

CITY OF SAINT PAUL LONG-RANGE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Monday, November 10, 2025, 5:00 – 7:00 pm | Arlington Hills Community
Center

- I. Call to order at 5:05pm by Chair Dees-Erickson
Roll Call
 - a. Members in attendance: Demetrius Shaw, Makayla Cox, Liam O'Brien, Carl Johnson, Raymond Hess, Tim Marino, Nardos Ashenafi, Lauren Dees-Erickson, Darren Tobolt, Jes Braun, Pang Yang
 - b. Members absent: April Eh
 - c. City Staff in attendance: Nichelle Bottko Woods, Shannon Forney, Bruce Engelbrekt, Neal Younghans, Caroline Swinford -Office of Financial Services, Alice Messer-Parks and Rec, Council President Noecker, Council Member Johnson, Council Member Bowie, Council Member Coleman, Kumud Verma – City Council,
 - d. Community Members in attendance: Michael-Jon Pease – Saint Paul Parks Conservancy
- II. Approval of 11/10 Meeting Agenda- Tobolt moved to approve the agenda, O'Brien seconded, motion passed.
- III. Approval of 10/13 Meeting Minutes – O'Brien moved to approve the minutes, Tobolt seconded, motion passed.
- IV. Budget Amendments
 - a) Office of Financial Services– RES PH 25-232: Budget amendment as presented by Neal Younghans. Amending the City's Capital Improvement Budget and Operating Budget to correct a bond proceed transfer for Fire's cardiac monitors for \$31,665.

Younghans explains that in the Bond Sale resolution earlier in the year, there was one transfer budgeted incorrectly, and that the remaining cash would be budgeted for cardiac monitors. A discussion followed about how departments budget for things like Green Energy rebates, and that it usually requires some financial adjustments towards the end of a project, as the budget is based on estimated rebate and actual amounts are frequently different. A motion to approve the budget amendment is made by Yang, seconded by Johnson. No further discussion. Motion passes.
 - b) Parks and Recreation– RES PH 25-250: Budget amendment as presented by Alice Messer and Michael-Jon Pease. Amending the financing and spending plan in the Department of Parks and Recreation in the amount of \$195,597.33 to utilize Parkland Dedication funds for the Taylor Park Improvements project.

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Messer explained that the Parkland Dedication Funds for Taylor Park would support a new play area, trails and signage. These improvements were identified through community feedback. Parks engaged the public through outreach and surveys. Parks is engaged with Kaboom, a national leader in developing play areas in response to community input. The Saint Paul Parks Conservancy has contributed \$108,000 to the project.

Dees-Erickson inquired what the total project cost was. Messer replied that this amendment added \$195,000 to the project. Roughly \$400,000 is from Common Cent sales tax funding, \$108,000 from Saint Paul Parks Conservancy. Messer explained that the typical cost for a playground is \$600,000, which usually requires a strategy of stacking funding until enough is available to launch the project.

Dees-Erickson asked for Messer to explain Parkland Dedication Funds, which were referenced in the financial analysis for the amendment. Messer explained that these are fees collected through the Department of Safety and Inspections permitting process, as part of a city ordinance in 2015.

A motion to approve the budget amendment is made by Hess, seconded by Tobolt. No further discussion. Motion passes.

- c) Real Estate– RES PH 25-251: Budget amendment as presented by Bruce Engelbrekt. Amending budgets for energy projects financed through the \$5 million Green Energy Program.

Engelbrekt described that the Green Energy Program was established in the Capital Improvement Budget in 2019, in order to reduce the City's carbon footprint, improve infrastructure, and reduce energy consumption resulting in significant annual savings. Typical projects include LED lighting, HVAC and other energy-related building system upgrades. Program success to date is outstanding. Since 2019, the City has reduced its energy use by 10%, received almost half a million in Excel energy rebates, and reduced electricity costs by nearly \$300,000 annually.

The purpose of this budget amendment is to close out completed projects and make final spending and financing re-allocations as a part of final project adjustments. As discussed earlier, this is quite normative for large multi-year projects of this nature.

