

## Item 25-0097: Approve Sole Source Purchase of Decorative Streetlight Poles for College Avenue Bridge

Municipal Services Committee

Mon, Feb 10, 2025 4:30PM

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 02:16**

All right, we are going to skip down to number 25-0097 approve sole source purchase of decorative street light poles for College Avenue Bridge.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 02:32**

Move for approval.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 02:35**

Second?

**Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 02:36**

Second.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 02:37**

Okay, we have a motion and a second. Anything from staff on this?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 02:43**

Be happy to answer any questions.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 02:44**

Okay. So, Alder Firkus.

**Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 02:50**

Thank you, Chair. As far as the replacement of these, are we talking about all of them or just select ones that are more damaged than others?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 02:59**

This is replacing all of the poles and arms. They are all pretty much evenly rusted, and, you know, once we've—in terms of the costs that we would get to purchase them in bulk, to try and do them onesies, twosies is just not a cost effective approach, because any of them that aren't rusted yet are going to be—or that maybe aren't as rusted as some of the others are just going to catch up to them in the next couple of years.

**Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 03:37**

What—is there a particular need that these have to be replaced with decorative ones versus a more standard? Or is there any reason or any potential savings if we went with a more standard light post and...?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 03:50**

There would be, there would be definite savings. I think we were trying to respect the streetscape look that was—that a lot of people put a lot of effort into when the College Avenue Bridge was being designed. But certainly, as an example, if we just put aluminum poles out there, there would be smooth aluminum poles that would be a significant cost decrease.

**Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 04:18**

All right.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 04:20**

Alder Meltzer.

**Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 04:21**

Thank you. What is the life span of these poles? How frequently do they need to be replaced?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 04:26**

So, under normal circumstances, we would like to get 40 years out of a decorative pole. The bridge is an extremely hostile environment. It's about the worst possible environment that you can have because it gets a lot more salt than a regular segment of street would. So already on that—so we've gotten about 15 years out of those only. The—you may know that the railings on that entire bridge were already replaced. Those fortunately, were under warranty. So, to be clear—and I think the memo talked a little bit about this—we're not just replacing those poles with the same poles. These are a pole that are rated for a much harsher environment. They do a galvanizing process before they prime and paint it. So, fingers crossed that we can get a lot more years out of the second—out of this batch.

**Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 05:31**

Thank you.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 05:33**

So, I'm gonna—so I'm looking at that and understand that the existing poles were out of warranty. Do we believe that there was any defect in workmanship, or did we just perhaps the poles that we got 15 years ago were not able to stand up to the environment

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 06:00**

15 years ago, when we were specifying these poles, the pros—the pole, the technology that's used to make the new poles didn't exist. So, kind of everybody's in the same boat with a lot of these types of poles that were put in these types of environments. It's just wasn't an option at the time, other than to go with something— excuse me, it's catching on [**Someone in the room was coughing, and Mr. Lom had to clear his throat**]  
—it's something that's, you know, less decorative. You know, certainly an aluminum, a bare aluminum pole, is going to be the thing that lasts the longest.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 06:36**

Thank you. Did I see you?

**Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 06:39**

I would—I withdraw. I was going to ask a question that was just answered. So.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 06:42**

Okay. Okay. All right. Any further questions, comments? Alder Firkus.

**Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 06:49**

Thank you, Chair. I guess knowing that the aluminum poles are cheaper, last longer—I I get the streetscape thing for the downtown, but the bridge in its own sense, kind of feels like it's not part of the downtown. It's a way to

downtown. But to be honest, it feels like you're on a little mini stretch of highway between two parts of the city. So, I kind of want to explore the idea of just going with the basic aluminum ones.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 07:19**

May I ask, is this, is this a time sensitive—do we have a price quote that's good for X amount?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 07:27**

Um, yes. And with the tariffs coming, we're already starting to see price increases.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 07:33**

Oh, steel and aluminum.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 07:34**

If I could touch on the streetscape thing just a moment. Um, so the streetscape actually carries from Badger Avenue all the way across the bridge and through and through the roundabout. So, every single street light pole that's not a traffic signal is decorative through that entire stretch. The bridge obviously is—you know, looks a little bit different, but the lights actually match, are intended to be stylistically similar to the railings and everything on the bridge as well. So, while the bridge certainly looks different than the nearby streets, it's kind of intended to be a continuation through there. And it's always a balancing act every time we do anything that's not the bare minimum. Whether it's colored and stamped concrete, fancy street light poles, or whatever it's like that you're—it's a tradeoff, because it's always going to last—it's not going to last as long. So, you're kind of making a judgment, a value judgment, there.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 08:39**

Alder Siebers, did I see you with?

