

CITY COUNCIL
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMITTEE MINUTES

September 24, 2020

The City Council Community Planning and Transportation Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met at 4:03 p.m. in a virtual meeting hosted in the Council Chambers on the 24th day of September, 2020, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted in the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Hall, Peacock, Petrone, and
Chairman Holman

ABSENT: Councilmember Bierman

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilmember Michael Nash, Ward Five
Ms. Carrie Evenson, Stormwater Program Manager
Ms. Jane Hudson Director of Planning and
Community Development
Mr. Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation
Mr. Taylor Johnson, Public Transit Coordinator
Ms. Beth Muckala, Assistant City Attorney
Mr. Shawn O’Leary, Director of Public Works
Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager
Mr. Michael Scroggins, Information Technology
(IT) and Marketing Manager for Embark
Ms. Syndi Runyon, Administrative Technician IV

Item 1, being:

**PUBLIC TRANSIT RIDERSHIP REPORT FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST 2020 AND
TRANSIT RIDERSHIP FARES.**

Mr. Taylor Johnson, Public Transit Coordinator, said the fixed route service transported 15,702 passengers in August, which is a 37% decrease compared to August 2019. The daily average ridership was 654, a decrease of 42%.

The paratransit service transported 1,341 passengers in August, a decrease of 35% compared to August 2019. Average daily ridership was 50, a decrease of 58%. For the month of August, the paratransit service had 0% trip requests denied due to capacity.

Mr. Johnson highlighted transit activities and said Staff continues to work with Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc., (Nelson/Nygaard) providing data needs to evaluate and provide insight into the transit current system as well as finalizing an outreach plan.

Item 1, continued:

Mr. Johnson said August 15, 2020, the City reinstated Saturday service for City transit operations from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. The bus system operated its first game day picking up passengers at the old Central Library location and will continue the service to determine how ridership responds. On August 10, 2020, marked the first day of the commuter route being operated solely by EMBARK OKC and EMBARK who expanded that route from six runs per day to nine runs per day.

Councilmember Hall asked how many people utilized the Saturday service and Mr. Johnson said Staff is wanting to wait before reporting numbers to ensure a true average is presented. Councilmember Hall felt that was fair and said it will take time to build support and make sure the public knows the service is available. She is cautiously optimistic the service will fill a need, especially for people whose only option for getting to work or shopping is transit. She asked how the game day service was promoted and if Staff was pleased with the number of riders that utilized the service. Mr. Johnson said he would be more comfortable reporting ridership numbers once the service has been operating longer to have a true average, but Staff is pleased with the operations on Saturday. He said both Saturday and game day service advertisements were posted on Facebook and shared through social media as well as posted inside the buses. He expects public awareness to become greater over time and agreed the service is filling a need.

Councilmember Hall asked what type of social distancing measures are being taken on the buses and if that is affecting ridership numbers. Mr. Johnson said capacity is being limited on fixed route and paratransit and on the fixed route, the capacity depends on the length of the bus, i.e., a 35-foot bus can have ten people with social distancing guidelines. He said if the bus is hitting those capacity limits then unfortunately the buses are having to pass up people at bus stops if no one is disembarking. He said EMBARK has stated there are not a large number of stops that have had to be passed by so that is good news.

Chairman Holman asked how the City is doing on obtaining grants for buses and Mr. Johnson said the City has not purchased a bus yet, which is the next big step this next fiscal year and it can 12 to 15 months to obtain a bus once ordered. He said Staff has applied for a bus through a grant provided by the Volkswagen Settlement to Oklahoma of \$5.3 million. He said the City can apply for up to 50% of the cost of a battery electric bus that costs \$900,000 and the City would have to pay the other 50%. He said and Staff is applying for all grant opportunities available to modernize the City's fleet.

Chairman Holman asked if any other entity in Norman provides funding for the transit system, such as Cleveland County, Norman Public Schools, etc., and Mr. Johnson said Norman Regional Hospital provides \$50,000 annually and the City also applies for grants from the State Transit Revolving Fund and the City received \$134,000 this year.

Item 1, continued:

Items submitted for the record

1. Public Transportation Monthly Report for August 2020
2. Norman Transit Ridership Totals for August 2020

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Item 2, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING PROTECTED BICYCLE LANES.

Chairman Holman said this is a subject the Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) will review, but he wanted to talk about what the Committee is hoping to accomplish to give BAC direction on what to review. He said the City is adding green colored bicycle lanes to road projects, which is great, but there have been requests from constituents for protected bicycle lanes in different areas of the City. He said one specific issue he would like the BAC to review is the intersection of State Highway 9 (SH9) and 12th Avenue S.E., where the bicycle lane runs across SH9 from 12th Avenue S.E. and interacts with traffic coming off of SH9 turning south onto 12th Avenue S.E. He said citizens are concerned about how the traffic merges into the bicycle lane very quickly and there is no protection for bicyclists. He said there have not been any accidents he is aware of, but has had many calls from concerned citizens regarding how dangerous this can be. He would like the BAC to review bicycle lanes throughout Norman looking at further protections that may be provided other than a painted lane.

