

Item 23-1476: Resolution #15-R-23 Parking Facility & Management Study

Municipal Services Committee

Mon, Dec 11, 2023 4:30PM

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 40:19

And then item 23-1476 Resolution 15-R-23 parking facility and management study. We need a motion. I'll make the motion to approve.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 40:37

Move to approve.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 40:39

I made the motion to approve. I guess, it just needs a second then so. All right we have motion and a second. I'll just open the floor for discussion, I guess. In—since it's my resolution—but in discussions with staff, in bringing this forward, I think we felt that this was a good time to take a look at our parking utility as a whole in terms of a number of different facets, I guess, in terms of how we manage the pricing, the options we have for managing our parking facilities. I was really surprised, I guess, in talking with staff of a couple of components that I hadn't even given some thought to including the management and ownership of our crosswalks or skywalks and how those are, are done. Just sort of an all-encompassing look here.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 41:34

And timing wise, it's, I think, also very beneficial, given the announcement we just had last week about US Venture potentially moving downtown to another site. Also, one of the items that's on the Finance Committee agenda today is taking ARPA funds to supplement the cash flow for the parking utility that came up short again, which I think continues to point to the fact that we're possibly not charging enough to meet our costs. We have a ton of deferred maintenance items that have been sort of put off since COVID that we need to catch up on. And so, I think staff and I had good conversations about the direction of this and feel pretty comfortable with what we have here, but I think then I'll let Director Block if she wants to share anything else first before we open it up for discussion from the rest of the group.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 42:34

Thank you, chair. Correct. We met on this. We talked and develop different strategies from the parking utility standpoint in terms of policies and best practices that currently exist in the parking utility right now—designated stall policies, special event management and how that operation looks when businesses request it, our request process for bagging meters, designating a stall on the street is, is that fee in line with the service they are getting by having that stall designated on the street?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 43:16

It would be interesting to have a broad look at overall best management practices for the parking utility. Are there different technology software's and programs that we could be taking advantage of that better interface the user experience as you enter and exit the ramps? That's a question mark. And I think we could start to utilize some of our existing software to our advantage. And we also folded in the marketing and promotional campaign materials. That had already been talked about during the budgeting process. So, we looked at what other things could we investigate within the parking utility and just optimize how the parking utility's manage.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 44:01

Alright, and before we open it up, is there anyone from the audience that wanted to speak on this? All right, okay. Great. Alder Alfheim.

Alderman Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 44:10

Thank you, chair. I think that everything that Director Block just said, I think sounds valid. I think looking at—you know there's always a situation where you need to refresh. If we're looking at the resolution itself, the part of it that I appreciate very much is the paragraph that says the city of Appleton Department of Public Works "has a desire to optimize best practices for publicly owned parking assets and analyze the value and condition of said assets." I appreciate that statement. And if that's what our intentions are, I would support that.

Alderman Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 44:43

I do not—do not—enjoy the next paragraph where it says "operating municipal parking utilities are fiscal challenges and municipalities around the country have for a variety of reasons sold municipally owned parking ramps or leased ramps and on street parking stalls to private management companies to generate much needed one time and ongoing revenues." I am very concerned about that paragraph—very concerned. And I think my friends downtown, when they do have the opportunity to speak are going to fill this room and scream from their top of their lungs if we even talk too much about it. Just stating my opinion, there will be an issue.

Alderman Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 45:22

So as much as I respect the one paragraph of the resolution, I really wish that paragraph and the concept of getting rid of these would be a massive detriment to our community and our businesses downtown. And as someone who represents the half of those businesses, I am clearly stating I will strongly be against that.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 45:43

Alder Hartzheim, go ahead.

Alderman Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 45:45

Thank you, Chair. I appreciate what Altra—Alder Alfheim—Alder—why Alder—Alderman Alfheim is saying right now. However, we don't know what we don't know, and this study will help us to know what we should be knowing. This request for a study is not saying we will do anything. It's saying we will get advice for best practices on what will happen. And we as a city own the upper hand on all of this. If we choose to privatize those ramps, we choose what those rules are for privatization, how they will be used, what the fee caps will be. We choose all of those things, and we should choose them based on based on the best advice from this study. That's why I'm supportive of this study because it doesn't say what we should do yet. Because we haven't—we don't know what we don't know, and that's why we need it. Thank you.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 46:44

Alder Meltzer.

Alderman Vered Meltzer (District 2) 46:45

Thank you. I am very supportive of a study that will help us learn how to better optimize our best practices, and I think that it's really important to remember that the fact that these parking assets are publicly owned, is what generates the greatest part of their value for the community. We do have the upper hand right now. As soon as they're privatized, we lose that upper hand forever, and we will never ever be able to step in again to take the initiative and the leadership to nurture and grow our downtown businesses the way we do right now.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 47:25

I have seen a lot of different communities. I've seen their history and trajectory over decades. I have never seen the privatization of parking leading to an economic benefit for any residents or any businesses—only for the companies that end up gaining the upper hand by becoming the private owners. So, I am absolutely unequivocally opposed to privatizing these publicly owned assets. All it would do would strip us of the asset. Thank you.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 48:03

Alder Seibers?

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 48:04

Thank you, chair. A question that you often ask, and I'll ask for you: What's the cost of this? Who's going to...? Do we know?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 48:17

I looked back at the Walker study that was done in 2015, which, from my understanding, touched on best practices, but it also—it was mainly focused on capacity analysis. That was about \$68,000 in 2015.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 48:32

And do we have money in the budget for this?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 48:34

I had identified the \$100,000 that was set aside for the wayfinding, branding, marketing campaign effort. If that is a part of the scope of services, I would recommend that those funds be used. I think it would be helpful to know before moving forward, obviously.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 48:53

Thank you.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 48:53

Is there discussion? Alder Alfheim, go ahead.

Alderson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 49:02

Just a question. Again, gaining information is valuable. Right? And I think that it's absolutely fair to say no decisions should be made without it. You know, would the author consider an amendment where we just focus on the assessment at this point, at—to, as are my colleagues said, to gather the information? Where this—the resolution, in my opinion implies an intent. And if it is true that we are just trying to learn, then we should be able to pull that paragraph out and let it be, and then let the facts guide us where it should when the time comes. So—and I'm not making that recommendation. I'm asking the author if he might be willing to do that?

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 49:44

I will, I will say "No." I don't think there's any intent here. The intent of this resolution is, as I stated earlier, for us to sort of take a look at what our options are. And I'll remind our colleagues some of who—some of which weren't here at the time about 10 years or so ago, the city sold one of its parking ramps, sold it to the YMCA. And one of the reasons the city sold that ramp is because it was in pretty dire condition, the city didn't want to invest in it anymore, and didn't want to bear the cost of tearing it down and potentially rebuilding a new ramp in place or something else.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 50:21

So, the city worked with a local partner in the YMCA who certainly has a need for parking in that area. The ramp was sold to the YMCA for \$1. The YMCA invested in the ramp for a number of years and then invested in tearing it down and building a new ramp, which also includes the opportunity for the public to park in. And to my knowledge—staff could certainly correct me if I'm wrong—but at least from our perspective, never heard a single complaint from a resident about the inability to park in the ramp or the cost of parking in the YMCA ramp as an option. So, I think it's a very, very good example right here in our city, where potentially selling a municipally owned ramp could have a benefit.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 51:08

I'm not suggesting in any way that we are going to do this, but I think it would be foolish of us not to take a look at what all of our options are if we're going to do a study about best practices in management and whether or not this is the right maneuver, right move for the city to continue doing. There could be interested parties perhaps or some public private partnerships that could be a benefit and have worked in other places. I know I shared with Director Block a number of resources that I had found online where cities had sold parking ramps or had worked with private management companies to manage their assets on behalf of municipality.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 51:47

Every circumstance is different, every community is different and the challenges they face, but clearly what we're doing isn't working because we're behind on our maintenance. We're not—we're not realizing the revenue that we need to even cover our costs, let alone catch up on the deferred maintenance that we have, or get us ahead of where we need to be. So, I think and agree with staff, this is a good chance to take a look at the parking utility as a whole and let a professional analyze what's best for us. Maybe there is maybe there isn't a recommendation about selling any of the city's ramps. I'm not for or against any of those options. I just want to see us do what's best for the city and our taxpayers. So, I think that the language in the resolution is pretty clear from that standpoint. Anyone else? Alder Meltzer.