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 08:41**

Well, I think you partially answered my question. I was just wondering maybe we should hold it and find out what the cost for the aluminum would be. And you know.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 08:52**

So, can you—what—do we know what the—how long this price is good? I seem to be unable to speak, and I apologize for that.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 09:03**

I don't have that information at my fingertips, and I guess I would be maybe a question for the attorney. Were—I believe the agenda item is intended to address the sole source nature of the purchase. The decor—the fact that these were decorative poles was what was included in the budget. So, I—I'm not the expert in that area, but I think the agenda item wasn't—was really more about the sole source aspect of it.

**Attorney Christopher Behrens 09:35**

The agenda item does reference sole sourcing, but it also talks about the purchase of—

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 09:39**

Okay.

**Attorney Christopher Behrens** 09:40

—street light poles. So. I don't know if you go with aluminum, that may change the sole source aspect of it, and then you might have to look at, maybe that's not a sole source, where you've got to actually bid that out so there could be a timing element there to consider.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer)** 10:01

We could certainly get the—if the committee was so inclined, we could certainly get the information regarding how long that bid is good for prior to the next—to the council meeting, which would allow you to take whatever action you'd see fit at that point.

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1)** 10:22

Are you suggesting that we take a motion, or we move on this item and send it to Council, and if you which information you provide prior to Council, we can then either refer it back or approve it.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer)** 10:44

That was the idea that I was throwing out there for consideration. I think there's a couple of things we're thinking about here. One is, is lead time. So right now, I believe that we're looking at—we were looking at 16 weeks. I believe they—we just found out that it's going to be closer to 20 weeks. So that's one thing that affects the—figures into how this decision might be made. And then the other thing is, is whether or not we would lose our pricing. Because certainly the pricing—with 25% tariffs on steel, the pricing is going to go up accordingly. So, I just need to double—I would need to double check how long our price is good for.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6)** 11:24

I saw Alder Meltzer first, and then I'll come back to you Alder Siebers.

**Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2)** 11:27

And this is really kind of on the same thing. I just want some more clarification about exactly what our time frame is. You know, like if we, if we did want to refer it back once it gets to Council would that cause complications? Like, does it kind of really need to get in through this particular window? Just curious about that, because if we get more information than we want to consider and refer it back at that point, I'd want to, you know, feel comfortable that it really could be referred back, and if it couldn't, then that would affect the decision that I make here tonight.

**Attorney Christopher Behrens** 12:11

I can take that one.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer)** 12:12

Okay.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6)** 12:13

Attorney Behrens.

**Attorney Christopher Behrens** 12:14

You always have a option to refer an item back, and because this is a new item, it would be an automatic referral unless a member objects to it, and then it would go through that process. That may be the more efficient process to follow though. So, Lom can get you the information you need prior to next council to make a decision if you want to just allow things to continue moving along, or conversely, decide you want to refer it back to committee. If you refer it back, you'd be in no different position than you would be if you just simply held it here

today, but at least you'd be in the position to move things along if you, based on the information supplied, you're comfortable with the continuing on, you haven't lost that time then.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 13:03**

Alder Siebers.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 13:04**

Well, there's two things that I'd like to know. We need more than 15 years on these new poles. I don't know if there's any guarantees that we can get. And number, two, obviously, I would like to know the difference between prices in regards to aluminum versus the poles that you're suggesting. You say there's going to be a great difference, but I'd like to know how great of a difference.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 13:40**

We can definitely get that information, and we can get it before the council meeting if that turns out to be important. As far as how long they should last, you know, the process that they're using now is much improved over the process that they used back then. We got 15 years out of the first one. I would hope to get, say, 25 or 30 out of the second ones. But it's kind of like buying a new car. You're not going to get a—you're going to get the three years 36,000-mile warranty. You're—they're not going to warranty it forever. So, we might get a five or a 10-year warranty, and that's the most anybody's going to be willing to provide.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 14:18**

Okay,

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 14:19**

Can I ask, um, these—we're talking about standard aluminum poles. What's the kind the composition on these? You talked about some galvanization process. What's the...?