Councilmember Hall asked if Norman has any protected bicycle lanes and Chairman Holman said no. Councilmember Hall asked Mr. O'Leary to describe the categories of bicycle lanes the City currently uses and Mr. O'Leary said the Public Works Department shares bicycle information with the Parks and Recreation Department who staffs the BAC meetings. He said the City has an adopted Bicycle Plan and the BAC updates the plan and categories, but just over the past few years the City has moved into the "on-street bicycle lane world" with the green bicycle lanes on major roadways and striped bicycle lanes on residential streets. He said many people in the industry refer to the striped and painted lanes as protected bicycle lanes, but Chairman Holman seems to be moving in the direction of other physical devices, such as curbs, barriers, etc., that physically separate the vehicles from the bicycle lane. He said bicycle friendly streets have signage (Share the Road) that designates the street as a bicycle lane, but does not have stripes or painted lanes. He said there are also off-street bicycle lanes, such as Legacy Trail, and a multi-modal path is currently being constructed on SH9 that will eventually lead to Lake Thunderbird.

Mr. Jud Foster, Director of Parks and Recreation, said the City has separated lanes (multi-modal path) for bicycles on SH9 and most of Legacy Trail is separated from the roadway, but he is not sure if that qualifies as a protected bicycle lane. He said designated bicycle routes include a lot of riding in the streets and that was a program adopted by the BAC and City Council several years ago.

Item 2, continued:

Councilmember Hall said she is a bicyclist and is aware of the different ways bicycles can use the street or bicycle lanes, but definitely wants to pursue this discussion and learn more about it because she is not sure what “protected bicycle lane” means. She said since the pandemic began there have been more outdoor activities including riding bicycles.

Councilmember Petrone asked how bike lanes are funded and how they came about and Mr. O’Leary said many of the bicycle lanes are incorporated into roadway projects and many are federally funded with the City’s share being 20% and the federal share being 80% while others are funded from the Capital Fund. He said the most expensive part of bicycle lanes is the green paint, which sometimes has additives such as reflective glass beads for retro reflectivity and sand for skid resistance and is the most widely used method to mark bicycle lanes. He said the drawback is the paint is rough and collects debris that can sometime cause problems for bicyclists.

Councilmember Petrone said some communities use rain gardens as a barrier for bicycle lanes and would like the BAC to review that as well as what other communities do to protect bicycle lanes on streets.

Chairman Holman said he would like to see a comprehensive list of what other cities are doing as well as innovative ways to protect bicycle lanes. He said some bicyclists do not like the green bicycle lanes because they collect debris as Mr. O’Leary stated earlier so he would like to see other options for colored bicycle lanes instead of the green paint.

Councilmember Peacock said the idea is to get separation between vehicle traffic and bicycles and recommended everyone read a website link he sent to them entitled, “A Bike Lane Any City Can Afford to Build,” that has ideas on low cost, low impact options for bicycle lanes that are along the lines of tactical urbanism where cities test concepts before dedicating public dollars to infrastructure changes.

Councilmember Nash said he opened the link from Councilmember Peacock and the first thing he noticed were plants separating traffic from the bicycle lane. He said just having that physical barrier can make bicyclist feel safer sharing the road with vehicles and help drivers recognize there are bicycles in their lane.

Councilmember Peacock said objects, such as plants, plastic poles, etc., definitely catches the eye of drivers making them more aware of bicyclists.

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Item 3, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING MAINTENANCE OF THE BRANDT PARK DUCK POND.

Chairman Holman said the Duck Pond in Brandt Park (on University of Oklahoma (OU) property) has become an eyesore to visitors to the Park. He loved when the Medieval Fair was held at the park because it was such a neat atmosphere and in a lot of old promotional photos and videos the fountain was always used and was a prominent feature of Norman. He said the fountain has not worked for many years and OU recently replaced the middle bridge, but many constituents have expressed their frustration regarding that project's appearance. He said the Duck Pond is a stormwater channel as well making it important to the City. He asked if Staff could work with OU to improve the appearance of the Duck Pond and get the fountain working again. He said the City may be interested in swapping some land with OU, such as airport land the City owns, giving the City the ability to maintain the Duck Pond. He said perhaps OU will grant the City the easements around the stormwater channel if they will not swap land.

Mr. O'Leary said Brandt Park is owned and operated by OU and the City does not even own easements around the property so the City cannot legally work on the property without OU's permission. He said the property is also in a regulated Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood plain so any work that takes place on that property requires a flood plain permit.

