

A work session of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 1:00 pm.

Councilors Present: Brownson, Herman, and Rocka.

Councilors Excused: Mayor Jones and Councilor West.

Staff Present: Public Works Director Harrington and City Engineer Crater. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

Item 3(a): Sunset Empire Transportation District Overview of the Operations and Plans for Future

Jeff Hazen, Executive Director, Sunset Empire Transportation District, gave a PowerPoint presentation providing background information on Sunset Empire and details on programs, services and service areas, ride statistics, federal and state requirements, future plans, funding sources, partnerships, marketing, recent and anticipated changes in legislation. He answered clarifying questions from Councilors and the public, and responded to comments from the Council with the following key comments:

- Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) funds are recurring; however, the legislature could take away the tax. If those funds become no longer available, the District would stop expanding, but continue to maintain what it already had in place.
- Weekend service on Route 10 in Astoria would begin in October. Weekday service on that route would remain the same.
- Programs are available through Clatsop Community Action to help individuals pay for para-transit services. Councilor Herman believed a scholarship should be provided to low-income people.
- Currently, a comprehensive route map is available, but it is very cumbersome. Sunset Empire is in the process of developing individual route maps as routes and schedules are redesigned. He provided details of the software programs the District was using to redesign routes, improve on-time performance, and update the mobile transit app for riders.
- The existing website was developed two years ago and since then, the District learned that the Google trip planner integrated into their site would only allow trip planning up to 90 days in advance. Tourists typically plan their trips to the area a year in advance, so the District is developing its own trip planner with fewer limitations and more details.
- Sunset Empire pays its drivers competitively and offers training. The current shortage of driver's is due to the low unemployment rate.
- Route 101, which provides service between Astoria and Warrenton, is one of the most popular routes so it will be expanded. The route connects with Tillamook County Transportation.
- Ridership to Columbia and Rainier is decent but could be better. In the past, Sunset Empire requested grant funds for four round trips per day, but only received funding for two round trips a day, which does not meet the needs of the riders. Recently, funding for three round trips per day was approved, so the District plans to provide better buses and do better marketing of the route.
- Sunset Empire would not be renewing the contract with Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) on the route to Portland because they need to focus on local expansion. However, bus service to Portland would still be offered via Highway 30.
- The District recently put out a request for proposals (RFP) for low floor buses, but they all came in so far over the grant that RFP had to be cancelled and another one put out. The low floor buses are extremely expensive.

Item 3(b): Sunset Empire Transportation District Pedestrian Safety Campaign

Mr. Hazen apologized that recent staffing changes resulted in poor coordination and communication between Sunset Empire, ODOT, and the City on the Pedestrian Safety Campaign. As soon as a new person was hired,

work on the campaign would start up again. He explained that in urban areas, the biggest problem is with pedestrians crossing the street in the middle of a block. Bus drivers do not stop for someone flagging them down from across the street in attempt to discourage this behavior.

Council President Brownson opened the discussion to public comments.

Sarah Lu Heath, Executive Director, Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA) [57:05] said she had been talking with Director Harrington about the Pedestrian Safety Campaign for three years. She was happy someone came to put signage downtown, especially at crosswalks and unmarked intersections. She believed the City had deferred to her on where to place the signs and she had received many compliments on them.

Unidentified Speaker #1 [58:08] suggested a route change for the Route 10 weekend service that did not involve backtracking, which he believed would be faster.

Mr. Hazen explained that Route 10 would be changed to include an east end route and a west end route for faster service. This would also eliminate sending two buses to the college.

Unidentified Speaker #2 [59:40] asked if there was a mechanism for riders to give feedback, suggestions, and share experiences. He also noted that most of the buses had five steps, which were difficult for he and his service dog to climb.

Mr. Hazen reiterated that the low floor buses were expensive, but as funding became available the entire fleet would be switched over. He added that service improvement forms were available at the transit center.

Councilor Herman confirmed that the route from the peninsula to Astoria provided service three or four times a day.

Item 3(c): Public Works Department Pedestrian Safety Projects

City Engineer Crater thanked Sunset Empire and Director Harrington for assisting with the tours of the watershed. He gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Highway 202 Sidewalk Project, which included an overview of the project goals, costs and funding sources, scope of work, project timeline, and next steps.

