St. Louis Park city staff

By **SETH ROWE**  
seth.rowe@apgecm.com

A plan to construct new sidewalks in St. Louis Park could be placed on hold as the city diverts funds to study ways to prevent damage from future water main breaks.

The St. Louis Park City Council discussed the idea June 20, although a majority supported continuing to fund new sidewalks near naturally occurring affordable housing complexes. The majority, though, also supported the idea of a citywide assessment to consider where the city should focus efforts to reduce the impact of future water main breaks.

Some mitigation work in the Texa-Tonka Neighborhood, where water main breaks occurred May 21 and June 3, would take place sooner. City staff recommended lining sanitary sewer pipes near water mains on Minnetonka Boulevard from Texas Avenue to Quebec Avenue. A city staff report explains that the lining “is a pipe within a pipe, installed without digging.” A felt lining is inserted into a pipe, with resin within the liner exposed to a curing element to attach it to the inner walls of the pipe.

“Since the new pipe is jointless and seamless, water cannot infiltrate into the system from the ground,” the report explains. “The city has been using this trenchless technology to replace sanitary sewer pipes for over 15 years. This would be a new application of the technology, whereby we would seek to minimize impact on the sanitary system by the neighboring water main system.”

Existing manholes, which city staff referred to as access points after Councilmember Margaret Rog objected to the gender reference in the term, would be lined with a mortar to block the path of water from a break, with the intention of preventing infiltration of the sewer system.

The estimated cost of the work on Minnetonka Boulevard between Texas and Quebec avenues is less than \$175,000, with City Manager Kim Keller planning to move forward on a contract without the council needing to formally vote for approval due to the limited cost.

A study to consider similar work elsewhere in the city would be more costly, though, according to city leaders.

Funding would come out of next year’s pavement management project, under the staff proposal. The project is focused on the Oak Hill, Lenox and Texa-Tonka neighborhoods and includes street rehabilitation, water main replacement, and the repair and replacement of sidewalks and sewers in certain areas. The project had also envisioned traffic management upgrades and as many as 2.5 miles of new sidewalk.

The staff proposal called for the replacement of existing infrastructure to move ahead but not the new sidewalks and traffic management elements, freeing up money for the study to assess sewer and water system vulnerabilities.

St. Louis Park is already facing potentially millions of dollars in spending to assist residents impacted by the water main breaks. As of the June 20 meeting, Keller reported that the city had received

44 claims from property owners.

Much of the damage resulted from water from the water main breaks entering the sanitary system through access points, according to Engineering Director Debra Heiser. The work planned for Minnetonka Boulevard would help eliminate gaps where water could enter the system.

Lining sewer pipes is much less expensive than lining water mains, which are under pressure, and can be achieved more quickly, according to Heiser. As a result, the city began to focus on mitigation to lessen the impact from any potential water main break.

“We’re going to get a pipe that’s going to look like new,” Heiser said of the sewer pipe lining. “It’ll last 50 or more years. So really, when you look at this investment, it is rehabbing sanitary sewer infrastructure.”

The city had already lined a sewer section on Minnetonka Boulevard after the first water main break, Heiser acknowledged. The new work will line the sewer pipes in the remaining sections under the stretch of roadway.

Of the plan, Keller said, “It’s that piece of do we replace the pipe, the water main? Or do we look at mitigation where if there was to be a break we’re able to mitigate that impact. And we can mitigate the impact in a much greater geography for less dollars.”

Mayor Jake Spano encouraged city staff to also focus on preventing water main breaks and to more quickly detect them when they do occur, though.

Councilmember Larry Kraft won-

dered whether the city could find other sources of funding to mitigate damage from water main breaks.

“I am all for being fiscally responsible,” Kraft said. “I would say being fiscally responsible is finding the money to do this – not necessarily finding it from this source.”

He suggested cutting work on streets rather than new sidewalks as an alternative. Rog indicated she disliked the staff proposal to use funds meant to improve walkability for the mitigation work but acknowledged that most council members agreed with the idea.

