



Legislation Text

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City Council Meeting Date: April 16, 2019

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Ben Martig, City Administrator
David Bennett, Public Works Director/City Engineer

Discussion of Potential Trail or Sidewalk Gaps for 2019 Design and Construction.

Action Requested:

The Northfield City Council is requested to discuss trail and sidewalk gaps for 2019 design and construction.

Staff is not recommending to pursue any projects in 2019 but rather to

Summary Report:

As part of the Pedestrian, Bike and Trail System Update Recommendations, the plan identified biking and sidewalk gaps in the community along with updating the planned walking and bicycling network map. This was the intended first step in pulling together a broad exploration of gaps in the overall system to then lead to prioritization of construction projects for these areas not associated with the street reconstruction improvement plan. Staff is planning to have this discussion with the City Council during the early stages of the 2020-2021 budget development process.

During the 2019 Street Reclamation Project process, there was interest to include the additional construction of a sidewalk gap on Highland Avenue and Ivanhoe Drive. Staff requested not to include it in that particular project scope as it would have caused significant delays to the project schedule. However, staff indicated it could be reviewed and discussed as a separate project and we have brought it forward for discussion this evening.

Since the meeting, the Engineering Department has prepared a preliminary cost estimate of \$100,000. The project may or may not be able to be completed in 2019 as there would be surveying, design, property owner meetings, bidding, financing and other steps to be complete the project. Additionally, if the expectation is to complete the project in 2019 the tighter construction schedule could lead to added costs due to the bidding environment.

The engineering department does not at this time have a prioritization plan in place for the City-wide areas identified in the study. Staff is recommending that the sidewalks and trail segment be programmed into the Capital Improvement Plan in future years to provide more time to establish a funding source and commitment and additionally to work through a prioritization process. This could lead to inclusion of new projects and funding in 2020 for the construction season dependent on city council interest and support.

Alternative Options:

Council could pass a motion to request staff to prepare plans and specifications for the Highland Avenue and Ivanhoe Drive sidewalks and other areas that the City Council may choose by majority vote. If council pursued this for 2019 we'd explore the start to design and financing in greater detail to determine. It may or may not be able to be completed in 2019.

If the council chose to pursue funding of improvements in 2019 we'd look at including in a tax abatement debt issuance this year to be paid off over years into the future. We are already planning to use this tool for a portion of Spring Creek Road improvements and we may also be pursuing it with pending projects that may arise in the coming months. These projects include the transit hub access road and the street department roof replacement. There could be some additional cash reserves to consider utilizing in lieu of added debt which we would review concurrent with the design and completion of the 2018 audit work.

Financial Impacts:

Staff has been exploring potential new revenue options to generate funds for replacement of special assessments that could also include other uses such as funding sidewalk and trail improvements for the future years in order to develop a comprehensive improvement plan for these "gaps." We are tentatively planning to have a worksession agenda item in May to present some information on options. The following are some potential options that are planned for further discussion:

- Tax Abatement - Issue debt through tax abatement which is the only debt instrument allowed under state law to fund trail and sidewalk projects that are not associated with another street project.
- Debt Instrument Legislative Changes - The City could encourage exploration of Legislative changes to broaden the scope of transportation funding options to allow more expansive language to allow improvements for all users rather than a focus on tools that almost exclusively for streets.
- Utilization of cash reserves - when the city has excess cash reserves beyond the policy requirements the City Council could utilize those for one-time projects. Staff will be presenting the City Council an update of the current reserve status at the time of the audit presentation in June.
- Franchise Fees - We are exploring the potential for a new gas and electric franchise fees that would be allowed in State law and many cities utilize as a revenue tool
- Property Tax Levy - There could be an additional non-debt tax property tax levy increase initiated to add these improvements into our capital improvement plans.
- Other- We will continue to explore other alternatives as well as we prepare for this discussion.

Tentative Timelines:

N/A