Director Harrington noted that this project was a good example of how complicated processes could be. Even though the project sounded straight forward, there were two retaining wall segments that were significant cost factors. Throughout the process, the Department of Justice has taken a long time to review documents because they were so busy. Additionally, it is very rare that an agency and a consultant cannot come to an agreement on costs. Several aspects of this project simply did not line up.

City Engineer Crater added that as construction costs continued to rise over the seven years this project had been in the works, the bid prices had also increased. However, the City did build contingencies into the financial planning and combining Phase 1 with Phase 2 will save money.

Staff answered Councilor's questions as follows:

- The scope of work would go a long way towards resolving a number of the pedestrian safety issues. Providing sidewalk connectivity on the north side would open up other opportunities to do some enhanced crossings in the area. The City has been talking with ODOT about doing some enhanced crossings in association with this project, but this was not originally scoped. It can be challenging to add to the scope of a project, so the north side would be set up to accommodate enhanced crossings. The City could then apply for grant funding to build it out across the street without having to reconfigure anything. Staff had also spoken to ODOT about a crosswalk at Hanover, but that is outside the project area.
- Originally the funding for this project was allocated from the local fuel tax revenue and (Surface Transportation Program) STP funds. However, debt services are in different places now, so the new local agency agreement would identify viable and sustainable funding sources.
- This project was identified in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TSP) because a significant number of high school students walk through the area, where the traffic speed is 35 miles per hour. Additionally, it is

one of the last places in Astoria without a sidewalk. This project will allow for connectivity from Peter Pan to Alderbrook.

- Currently, the south side of the road has adequate space for a bike lane. The City has asked ODOT if a bike lane can be striped as part of this project.
- Construction should begin by the fall of 2021. The project timeline must be sensitive to the school year, so some work can only be done while school is not in session.

Councilors and Staff discussed other areas of Astoria without sidewalks and sidewalks that do not connect to other networks. Staff explained that the TSP has targeted some connectivity projects, but Staff has prioritized the higher volume roads. Funding for lower volume areas is more difficult to get and usually require a match by the City. Staff described the difficulties in providing those matching funds and reviewed the funding strategies that Public Works had used on other projects.

Director Harrington provided an update on the following pedestrian safety projects:

- ADA ramp upgrades were being installed as part of paving projects and the CSO projects.
- Continental crosswalks were being installed, starting downtown.
- Staff was working with ODOT on improvements along the highway system, including lane reconfigurations and lighting improvements.
- All lighting along the Riverwalk and City-owned lighting downtown were being replaced with LED lights.

Staff was considering removing the signal at 11th and Duane. The signal has become unwarranted since Safeway is no longer there and safety concerns have developed as drivers and pedestrians use the signal improperly. ODOT must be involved in this process as they own and maintain all of the traffic signals in the downtown area.

Staff provided details on the City's work to mitigate safety issues and ADA access violations caused by sidewalk clutter. Several departments are involved, but the City has limited Staff to enforce permits and allowed uses. The City has started to receive complaints and is working to educate businesses on the most current ADA regulations, which can be confusing. There is a perception that the regulations are being inconsistently enforced, so Staff plans to recommend Code amendments that are fair and equitable. All complaints are taken seriously and investigated. Once the City has hired a Community Development Director, Building Official, and Code Enforcement Officer, Staff will have the capacity to address these issues more effectively.

Director Harrington explained he brought this up at the request of City Manager Estes. Since Staff is limited, enforcement is complaint driven. Complaints about ADA access violations are very serious because the City could get sued for non-compliance. Staff wanted the City Council to be aware of the issues and know that Staff was working on a strategy to update the Code and come up with solutions.

Council President Brownson asked if the Council wanted to discuss the minimum distance from an entrance for smoking on public streets, noting that the topic was brought up by a citizen at a recent City Council meeting. After a brief discussion, the Councilors agreed that they did not wish to pursue the citizen's recommendation to increase the distance from 10 feet to 25 feet.

ADJOURNMENT

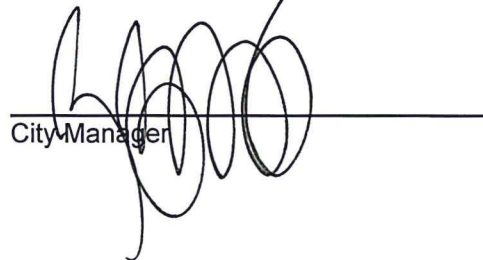
There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:56 pm.

ATTEST:



Finance Director

APPROVED:



City Manager