Councilmember Sue Budd said the Fern Hill Neighborhood has already faced construction disruptions lately. Budd said that delaying the installation of new sidewalks in the area next year would reduce disruptions to yards and residents. Spano pointed out the city would continue to repair the existing sidewalks the city already has in the project area under the staff proposal.

In advocating the city continue to study new sidewalks by naturally occurring affordable housing, specifically along Park Village Drive and Rhode Island Avenue, Budd pointed to the higher level of transit in the area.

Agreed Councilmember Tim Brausen, “I think that’s a high priority when we’re doing additional sidewalk segments. And if we have to look under the couch cushions for the additional funds, let’s do it.”

Follow the Sun Sailor on Facebook  
at facebook.com/mnsunsailor.

## Beltline

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Transit line. The more than six-story ramp would also include commercial space on the ground floor.

The building site is southeast of the intersection of County Road 25 and Beltline Boulevard and is situated near the actual light rail station and a prominent trail bridge already under construction.

The council unanimously approved two tax-increment financing districts for the project June 6. With the form of financial assistance, the developer will pay taxes only on the original value of the land before development for a period before eventually paying taxes for the full value after the period ends. The TIF assistance amounts to about \$14.3 million, an amount that increased from the \$12.6 million in TIF city staff had previously recommended due to higher construction prices, interest rates and inflation, according to a city staff report.

City documents point out that the city land that is part of the deal currently is tax-exempt. The combined value of all

the parcels for the redevelopment site, including the city land, will have a base value of \$7.24 million. That is the amount on which Sherman Associates will be taxed during the TIF period, estimated at 16 years.

For comparison, the estimated full market value of the land when the development is complete will be an estimated \$80.2 million.

Chris Sherman, president of Sherman Associates, said the plan has been four years in the making.

“We truly do believe we have an outcome here that is going to stand the test of time,” he said, adding that he believes that residents will be able to be proud of the development for generations to come. “It took a long time to, I think, really arrive at the right vision.”

The company is “at the doorsteps of closing on the financing” and intends for the project to get underway in the next couple of months, Sherman said.

Councilmember Tim Brausen said the community has been engaged in discussions, which he said “hopefully made it a better project.”

He remarked to Sherman, “Hopefully we have a light rail train coming by there

soon after you open up the development.”

Mayor Jake Spano commented that the development, combined with expansion at neighboring Nordic Ware, shows that the area is popular.

Councilmember Margaret Rog called the plan a big deal.

“This project has been a very long time in the making,” Rog said. “Thanks to the foresight of staff many years ago in acquiring this land, now we’re selling it at a significant benefit to our development fund, which we’ll be able to utilize for other projects going forward.”

After approving the sale, the development authority turned to the redevelopment contract. It calls for the affordable housing building to be substantially complete by the end of 2024.

In addition to the TIF amount, the city agreed to provide a deferred loan of more than \$618,000 through its affordable housing trust fund for the five units that will be restricted to tenants making up to 30% of the area median income.

Council members noted the developer has said it will seek to implement equity and inclusion goals when hiring for the work. The plan also exceeds the city’s green building policy.

Rog praised the number of affordable apartments large enough to accommodate families and said she hopes residents of the affordable building will be able to work at retail in the development.

Grading and utility work would begin in September with work on the affordable housing building set to begin later in the fall, under a proposed time line. Work on other buildings would follow late this year and in the first half of next year.

While construction on the buildings has not begun yet, work to accommodate them is already underway. Changes include a roadway onto the site, a new traffic light on County Road 25 and a turn lane.

“There is an incredible amount of infrastructure being put into this development for the ultimate use of the residents here as well as the residents of the city,” said Economic Development Manager Greg Hunt. “It’s a major landmark, transit-oriented development for the community.”

Rog said, “Folks can continue to expect some hassles in that area.”

Hunt replied, “For several years, yes.”

Follow the Sun Sailor on Facebook  
at facebook.com/mnsunsailor.

**SAILOR.MNSUN.COM**

FEATURING NEWS, PHOTOS AND ADS  
FROM YOUR COMMUNITIES