

Item 25-0297: Approve 2025 DPW Parking Utility Strategic Planning and Marketing Study to Walker Consultants in an amount not to exceed \$200,000, contingent upon 2024 DPW budget carryover approval

Municipal Services Committee

Mon, Mar 24, 2025 4:30PM

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 21:47

All right, moving on, item 25-0297, approve 2025 DPW parking utility strategic planning and marketing study to Walker Consultants in an amount not to exceed \$200,000 contingent upon 2024 DPW budget carry over approval. Do we have a motion?

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 22:13

I'll make a motion to approve to get this discussion started.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 22:18

Second.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 22:20

All right, we have a motion and a second. All right, who would like to—um, do we want to hear from staff on this? Director Jungwirth, Deputy Director Neuberger.

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 22:33

I'll take the first—

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 22:34

Okay.

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 22:34

Thank you, Chair. So, I think the specifics of the of the study are laid out pretty well in the memo, I want to touch a little bit more on kind of the events and things that that led up to this. The last downtown parking study that we did was completed in 2015. A lot has happened since then. Use cases for the parking ramps have changed quite a bit. We've seen residential uses move downtown; that means a lot more overnight users. There are factors to consider that we haven't really had to consider too much in the past related to this interplay between day users, people who work downtown, versus people who live downtown, and all indications are that there will continue to be more residential use moving downtown. That's a great problem to have. We want to go into that with our eyes open. And so, we want to understand, if we take a look at the 20-year outlook, how does our parking supply look? How does the public parking supply work?

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 23:26

We got three ramps. We've seen, in addition to additional residential use with a forecast that points in that same direction, we've seen some additional new downtown workers, 222 building that sort of thing. So, conditions have changed significantly in terms of the users since our last downtown parking study.

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 24:08

Another factor that comes into play is the technology has really changed quite a bit. We think about cell phones and that sort of thing, and we have many more tools available to us to do things like data management,

different ways to access the ramps, different way to pay for ramp usage, different ways to pay for on street parking usage, things like electric vehicles, all these things that people were really not contemplating very much 10 years ago. So, the time is right, from staff's point standpoint, to get some additional guidance from an industry leader here, give us an opportunity to benefit from the wisdom that they see happening in other communities, and just help us to make good, well-informed decisions to help set our parking utility up for success well into the future.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 25:07

Thank you. All right, where do we want to—we want to start up here? Alder Firkus.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 25:13

Thank you, Chair. One question I have about this study, is it just for the downtown, or is this a more comprehensive look at part at parking throughout the city?

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 25:22

While the focus is downtown, it is comprehensive. So, we will be—we will be discussing with them, user needs even outside the downtown. But certainly the focus will be downtown.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 25:34

Because that question was—I had that question because when I saw the bullet point about evaluation of recommendations for DWP, staffing equipment, policies that made me think of some of the discussions we've had in the past with on street parking that really had a impact as far as outside of downtown. So, I—my hope was that this is, in fact, going to be more comprehensive, especially for the price tag.

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 25:58

Yes.

Alderson Brad Firkus (District 3) 25:58

Thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 26:00

Thank you. Alder Meltzer. I see you—I see you, Alder Hartzheim.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 26:05

Yeah, I really want to echo that point about it being comprehensive. I think that it is time for us to update the study. I think that Walker is—they have my respect and confidence. I think that the price tag, though, just seems a little bit high for my comfort. So, the more comprehensive it is, the more we're actually getting out of that price tag, the happier I'll be to vote for this.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 26:36

Alder Hartzheim.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 26:38

Thank you, Chair. I echo what that sentiment. \$200,000 is a great deal of money, and on top of the money that was already spent in 2015 I just—I have huge reservations about this. Well, we can all go back to the discussion of whether to privatize or not, but that I know won't float here. But even if we are to keep in-house parking utility in the city, I question spend \$200,000 and then can we even do this? Who manages this once we've got some sort of plan? Who—we failed before. We did a great comprehensive study, and nothing happens

thereafter. And I don't mean—that is not meant as a, as a, you know, dis on the DPW. It's just that I don't know that this city has the capacity to do what really needs to be done when we get a \$200,000 report on what really needs to be done. It feels like good money chasing bad or just an overspend because we failed in the last round, and I'm really worried that we push all this money forward, and the solutions aren't—we aren't, we aren't set up as a municipality to implement those solutions. This may not even be a core competency of a city, and those are the big concerns that I have in this regard.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 28:13