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 14:27**

So, these are steel.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 14:28**

Okay, these are steel.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 14:30**

So, they're steel with a—that they galvanize, and then they prime, and then they paint.

**Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 14:37**

Okay. So, I—so, I think what we've asked for, and obviously Alder Firkus can make his vote based on—but, so what we've asked for is the price difference, and obviously we need to take that calculation into effect, because we don't know where the aluminum is coming from, etc. And what is the life of—the expected life, or the warranty?

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 15:05**

Well, he says he can't—the best guarantee we get is five years or 10 years, but I'd like to know something to say that we're going to get more than 15 years. I mean, that's really nice, but it's only going to last 15 years. I'm sorry I'm not going to vote for it. We need more for our money than 15 years in my opinion. And I don't know if you can answer that.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 15:34**

Yeah, I can I can ask the manufacturer what, you know, what their response is to that question.

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 15:41**

I appreciate that.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:43**

And would—and given that, what did they say on your car? You have the normal maintenance schedule, and then you have the in—whatever they say, the rough use maintenance schedule, and understanding that these are in a place where we maximum salt application, etc.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 16:05**

It's worth pointing out that steel poles come with this problem—right?—because there's steel. You'll notice that, or you may not notice, but the poles that we use throughout the downtown are concrete, and they are much more able to withstand the salt. The problem is, is that concrete poles on a bridge structure are too heavy and so—or I shouldn't say—I mean, you could build the bridge to accommodate it, but you end up spending a lot of money to upgrade the bridge to do that. So that's why we end up with steel poles on the bridge.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 16:41**

Okay, anything else up here? Alder Firkus.

**Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 16:43**

Thank you, Chair. I like what Alder Siebers has put out as far as wanting to know how long do they last? What's the cost difference between the two? And any warranty information that we can get is good. I'd be willing to vote for this and then just kind of get that information between now and Council. I think that's fair. I would trust that—if you say there's enough time to do it, to get that information, then I'm willing to go on that.

**Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 17:11**

The only other little caveat question I would really have just make sure we're not making too big of a deal about the time frames here. Obviously, the bridge is only—it's not a particularly old bridge, but I would imagine at some point in time there's some sort of, like, surface, you know, major, not reconstruction, I don't want to say that, but like some at some point where the concrete work needs to be reworked. Based on, like, the expected time lifetime of the existing bridge surface, any—care to venture any guess on what that would be? Just from my standpoint of thinking is if we're coming up on that horizon the next 10-15 years, maybe I'm okay with the shorter life term light pole versus buying something—say just using this example, the aluminum pole lasts 50 years, but we're going to be in here doing, redoing some of this surface well before that, like, way before that. So just kind of where my heads.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 18:13**

I will have to check with our structural engineer on that. My guess would be that you'd, you'd be looking at a redecking probably like year 30, which would be 15 years from now, roughly.

**Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 18:26**

All right, thank you.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 18:29**

Are we ready to take a vote on this?

**Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 18:31**

Just to point out if it adds any salve to the wound and factor in your decision, we are under budget with this, just to point that out, and then also to reiterate the continuity of the corridor with those lights. So, the pricing is still within budget.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 18:49**

Thank you. All right, if there are no further questions or comments, we'll go ahead and vote, and with the understanding that we've asked for these pieces of information to be provided before the council meeting next week.

**Eric Lom (City Traffic Engineer) 19:03**

You'll have them.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 19:03**

All right, all in favor? Aye. All right, that passes four zero.