

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

Common Council

Wed, Apr 02, 2025 7:00PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 23:00

Municipal services. This is item 25-0297 approve 2025 DPW parking utility, strategic planning, and marketing study. We have a motion and a second to approve. We'll open the floor for discussion. Alder Fenton.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 23:26

Thank you, Your Honor. I would like to urge my colleagues to approve this—to approve this item. We have—during the—we had a pretty robust discussion at the municipal services committee meeting. And I'd like to point out a couple of things that were, that came up in that discussion and that I'd like to clarify.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 23:55

The first thing was, there was some discussion about the about the taxpayers subsidizing the parking utility. So, I reached out to the Finance Chair—Director of Finance, and she can speak up. And other than the transfer of ARPA funds two times—the \$500,000 and then another 244 to replace lost revenue. Neither of us could find any history of transfers from the general fund to the parking utility. So, the parking utility, in my opinion, is functioning properly as an enterprise fund where the user fees support it.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 24:45

There was also discussion of the 2015 parking study by that same—by Walker, the same group that's being asked the contract to be awarded for this one. And there was a discussion that we hadn't implemented the recommendations of that study. So, Deputy Director Neuberger very kindly provided me with that study and some annotations, because it preceded my time on council. And of 14 recommendations in that study, there were really only two that were not even considered at all. The rest of them—one of the first thing, access and control, is scheduled—change in that is scheduled for this year.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 25:31

Other things that were not implemented were things like a neighborhood parking plan where we were—where there were zones where they recommended we impose a two-hour parking limit, and those weren't implemented because of the concerns about the neighborhood people who live there, the use of those parking area—those street parking areas. And then one was a recommendation to work with Lawrence University on expanding the Chapel lot to—by 50 additional stalls. And that wasn't implemented because, not sure exactly why, but that's a third party that the city really doesn't have any control over.

Mayor Jake Woodford 26:13

Well and actually, just as a as a point of information, that lot was expanded.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 26:18

Oh, it was okay.

Mayor Jake Woodford 26:19

Yes.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 26:19

I apologize.

Mayor Jake Woodford 26:20

And the recommendation that you mentioned about neighborhood parking zones was extensively evaluated, and there was public input. There were public input sessions in neighborhoods. I'm recalling this from my time working at Lawrence, so I was I was on the other side of the table, but part of those neighborhood outreach meetings with the city. So, the Chapel lot was, in fact, expanded, and—

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 26:47

Appreciate that.

Mayor Jake Woodford 26:48

So, so you're correct. No, you're but you're generally correct. So, I just wanted to provide that that information Go ahead, please.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 26:56

So, thank you. Thank you. And apologies for that misunderstanding I'm sure on my part. I was misreading the annotations there. So—and reading that 2015 document was fascinating because of the five scenarios that they discussed, the—one of them was the move of the library to the soldier square and a construction of a new lot, new parking garage there. Which, of course, the YMCA has on their own constructed a new parking garage there. And moving City Hall to where the current library is.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 27:37

They talked about the estimate of a 10% increase in parking requirements. None of the US Venture moved to the 222 building where we're talking about 650 more people parking on a daily basis. None of the expansion in the residential units that have been built downtown was in that 2015 study. So, I think all of this really shows that we have a need for this this new parking study to evaluate parking under our current conditions.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 28:14

And I forgot one of the recommendations was for smart meters. And of course, cell phone technology made that obsolete because we use the we use the app for access. So bottom line, because so much has changed in the years since that study, I think it is time for a new study, and I think it's warranted.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 28:37

The half of the funding was is being asked to be carried over from the 2024 budget, and then we—in the 2025 budget, we approved another \$100,000 for a strategic plan for the parking utility. And I think all of this in our environment is a worthwhile use of our funding. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 29:04

Alder Hartzheim,

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 29:07

Thank you, Chair. \$200,000 is a great deal of money. When we talked about this in the Municipal Services committee meeting, it was specifically asked of staff whether this study would be asking about how to manage parking elsewhere in the city. And there was a kind of a nod and a yes, but I don't—I don't know that that's

called out anywhere in the specifics of this particular study. So, I think that is a huge concern that at the very least \$200,000 should help us pay for, but it doesn't sound like it will be.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 29:47