Thank you. Alder Meltzer, again.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 28:15

I think that we, I guess you could say, failed with implementing a lot of the recommendations in the first parking study because of political will, because of whether people really valued implementing those recommendations or not. Many of those decision makers are not sitting in the decision-making seats anymore. And I think also, you know, there was a lesson to be learned there, right? When you get a recommendation, you can't just say, "Oh, well, you know, when it's a really, really nice, sunny day and the weather is just perfect, then we'll go ahead and implement that." I think that we have to take these things more seriously, and I think that we have historically not taken parking seriously enough as a city, but I don't think that that means the same thing as our Department of Public Works doesn't have the capacity to implement the recommendations. I think those are two very different things.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 29:26

So, reminding us that we approved \$100,000 in the budget for the, I think it—marketing and way finding portion of this, and what this is asking for is \$100,000 in the carryover funds. And please correct me if I'm wrong on any of this. And so, if we look at the breakdown in the memo, we're still talking about \$95,143 for strategic planning and marketing. So. And then we—the digital parking management—and I absolutely agree that we've been kind of in the Dark Ages. The fact that we have, just in the past year or so gotten—I see you Alder Hartzheim—gotten a chip and tap system that, rather than, you know, the two minutes the credit card and did it read the credit card? I mean, that's an improvement.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 30:23

But if we are going to compete, then we we're going to have to use modern technology. I know I find it extremely convenient. If I want to park at the Milwaukee airport, I have an app, and I do that, and I pay in advance, and I just wave my phone at the screen when I go in and out. And this is great. And anything that makes it easier to use our parking ramps, that makes—it makes them more attractive. And park—our parking is a utility. We are supposed to cover our costs through user fees, but we're not in the business to make a profit, and I think that, you know, not to go into the privatization, but other cities much larger than we have gone that route and regretted it.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 31:14

So, I think that it behooves us to maximize our resources, and as the testimony here, our environment has changed, and I see that in the yellow ramp. When I leave here late after a meeting, I see people coming into the ramp, and those are probably people who live here and who are going to be in that ramp overnight, and we've got to we've got to make our parking attractive, and we need to look at a lot of things. It needs to be comprehensive. It—and it needs to be outside of the downtown, as Alder Firkus noted. I hope that we're including the metered parking in that because I've complained to staff before that I think the service charge on the passport is too high. And I mean, we're talking 30% as the fee. So, I think we need to look at those kind of things too.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 32:15

So, I'm going to vote in favor of this, and it's a lot of money, but we're also talking about really high dollar assets that we have in those ramps, and so it really behooves us if we need to spend the money to find out how to use those more effectively to do it. All right, Alder Hartzheim.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 32:41

Thank you, Chair. To Alder Meltzer point that there wasn't political will to move forward with whatever was brought out by the previous study. There may be the political will now, but I don't know that we have taxpayer buy-in in that regard, because we don't have any clue what additional costs might come with this additional \$200,000 study. We don't know what it's going to cost to implement anything that they say that we should implement. So not only \$200,000 is on the table but everything else thereafter if we really say that we have the political will to do this. And what will our taxpayers say after that point? I'm not sure that they're all bought in. You said before chair that that our political—or our parking utility is supposed to cover and not make a profit, but we don't. Taxpayers currently subsidize our parking utility. Those things are not fair to the taxpayer, and I'm very, very concerned about how we move forward with this. Thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 33:43

Anyone else? Director Jungwirth. Whoops. There you go.

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 33:55

Thank you. And I just wanted to add a few clarifying points. So as a part of the RFP, we went out and put a sentence in there that said, if there's anything we're missing in our request, please let us know from the consultants and things that that they see that we might be able to make improvements on. So, Walker did propose a menu of options as a part of their proposal.