Alderman Vered Meltzer (District 2) 52:39

Thank you, Chair. I just want to correct you here. The ramp—the YMCA has owned and operated the ramp since 1996. That's when it purchased the property from the city for \$1. It's also my understanding that the city wasn't looking to offload that ramp, that the YMCA took the initiative to initiate a collaboration which would be mutually beneficial. The YMCA wanted—they, you know, they took the initiative. It wasn't that the city was like, "Hey, we are—we have a ramp for sale now." I think it was—that's just my understanding. Obviously in 1996. I was not living in Appleton yet and I certainly would appreciate anyone who can fill in more of the history. But it was not 10 years ago that the city sold that ramp and I think that situations around parking ramps have certainly changed a lot since 1996.

Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 53:38

Any other discussion? Alder Alfheim?

Alderman Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 53:39

May I ask Director Block a question? Director Block, would you say—do you believe that if we did a study and the information came in, do you believe we—would you expect to gain enough knowledge to far exceed the cost of the evaluation without selling anything? On an ongoing basis, can we—is there enough efficiency gains in terms of what we expect to find what's out there that we expect this to be a forward movement from the city without any sale involved?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 54:20

I can't opine on that without—with any certainty.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 54:24

Fair enough.

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 54:25

No, sorry.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 54:25

I thought was worth an ask.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 54:28

Other discussion? Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 54:31

Thank you, chair. I think the important thing about this resolution is that it directs staff to prepare an RFP, which I think we might be able to as a Council have some weigh in on. So, I really feel like it's important for us to find out what we don't know. And if your sticking point is it has to not include a sale, then we will never find out what we don't know. Because that could be a best practice. But we don't know it yet. So, I would really encourage this committee to approve this resolution just so that this can move forward to an RFP, so that we can see more about what is going to be asked. Thank you.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 55:24

Alder Wolff, what number do you have there?

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 55:29

Thank you, chair. So, I would say the best practice here is to listen to the constituents—right?—and they've made it pretty clear that they have no interest in us selling any parking ramps. So, if we would look at what we don't know and make a recommendation that we want to sell, it would still come down to us listening to the people who put us here and who pay taxes in this city, and they have said that they wouldn't want that to begin with already. So, we may as well not move forward with this, because the people have already spoken.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 56:06

Alder Croatt.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 56:08

Thank you, Chair. I certainly have had have had not nearly enough citizen input to make that conclusion. I would—my question would be (and this is for Director Block, I guess) is whether or not if—and I'm for this study, but I will only vote for it if we can utilize the budgeted money. Otherwise, where's the money coming from? You reference the \$100,000 in the budget for the other study? Are we able to use that money for this? And would we be able to get all the answers we need for \$100,000?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 56:44

It would be my recommendation to use that budgeted \$100,000. Would we get all the answers? I have to start I guess laying out the request for proposals and—or the scope (let's put it that way) bringing it back to the committee and being sure that it tackles what you know the committee is looking for answers on. I certainly would have the best practices and policies included within the scope of services.

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 57:14

Okay. Thank you.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 57:16

All right. I would just say I have had no public input one way or the other for this study. So, I don't—I want to make sure we aren't making a blanket statement that the entire community is against doing the study. But also, just wanna remind our colleagues too, that part of what's included in this request for proposals here in the resolution is to include some information or perhaps guidance about the marketing aspect that those dollars were originally scheduled for. As Director Block and I spoke, it may not necessarily get all of the, I guess, or help us with the entire piece of what we originally set out to do at this point, but it certainly would get us some, and if there was leftover funds for that—for the marketing aspect, that could still be used for that purpose also. So, Alder Siebers.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 58:05

One of the problems I have—and I'm stuck, that's one of my problems. We just passed a budget. And now we're starting to make little changes here, little changes there. And that's the struggle that I have. This wasn't put in the budget. You know, you know why should we be putting in the budget now and replacing it with something—or you know, taking away something else? I really struggle with that.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 58:42

I will—I'll just add from my perspective as being the author of the resolution, I think part of it came out of the budget discussion that we had. And I think that was part of the discussion with staff. I think that realization that perhaps this would be a good time to revisit and take a look at this. And then as I said earlier, the information received last week about a potential influx of new business downtown, and coupled with the information that will be discussed at finance as well about just the need for additional revenue to be transferred over from the ARPA funds to the parking utility due to a shortfall, just shows that there's a real need there to revisit this. And so, I think—I'm not going to speak on behalf of staff, but I think staff is comfortable, I guess, with going this route first if I can say that. Any other discussion? Alder Wolff.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 59:44

Thank you, chair. I should add context to what I said earlier. I posed the question online. I got 20 responses from people. I asked the question yesterday. All 20 people said no to it, which is 100% against. Now sure the next person could say yes. But if the next 20 say no, that's still, you know, 40 to one, which naturally we need a bigger audience, but with just that 20 it's pretty clear cut that it would be unpopular.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 1:00:20

Alder Firkus.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 1:00:24

Thank you, Chair. I just have two questions looking for clarification. Now this resolution does not state a dollar amount or where that money comes from. So, we would need that at some point, even if the assumption is it would come from the trans—the parking utility and that study, we would still need that in writing. Correct?

Director Danielle Block (Department Of Public Works) 1:00:43

Correct.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 1:00:44

And then my next question is, if we're talking—that would be amending the 2024 budget, so then does that change the vote threshold for this to two thirds since budget—okay.

Attorney Amanda Abshire (City Attorney) 1:00:54

Not yet. The item before the committee is whether or not to have staff draft an RFP?

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 1:01:00

Okay. So, it would be if money was going to be spent though, for this to happen, at some point the Council would have to take a vote and it would take two thirds because that is a budget amendment, correct? Down the road at that point, where if you're saying we're going to move money from the already budgeted use of the wayfinding...

Attorney Amanda Abshire (City Attorney) 1:01:21

If you're making a budget amendment now, you're also going to be looking at awarding the contract as well.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 1:01:26

Okay.

Attorney Amanda Abshire (City Attorney) 1:01:27

So, we've got a couple votes between now and then.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 1:01:29

Okay. But that is part of the process. That's not the whole thing. I understand that. I just want to make sure that we're not—this isn't something where from beginning to end to make this happen is just simple majority votes. So just kind of as—keep that in mind as people kind of bounce ideas out there that at some point, you're going to have to cross a two thirds threshold. So, the ideas that we discussed should probably take that into consideration. Thank you.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 1:01:52

Anyone else? All right, hearing none, we'll take a vote. All those in favor say aye. Aye. Opposed?

Aldersons Sieber, Meltzer, and Alfheim 1:02:02

Nay.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 1:02:03

All right, that motion fails. 1 to 3.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 1:02:08

And then our...?

Attorney Amanda Abshire (City Attorney) 1:02:09

So, then we'll take—then we'll take another vote to make it in the—

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 1:02:13

Affirmative.

Attorney Amanda Abshire (City Attorney) 1:02:14
—affirmative. Correct.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 1:02:15
Alright, so then we need a—do we need a motion to deny?

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 1:02:17
Move to deny.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 1:02:19
Second.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 1:02:26
Okay, good?

Attorney Amanda Abshire (City Attorney) 1:02:27
All in favor?

Alderspersons Sieber, Meltzer, and Alfheim 1:02:28
Aye.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 1:02:31
Opposed? Nay. That motion passes three to one.