Hess inquires what percentage of City owned buildings are having these kinds of improvements. Engelbrekt responded that there are close to 180 buildings in the City's portfolio. Improvements have occurred in less than half of those.

Dees-Erickson asked if the investments for the Griffin Building were solely for lighting improvements, and Engelbrekt confirmed. Dees-Erickson also asked for more detail on the Fire Station 3 project. Engelbrekt explained that the station has a need for \$800,000 just for the energy components of this multi-million dollar project.

Engelbrekt went on to explain that the Energy Project Coordinator is working on tracking energy use and annual savings. Marino asked if there was data or analysis on savings during pandemic closures. Engelbrekt explained that the cost savings during the pandemic were not that substantial, as buildings still had to be warmed and maintained even when un-occupied.

Yang congratulated the City and Real Estate services on the tremendous accomplishments of the program. She inquired if funding could be used for street lighting. Engelbrekt explained that the funding was not eligible for street or trail lighting.

A motion to approve the budget amendment is made by Tobolt, seconded by Cox. No further discussion. Motion passes.

V. New Business

- a) Community Proposal Sub-committee as presented by Lian O'Brien.
O'Brien referenced the Wilder Research Report to the City Council Audit Committee, calling for recommendations for new tactics by November 20th. O'Brien suggested that the Sub-Committee would return with a letter of recommendations for process changes based on responses.

O'Brien also requested a process improvement for budget amendments; that amendments should provide a one-pager of the entire project scope, not just the change being presented. Committee members need to follow projects in their entire scope but are often presented with portions of the project change. Adding a one-pager document to budget amendments before the CIB would significantly assist the CIB committee in making informed decisions and recommendations.

- b) CIB 2026 Proposed Budget and Project Recommendation Conversation with Council Members Johnson, Coleman, Bowie and Council President Noecker. Council President Noecker thanked the CIB for the opportunity to have a conversation with

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the committee. She assured the committee that they were there to support the CIB and their process rather than question specific recommendations or projects.

Council Member Johnson reflected on her own experience as a volunteer Cultural Star Committee member, when the meeting minutes didn't capture every nuance of decision making. She stated the desire to understand the CIB's decision making framework beyond just a list of funding recommendations. She asked how the committee views their roles and participation in the process.

Council Member Coleman introduces herself as the newest City Council Member representing Ward 4. She explained that Council Members get a lot of questions from constituents regarding CIB funding. She stated a goal of learning about the work of the CIB and ensure all wards are represented. She also posed questions like, "What is our City choosing to invest in? How do community members get involved? How do we spend money equitably?". She acknowledged that all this work is done by a group of dedicated volunteers, to direct millions of dollars in funding.

Tobolt clarified that the CIB makes recommendations, but that the final approvers are the City Council Members to make the funding decisions.

Council Member Johnson asked if there was a scoring rubric. Dees-Erickson affirmed and Bottko-Woods showed the scoring rubrics for the Community Development Block Grant process, and the Community Proposal process. Johnson asked the committee about their personal process for scoring; "How do you score, what do you take into account?"

Tobolt responded that the considerations really depend on the funding process being considered. CDBG is a federal program with risk score ratings provided as a starting point for each project. Tobolt also mentioned that many of the CDBG applicants are familiar, they have applied to this program for many years. He mentioned that a lack of project detail was the hardest challenge in scoring a project. Answering the application questions directly and fully was the most helpful way for a project to be fully considered. He also mentioned the tension in a funding process where community groups are applying alongside City departments for Federal dollars.

Johnson mentioned that in the CDBG process, the risk ratings sometimes flagged projects without robust descriptions of why, possibly influencing the scoring significantly.

Bottko-Woods explained that the CDBG program is a Federal HUD (Housing and Urban Development) contract held by the Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED). PED allocates 60% of the funding to the CIB for CDBG projects, and retains the rest for departmental CDBG programming and administration. PED provides the risk ratings for projects but does not have a role in ranking the projects, or final funding recommendations.

Council President Noecker asked about some specific projects where the recommended funding level shifted substantially throughout the process, or projects were not funded.

Dees-Erickson affirmed that the committee had numerous discussions through June meetings about the CDBG rankings, scores and final recommendations. Dees-Erickson referenced her notes about one project that was not recommended for funded, citing the project was not fully compliant with ADA standards. The organization also requested an amount of funding that dwarfed their operational budget. These concerns led to a low score.

Dees Erickson also mentioned that for another project that was awarded less funding than requested, she noted that this group had been awarded many times previously, and that there was a perspective of wanting funding to reach more / new groups.

Yang recalled her support for a department proposal during the CDBG process. While it originally scored low, the score was revised after discussions of the project need and merit. This funding was specifically for vacant building demolition, which is not a particularly inspiring project, but this funds a core City need that leads to better safety outcomes. Given the full weight of the need / scope / available resources this project was ultimately recommended for funding.

Johnson contributed that there is a lot of CIB funding that the committee doesn't make funding recommendations for. One example is Municipal State Aid dollars. This is a CIB funding source that is controlled by Public Works in accordance with their 5 year plan. He noted that in order to change CIB processes and make improvements, the CIB needs more resources than the current contributions of OFS staff.

Johnson went on to say that the CIB budget is complicated and a huge learning curve to be a participating committee member. There is no hand-book to serving on the committee, there are too many complicated processes, and the communication around funding isn't robust enough.

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Marino added that the risk ratings and other review tools to assess projects were meaningful in order to be good fiduciary stewards. Tobolt noted that 6 of the projects recommended for funding were Parks projects. He wondered why these projects were not funded through a program like the Common Cent Sales Tax.

Marino noted that the CIB program funding amounts had not grown with inflation, so that all of these process decisions become more difficult when there are more requests for funding, and the funds available do not also increase.

O'Brien noted that he agreed that there was a 2 year learning curve in order to become a fully participating CIB member. He also noted that as volunteers, they were very reliant on staff review and things like the risk ratings to provide structure to the process. He thanks the Council Members for attending the CIB meeting, and hosting such a robust discussion. He offered that this type of public discussion of the CIB processes could be an annual meeting.

Braun contributed that as a new member to the CIB, it was very overwhelming to learn all the processes, rules and guidance. She likened it to "drinking from a fire hose" in a very public process. Committee members generally agreed that being a CIB member was a substantial commitment, and was a difficult ask of volunteers to redirect or reimagine better CIB processes on their own. The best process improvements are probably reached by working together with many stakeholders.

Council President Noecker thanked the Committee for the discussion, to better understand the CIB's decision making process. She noted that it was really helpful to be able to interact with the committee and ask questions.

Council Member Johnson noted that she was actively advocating for more Ward 7 representation on the committee roster and encouraged continued outreach from current members.

Chair Dees-Erickson thanked the Council Members for a robust discussion about the CIB and reiterated interest in making this an annual meeting event. Deepening the relationship between CIB and Council helps serve the constituents of Saint Paul better.

- c) Capital Maintenance Recommendation presented by Tim Marino. Marino showed the final funding recommendation list from the Capital Maintenance Committee's work throughout October and November. He summarized that there was a spirited discussion about the amount of contingency offered in this program (10%). The sub-committee did analysis on funding recommendations if the amount was increased as much as 20%. Ultimately, they decided to leave it at 10%.

The Capital Maintenance Sub-Committee recommended that projects not exceed \$500,000. Two projects came in that exceeded this amount. While they were not recommended for funding, robust conversation ensued over available resources versus needs across the city, and how to hold those in balance. Reserving enough contingency funding for projects continues to be a challenge, both for specific projects and for the work of the committee. Marino presented this information, with the intention of voting on funding recommendations at the December CIB meeting.

O'Brien offered that it would be helpful to see a study on deferred maintenance across the City. Dees-Erickson offered that it's difficult to go through these processes repeatedly when you can only fund 25% of requests.

VI. Announcements

- a. Upcoming Meetings:
- b. Monday, December 8 at North End Community Center
- c. Monday, January 12 at Arlington Hills Community Center
- d. District Council Process Feedback

Meeting adjourned at 7:07pm