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 34:24

So, their base proposal, the—I'll call it the lump sum amount—to execute exactly what we asked for was in the memo, written as the \$95,000. As our staff that worked on the review of the proposals looked at all of the menu of options that Walker provided, felt that the two most important pieces are the digital—the digital parking management, and as Alder Hartzheim said, implementation. We fully recognize that that is a big piece of it that we need to make sure we execute and follow through on.

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 35:01

So, the \$200,000 is what was the amount budgeted. So, we have a requested carry over currently out there from last year's marketing and way finding dollars that were allocated, and then again there was \$100,000 in the 2025 budget for the strategic planning. What we did is we went out to RFP for both of those pieces together. We thought it would be better to have an all-encompassing analysis performed.

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 35:30

So, the dollars that we have in the memo are maximum amounts, and the digital parking management had quite a range. And I think until we really get into the study, we're not going to know exactly what that shakes out to be. We did feel too that—so there's dollars included in here for implementation support by Walker, by the consultant we're recommending. If there's extra dollars left within that, you know, we're going to propose everything back to the committee, of course, for approval before anything is proceeded with. But if there are some dollars left, based on what we've analyzed as a part of this, we would foresee asking to put some of those dollars into signage or some of those physical items that are going to be necessary as part of that implementation. So not trying to put any carts before the horse here by stating that, but we also—we feel that

that implementation is a very important piece that we need to follow through on. So just adding that there are multiple facets to this. It's not just that base proposal; it's other items that were proposed as a part of what we received.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 36:41

Thank you. Anything—I see Alder Hartzheim again.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 36:45

Thank you, Chair. I'm very interested in what Director Jungwirth said as far as a pick and choose menu from Walker, and I'm wondering what pieces, parts were on there that were not chosen by the city staff to review. I wonder if there's something that council would want more information on in that regard.

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 37:04

There was a portion in there, and I'm just going off my recollection, and Deputy Director Neuberger is looking at the actual proposal here. One of them was the analysis of sky walks. We currently have Desmond on board looking at our structural components of the ramps, so we felt that they could continue to assess our structural components and structural pieces to the parking utility and would hope that we could have that as a part of the work that they complete. So that was one reason for eliminating that specific piece. I believe there were some other options in there.

[Somebody said something off microphone.]

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 37:48

Chair, could I follow up on that?

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 38:03

And I guess it's more with the dollars that we have available. What do we feel we could fit within what we have budgeted for, I think is, is more really what we were looking at.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 38:14

All right, I'm going to go back to Alder Hartzheim, while Deputy Director Neuberger is paging.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 38:18

I know internally there were some discussions in regards to skywalks and whether city should have should retain ownership of them. Was that something that was discussed or thought of in this regard as well?

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 38:30

I think that would be a piece to analyzing them and taking a look at them, certainly. Yes.

[I'm not sure; somebody may have said something off microphone.]

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 38:43

But Director Jungwirth is saying that that was not included or not chosen as an option?

Unknown 38:48

Correct.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 38:50

All right, so Deputy Director Neuberger has—oh, he's on two, sorry.

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 38:57

Thank you, Chair. So, the optional tasks that were not included in the recommended award included, as Director Jungwirth said, rampant skywalk conditions assessment. We've already got Desmond on board to do that. And then equipment procurement assistance was the other one. We feel that staff are capable of procuring equipment as we move into implementation.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 39:22

Thank you.

Director Laura Jungwirth (Public Works) 39:23

And the other items were, as we said, the implementation. They had implementation support for marketing and wayfinding and operations management and implementation of strategic methods. So, and again, with the data piece.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 39:40

All right, anything else? Alder Siebers.

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 39:43

For the sake of saying something. I hear arguments on both sides, and I appreciate what staff has said in regards to supporting this, but it hasn't done anything in terms of my feeling uncomfortable. I mean, I'm really feeling uncomfortable with this, and I'm going to vote against this.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 40:13

All right. Anything else? Anyone else? All right. Are we ready to vote? All right, all in favor, please signify by saying aye. Aye. All opposed?

Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 40:25

Nay.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 40:26

All right, you were an aye Alder Firkus? So that passes three to one. So that will go to council with the recommendation to approve.