What was specifically called out as being requested on this is the evaluation of EV charging stations throughout the city. I don't believe that a city government should be in the business of putting in EV charging stations. So, I'm very concerned that, obviously, we want to find out information about it, but I'm very concerned that we, we would suddenly become—we would be in the business as a city, in the business of operating EV charging stations.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 30:19

The other thing that was specifically called out was way finding and marketing strategies for the parking utility. I'm not sure that any of that is needed. Who—how—who do we have to market to? The folks who are coming to downtown or Appleton are already coming to downtown Appleton. The folks who are coming downtown already have phones, most of them, able to find where parking is available.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 30:49

All of these things have a huge price tag, but don't seem to really be looking at the concerns of parking downtown that, really, I think should be looked at. So, I have grave questions about this, and again, the high price tag makes me feel as though we may not be getting what we're looking for. I would encourage my colleagues here to highly question this and potentially to deny this. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 31:26

Alder Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 31:29

Thank you, Chair. I think if we were having this discussion a few years ago before much of the housing development was incorporated into downtown district, we might not feel the need that this is necessary. But I think about what we've created and included in our downtown district and the number of housing units that we've added to sort of the stress of downtown parking, and I think it's significant, and we should be taking some time to review where we are.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 32:03

If you'd asked Common Council in 1937 what the implications would be for creating parking in soldier square, I don't think they would have thought we'd be dealing with that situation you know, 75-80 years later. So, there is some—there is some need, I think, when we're trying to project forward where we might be in 20 years, given where we're headed, and what we're trying to do with our sort of pedestrian-centric vision for what the downtown could become, and sort of thinking about where what the modality change might be in that 20-year time frame given where we're headed.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 32:42

I think this is a smart—it's a significant dollar amount, but I think, I think we need some more information to make some smart decisions about what we're doing as a city given what we've increased in our downtown district for residential housing and how we're trying to manage that, given our limitations as a city and the parking restrictions that we have. Parking is not going away, and I think it's a wise use of dollars, because we need some information, some granular information about what we're going to be facing in the next 5, 10, 15 years as these developments, you know, come to fruition, and we have a significant amount of individuals residing in the downtown that weren't there previously, and we're just not—I don't think we have the

information that we need to address that. And I think this, this study, is probably—it's not just a nice thing, but it's probably warranted at this point. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 33:43
Alder Alfheim.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 33:45

Thank you, Chair. We always talk about parking, always, and to my colleague's point to the residents downtown that are a few blocks off. Nope. I don't think this is going to address it. I don't think it's meant to. What we have heard over multiple budget cycles is the talk about parking. What parking? Who's using parking?

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 34:13

This is a crucial element to downtown business. Downtown business is critical to the city of Appleton. We didn't have 400 residents a year and a half ago that are 95% full. We don't have hundreds more that are within months. We didn't have 400 people working downtown the last time we had this conversation.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 34:41

Electric vehicles. I now own one. You know what happens when people park their car to charge at an EV station that's located near a restaurant, a store, or a bar? We plug it in, and we go spend money, and then we go back and happily take our car where it belongs. That's how these stations work, and I would like the city to embrace that, because it is part of our reality. So, make it as opposed to an afterthought, where everyone's wondering where they are, or I'm sitting three miles outside of town in my car watching Netflix when I could be downtown having lunch or brunch or shopping. That's how we utilize today's needs for the benefit of economic development.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 35:25

So, it is valid to say \$200,000 is a lot of money. It is. It absolutely is. And no, it's not going to solve all of our parking issues. We still will have conversations about parking year after year after year, because it's going to be an issue. But this is going to address the major change that we have already had since the last time we had an evaluation.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 35:47

Oh, and by the way, those way finder signs? They look horrible. Does anybody notice that? They look horrible. The point of those signs is to draw people from one side of town to the other to spend money. That's why we have them. So, this is all about our community growing and being the best version of itself. I think this is an investment that is worthwhile. No, it won't solve all the problems. However, if we do it, we spend the money, we get a proper plan, then evaluate, prioritize, and take action. The only way this is a waste of money is if we do it and then we choose not to take action on any of the advice we're given. That would be a waste of money, and that would be a flaw for the city of Appleton, in my opinion. Thanks.

Mayor Jake Woodford 36:34
Alder Meltzer.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 36:36

Thank you. I encourage my colleagues to vote in favor of this. As it's already been said, this study is long overdue. Also doing a parking study is not a commitment to any of the recommendations. You know, we've had discussion before about whether or not we have even fulfilled various recommendations, and you know, EV charging stations, smart meters, this study will help us to see what they would entail, whether they would be

the right fit for the city. It's possible that the study could say that it's not the right fit, or it's possible that the study could say that this is the right way to do it. These are things that we can't know without doing this study. And if we were to take up other projects to try to improve these things piecemeal along the way, we wouldn't have that efficiency, we wouldn't have that insight. So as the downtown grows and evolves, we're going to have to confront all of these things one way or another, and having the expertise of a parking study to guide us is, I think, the only way for us to not just be kind of feeling our way through the dark.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 37:47

So, \$200,000 is a lot of money. But I think also, given what I know of consultants, I would also say that it's not a lot of money. This isn't something that I look at and I say, "Oh, this is a consultant who is exorbitantly priced." But I think another important thing is, I also don't look at this and say, "This is a really cheap consultant. Can I really trust or feel confident in the work that they're doing?" So, when we think about the amounts of money that we spend on the work that is investing in, you know, 20 years or more in our future, we need that to be valid, we need that to be trustworthy, we need that to be work that we can be confident in. So, I have immense confidence in this consultant, and I encourage my colleagues to support this.

Mayor Jake Woodford 38:38

Alder Hayden.

Alderson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 38:40

Thank you, Chair. I think there's a lot of really good points to be made, but I'm inclined to agree with Alder Hartzheim, although for different reasons. When this was before committee, I think there was a lot of concerns about the scope of this study being limited to downtown. And I think if we're doing a study it needs to be more comprehensive and include the outer lying areas as their city is growing very quickly, because this study, with the limited scope that it has is going to go be—is going to be much more limited than what we need.

Alderson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 39:12

Along with that, I feel like if we're investing \$200,000 in our parking utility, I think we have much more immediate needs. I think every year coming up on Small Business Saturday, we have the same discussions again and again about the limitations of our parking ramp. I feel like if we invest the \$200,000 in the ability to kind of control our gates and allow Small Business Saturday to let people in and out of the ramps like we've been asking for, I think that will pay for itself faster than some study that is going to be outdated very quickly. Thank you, chair.

Mayor Jake Woodford 39:48

Alder Hartzheim,

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 39:50

Thank you, Chair. I'd like to clarify because—as a follow up to Alder Alfheim, statements about embracing EV stations, I'd like to clarify what I stated before. I don't believe that we should not embrace EV stations, but I don't believe that that is a function of the of public funds, of government funds. I believe that that should be a private enterprise. And speaking of private enterprise, there's not one way to manage parking in this city, and this study is not even asking whether we should even investigate privatization of the entire parking utility. So, I feel like \$200,000 is thrown away without us even feeling like we know whether this is the right way to move. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 40:39

Alder Doran,

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 40:40

Thank you. I'll take one last crack at something here. As probably one of the few people, I think, maybe, in the room who was around or associated with the city at the time the last parking study was done, I remember having read this on multiple occasions, and I think given the fact that this current contract is looking at using the same vendor that we had the last time, I think they have a pretty good familiarity with the city with the city's sort of parking conditions. So, I have a few concerns about the need for spending money on that.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 41:22

Echo sort of the concerns that Alder Hartzheim also shared about the marketing plan and especially the EV charging stations, which—the city's job is not to be in the business of competing with private industry, and I don't think that having city funded and operated public charging stations is the right way to go. So, I would like to make an amendment to the contract to strike a couple of bullet points. Might be the easiest way to go about it, I guess.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 41:57

The first one that says 'the analysis of existing downtown parking, supply and conditions.' I believe, as I said, that that Walker has a pretty good handle on that, and I think very little has changed with that in the last 10 years. I would also strike the bullet point "with the evaluation recommendations for marketing strategies and way finding plan," and the bullet point regarding "evaluation of and recommendations for public EV charging stations" as part of that contract. And I think lastly, just for good measure, to maybe clarify down at the bottom of page two, to strike "the strategic planning and marketing in the amount of \$95,143."

Mayor Jake Woodford 42:48

We have motion and a second to amend. We're going to clear the queue and reopen with discussion on the amendment. So, if you're looking to get in, get back in. Alder Meltzer.

Alderson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 43:05

thank you. I encourage my colleagues not to support this amendment. I think that this is taking out some important pieces. Instead of just speaking to all of them, I'm just going to point out way-finding will help us do things like figure out how to get people to know how to access parking that isn't immediately visible from the street. Since we rely so much on ramp parking, since we have the configuration of College Avenue to avoid congestion and to not have cars circling and circling and milling around while they're looking for parking, you know, way-finding isn't just putting up pretty signs that have some kind of esthetic purpose and nothing more. Way-finding is really an important part of the infrastructure that helps people to properly and effectively use the parking that we provided. So, I think taking that out of the parking study is taking out part of the whole point of the parking study. I would encourage my colleagues to vote this down. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 44:12

Alder Alfheim.

Alderson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 44:14

Thank you, Chair. I would also vote down the amendment. One, asking questions and doing the analysis about EV charging does not mean the city has to own it. Every week I'm in Madison. I go to a little community lot of chargers that Shell actually owns. There's another one that the power company owns. The cities don't own them, and yet they're used. So, I—whether—I'm not saying the city needs to, perhaps they shouldn't be. I don't think that's the point. The point is, if we're going to have one, where would it be? Then we can find out who would want to be doing that. We don't have to be in that business. So, I think that's part of the discussion.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 44:55

In terms of marketing, this is marketing that. We are marketing ourselves to our visitors. I think sometimes we get caught up on "We live here; that's dumb." Yeah, but that's not who it's for. It's for all of those that are joining us for the first time. Every time we go to an outside city, we utilize way finding tools that are used because they're put there for us, who are the visitors. So, I would ask us to step out of that a little bit. Instead of thinking as residents, think as marketers of our city, and to those that are joining us for the first time or once a month, we are helping them to utilize our entire downtown better, including our resources of parking. It's enticing and encouraging people to use the ramps instead of the on-site, and making it a simple plan. "Go here." And then people follow that sign. That's part of the deal. I'm not sure how we're not seeing the value of investing in the communication of who we are as a city to all the people that come to join us. That's what this is about.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 46:02

So, I would vote down the amendment. We're they're going to do it, or we're not going to do it, but don't tear it down to the point where we're doing next to nothing and then wonder why it doesn't work. Vote down the amendment.

Mayor Jake Woodford 46:13

Alder van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 46:15

Thank you, Chair. Alder Alfheim stole a lot of my thunder. So, I'll just remind everyone that 10 years ago, this city had a lot of different priorities and looked a lot different, and that I think the familiarity of Walker with the city's parking situation is reflected in the lower price. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 46:33

Alder Fenton.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 46:34

Thank you, Your Honor. If I may, could I direct a question to Deputy Director Neuberger, who wrote the memo on here? So, my question would be, we have got—about half of this contract would be for digital parking management and implementation support. Could I ask if the if that would include investigating methods of changing the exit strategy for the parking ramps to enable something like free parking on Small Business Saturday?

Mayor Jake Woodford 47:15

Deputy Director Neuberger, what's the mic there? Go ahead.

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 47:21

So, I would say that the answer to that is yes, that we can easily fit into the implementation support item, including looking at flexible entry and exit options related to events like Small Business Saturday.

Mayor Jake Woodford 47:41

Anything further, Alder Fenton?

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 47:42

No. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 47:43

Alder Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 47:45

Thank you, chair. You know there was a question posed about whether the city should get into the business of providing charging stations for electronic vehicle—electric vehicles. And if you allow just a couple seconds to read the national electronic vehicle infrastructure formula the program, just to get an understanding of where the where we are federally. The national electronic vehicle infrastructure formula program created under appropriations total of 5 billion to states, all states, or five years, to strategically deploy EV charging infrastructure and to establish an interconnected national network to facilitate station data collection, access and reliability. Funding on this program is directed and designated to alternative fuel corridors for electric vehicles. I could go on. But essentially they're saying this is an important thing we want to do and take on as a federal mandate and help states create this infrastructure for electric vehicles. So, if there's a question about whether we as a municipality should embrace this or have a study to show how we could do that, I think, I think that the standard has been set.

Mayor Jake Woodford 48:50

Alder van Zeeland,

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 48:52

Thank you, Chair. Just want to follow up on Alder Fenton's question to staff and ask if things like efficiencies for parking validation for large events or management of the entrance and exit of large events would be included. Because if that's the case, I think that's a game changer. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 49:12

Deputy Director Neuberger.

Deputy Director Pete Neuberger (Public Works) 49:15

So that was that was not spelled out specifically, but the bucket of items that would well fit within the implementation support item would include that. If we so choose to direct the consultant to do that, we can manage that within that task, yes.

Mayor Jake Woodford 49:35

Which I think we'd be inclined do. So, I don't, I don't think we have any concern with that. So, we'll make a note of that and include that.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 49:43

Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 49:47

Any further discussion? Alder Doran.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 49:52

Thank you. Just make two further points, I guess. To the point about visitors trying to find their way around downtown, I would agree that that study, you know, in wayfinding signage isn't necessarily meant for people that live here. I think in general, our downtown is very small and compact, and it is not hard to navigate. But I know that when, just for example, when I go to places that I haven't been and I need to find a place to go. We all

have the technology at our fingertips to pretty easily find that. You can open up any Google map or Apple map, whatever your favorite map app is, and type in "parking," and you'll find a ready supply of options that come up, and can even give you directions to the entrance and exit of said parking. So, I think the need for spending a lot of money on signage is unnecessary when we have that technology already available.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 50:51

This also doesn't preclude staff from updating the signage that's already there and bringing something forward to Council to if, if esthetics is the issue, to replace that with something that's more in line with the city's current theme.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 51:06

The other point I would make it just back to the EV charging stations. As I said, I don't think this is the city's business to be in, but it's also not necessarily the city's business to be telling or even planning for where public EV charging stations could go that are owned by private businesses. They don't need our help on that. If a private business sees an opportunity for something, it's well within their right and capability to bring something forward as a proposal to the city to want to put something in, and the city can evaluate it on the merits. We don't need to be telling them where we think something should go. Let's let private businesses do that, because that's what they do best, and let's do what we do best, which is staying out of the way. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 51:50

There's one speaker in the queue. That's Alder Wolff.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 51:56

Thank you, Chair. So, I've heard it mentioned a few times, talking about using your phone to find out where you're going. And I recently left this country for the first time, and as I got to that place, I realized that I would be without using Google Maps. Now, that was a little daunting, but having to figure out the city that I was in without having a phone to use is something that was important to be able to do. Now, our city in particular, does get students from abroad, and the idea that potentially they might need us to help them figure out where they need to go downtown to have a good experience, is something that I find important, because that's something recently discovered, but I do think that that's important to help people in that kind of landscape. I don't know if we necessarily have the same issue, but I think that that's something to think about too, that not everyone's going to be able to use their phone to navigate a new city, and that we should be able to guide people around our city. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 53:08

Any further discussion on the amendment? All right, hearing none, a motion to amend was made and seconded. Please cast your votes. All right. Motion fails two to 12.

Mayor Jake Woodford 53:41

We're back to the item. Further discussion on the item. All right. Alder Hartzheim.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 53:52

Thank you, Chair. To Alder Wolff's point earlier in regards to wayfinding, signage, and folks not having smartphone availability, let's remember that that's \$200,000 that's on the table is not to put those signs out there. It's to tell us what we need as far as signage. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 54:19

And again, the last speaker in the queue, Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 54:28

I will say on that that perhaps this study will show us that that's something we might want to have, is signage in bilingual opportunities that we might have that kind of thing, right? We have a very large Hmong population in our city, and maybe that's something that they would benefit from. So, I don't—you know, that's kind of where the study comes in handy. It could show us that we might need something like that, and that's a blind spot to us, so just something to keep in mind. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 55:01

Alder Alfheim.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 55:03

Call the question.

Mayor Jake Woodford 55:06

You were the last one. So procedurally, we've added more time. We have a motion and a second made to call the question. Any discussion? All those in favor of calling the question, please signify by saying, aye. Any opposed? The question has been called. Please cast your votes. Motion passes, 10, four. Item has been approved.