Ms. Carrie Evenson, Stormwater Program Manager, said some of the changes happening at the Duck Pond are fairly normal for a pond of its age with the kind of organic input it receives on a regular basis. She said some of the changes around the water's edge is actually OU working with the Oklahoma Water Survey under their Pond Program to protect Norman's natural detention and they are looking at ways to minimize shoreline erosion. She said there is beneficial activity taking place, but OU recognizes there is work that still needs to be done. She has spoken with Mr. Matthew Rom, Director of OU Facilities Maintenance, and they have a project planned to do some rehabilitation of the Duck Pond, which is in the early stages and she is not at liberty to talk about these plans. She said Mr. Rom said he would keep City Staff informed of what is taking place as they move forward with the project.

Councilmember Petrone asked if OU plans to rehabilitate the fountain or install a new fountain and Ms. Evenson said she is not sure since their project is in the early stages, but does not believe that decision has been made. Councilmember Petrone said, assuming the fountain cooperates with the ecological habitat OU is trying to preserve, it would be nice to have the water moving so it does not stagnate and attract mosquitoes. Can the City talk to them about installing a fountain especially since it is iconic to Norman?

Councilmember Hall said she was always a fan of the fountain as well and would like to see it working again. She said to the uneducated eye of someone who does not know anything about pond management, the pond looks sad compared to its glory days when the Medieval Fair was held there. She has been struck by the algae in the pond and asked Ms. Evenson if that is normal and Ms. Evenson said yes, in smaller ponds with large bird populations the nutrient input into the pond makes a prime environment for algae to grow.

Item 3, continued:

Ms. Evenson said water in the pond flows through an outlet that flows under Lindsey Street to Bishop Creek so there is movement of the water. She said the flow can be managed, but that will depend on how much work OU is willing to put into the pond and aeration through a fountain can become quite costly if the fountain runs 24/7. She said there are other ways to manage nutrients in the water, such as using aquatic plants and controlling bird population (which is not an easy solution). She said as far as mosquitoes, fish in the pond eat the larvae and the ducks eat the mature mosquitoes so she does not see an issue.

Councilmember Hall said she is happy to know Ms. Evenson is having dialogue with OU regarding the Duck Pond rehabilitation efforts.

Councilmember Peacock said he participated in the Nature Conservancy Leadership Academy and discussion included the Duck Pond and what a jewel it is in Norman so this could be an opportunity for a partnership with them. He said the Nature Conservancy spoke about a possible case study of urban conservation of the pond and it would be a smart move to include them in the conversation since they work a lot with conservation easements where OU would deed the land to the Nature Conservancy and the Conservancy would protect the pond into perpetuity. He said there is also a program in Oklahoma City called Saturday Morning Sweep in which the City pays for a dumpster, volunteers organize a cleanup, and the City pays to have the dumpster removed. He said there is enough interest in the Duck Pond that acquiring volunteers would not be a problem. He said there may also be opportunities to apply for federal grants or conservation grants.

Councilmember Hall said years ago there was a “Save the Duck Pond” campaign and significant improvements were made.

Councilmember Peacock said the City also has the wonderful Firehouse Art Center ceramic duck statues that could be used in Brandt Park as a great marketing campaign.

Chairman Holman said he would like to see further efforts of preservation of this park and pond and the clean up idea is great because he does notice trash and debris building up around the edges of the pond. He said some people believe the Lindsey Street Project altered the flow of stormwater that is negatively impacting the Duck Pond and Mr. O’Leary said there are no negative stormwater impacts to the Duck Pond from Lindsey Street.

Mr. O’Leary said OU has gone through some major budget cuts and approximately 50 or more landscaping employees were laid off so they are unable to keep their properties as well maintained as before.

Chairman Holman suggested Staff explore options for procuring an easement for regular City maintenance of the drainage channel. He also asked if Staff could encourage OU to either repair the current fountain or install a new fountain if it would not be damaging to the ecosystem.

Item 3, continued:

Ms. Evenson said the City does have clean up events across the City and will be doing public outreach and education in a socially distanced way. She said on October 4th there is a clean-up scheduled at Crestland Park as part of the Lake Thunderbird Watershed Cleanup Blitz. Other cleanups are scheduled for October 12th along 12th Avenue S.E. from Boyd Street to Lindsey Street; in Saxon Park on October 25th; and a Watershed Workshop and cleanup of Lake Thunderbird in the State Park on October 31st. She said on October 2nd and 3rd the virtual inlet painting event will be taking place as well.

Chairman Holman thanked Ms. Evenson for the information and asked Staff to keep the Committee updated on progress at the Duck Pond.

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Item 4, being:

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS.

Chairman Holman asked if street sweepers could sweep the street around Campus Corner before game day and Ms. Evenson said street sweeping is part of the Stormwater Division's regular duties before and after home games.

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The meeting adjourned at 5:08 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor