

Minutes

Audio Tape No. 674

The City Council of the City of Leawood, Kansas, met for a Special Call Meeting at City Hall, 4800 Town Center Drive, at 6:00 P.M., on Monday, March 5, 2007. Mayor Peggy Dunn presided.

Councilmembers present: Jim Rawlings, Lou Rasmussen, Gary Bussing, Scott Gulledge, Gregory Peppes, Debra Filla, and James Azeltine.

Councilmembers absent: Mike Gill.

Staff present: Scott Lambers, City Administrator
Patty Bennett, City Attorney
Chris Claxton, Parks & Recreation Director
Deb Harper, City Clerk
Christy Wise, Deputy City Clerk

Others present: Dennis Reynolds, Planning Commissioner/Building Designer
Laura Uhlmansiek, *Kansas City Star* reporter

1. Opening Remarks

Mayor Dunn called the Work Session to order at 6:10 P.M. Introductions were made by those present. She reviewed that plans for Gezer Park have been in the conceptual stage for some time. In the fall of 2005, a delegation from Leawood visited Israel and presented the conceptual plan drawing to the Gezer Regional Council for their review and input. The councilmembers of our sister city were very impressed with the appearance of the plan and the thoughtfulness of designing a park in their honor.

The park project has been in the Capital Improvement Program [CIP] and was listed at \$1.1-million in last year's document. The initial estimate of \$750,000 was based upon development costs of I-Lan Park.

The purpose of the Work Session is to obtain consensus on the conceptual drawings in order to move forward with schematic designs. Changes can still be made at this point. The scheduling of this meeting is timely as three members of the Gezer Regional Council are coming to Leawood on March 19th for a 4-5 day visit prior to doing work with the Jewish Federation of Greater Kansas City for Partnership 2000.

2. Discuss Gezer Park Improvements, located at 13300 Mission Road

Dennis Reynolds provided a presentation of the current plans for Gezer Park with the aid of site plan drawings.

In addition to "The Ladder," a sculpture by Ilan Averbuch that will be placed in a shallow pond, Parks & Recreation Director Chris Claxton mentioned that a second piece of public art is proposed for the west side of Mission Road. Mr. Reynolds stated art options for this location have been discussed including projection art on the stone wall or something on a large scale that would be legible from cars driving along Mission Road.

Ms. Claxton added that the Leawood Lions Club, who is interested in participating in the project, has suggested incorporating audio components throughout the park in order to provide further education of the Gezer Region. Potentially, this type of feature could be placed in several areas throughout the park such as near the artwork, near the rocks inset with fossils, near the playground, near the shelters, and near the tablet to be gifted by the Gezer Region. Replacing worn-out tapes would be relatively inexpensive. Mayor Dunn commented that an addition such as this would harmonize with the Lions' mission of serving the sight-impaired.

Mr. Reynolds informed there are roughly 20 parking spaces in Lot H with adjacent space acquired for offloading and special activities. If there are larger crowds, there is excess parking across the street in the Price Chopper parking lot. Mr. Lambers informed that details will be ironed out concerning park patrons utilizing the Price Chopper parking lot.

Councilmember Rawlings reported witnessing illegally parked vehicles at I-Lan Park due to an inadequate number of spaces. It was noted that 12 more spaces are under construction. Mr. Lambers stated I-Lan Park also functions as a trailhead. While there may not be many people in the actual park, vehicles are parked here during utilization of the trails. Gezer Park will probably not function in this same capacity. Mayor Dunn stated the congestion at I-Lan Park will hopefully be relieved upon opening of the additional parking lot.

Mayor Dunn informed Councilmember Filla that Gezer Park will be comprised of 10-acres of green space. The land was donated by AWG during the approval of Price Chopper.

Ms. Claxton confirmed that some of the existing trails may require relocation. Mr. Reynolds stated it may only be necessary to reshape a few sections into the landform while keeping 80-90% of the trails in place.

Councilmember Azeltine inquired about characteristics of the Gezer Region that are to be simulated. Mr. Lambers stated the water features are intended to replicate north Israel as the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, and the Dead Sea while the archeological aspects represent Tel Gezer from 4000 B.C. Other features do not pertain solely to the Gezer Region but to Israel in general. Research on trees from the region that would be compatible in this area has produced limited results but does include the non-fruit bearing Russian Olive Tree. The trees will be terraced into the hills as was done in Israel, particularly in Jerusalem. The vision is to capture the ancient history from this area.

Mayor Dunn stated Councilmember Gill, who is absent this evening, had previously asked Ms. Claxton to create a list of possible collaborations with private donors, such as the Leawood Foundation. Ms. Claxton explained the donations would derive from a very specific gift catalog, which is used by many parks & recreation agencies such as Lee's Summit and Overland Park. She also informed that a tree donation policy was recently submitted to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board for recommendation.

Mayor Dunn remarked on the impressive amount of private donors to the Arboretum in Overland Park, who are recognized on nameplates. She stated it would be wonderful if this type of program could be incorporated into Gezer Park. Another suggestion is to obtain input from Kibbutz and Moshav of the Gezer Region as well as from the Jewish Federation of Greater Kansas City. Ms. Claxton reported that a group of students from the federation completed work on some of the stepping stones for the park.

Mayor Dunn informed Mr. Reynolds that the stone tablet, which is being sculpted in a sculpture garden by artist Gadi Fraiman, is not in Leawood at this point in time. The large art piece will be sent by ship.

Councilmember Rasmussen received confirmation from Mayor Dunn that the purpose of the meeting is to also obtain consensus on the proposed budget for the project. A Work Session on the CIP will take place next week, however it was felt important to have more detailed discussion surrounding Gezer Park given the Gezer Regional Manager is coming on March 19th.

Councilmember Gullede arrived at 6:30 P.M.

Mr. Reynolds conducted a PowerPoint presentation including slides illustrating the regional vegetation and landforms, which were taken by the Leawood delegation while in Israel. The Gezer Regional Council has reviewed a printed version of the presentation.

Discussion took place regarding the process of obtaining bids and creating an estimated budget. Mayor Dunn noted the project can be phased if submitted bids are higher than \$1.1-million. Another option is to attempt private fundraising rather than spend additional public dollars.

As read in the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board minutes, Mayor Dunn confirmed with Mr. Reynolds that the water features are the driving costs of the project. Councilmember Rasmussen commented that these feature are the spine of the park. He also inquired if it were possible to bid the project in separate pieces that fall within \$1.1-million.

Mr. Lambers prioritized the construction process by listing the parking lot and restroom facilities as most important, followed by the water feature, followed by items listed as alternatives. Contractors can be made aware that alternative items may or may not go forward. If consensus is obtained for the water feature, the alternative items will be subject to a subsequent review and prioritization by the Council based upon the bids and available funding.

Councilmember Rasmussen asked to what extent an engineer's estimate would be applicable. Mr. Lambers stated concrete estimates can be obtained for the parking lot and restrooms given there is construction of such in other areas of the City. Costs for the water feature will somewhat of a wildcard and will be subject to an engineer's estimate and the actual bids received.

During the trip to Israel, Mr. Lambers shared that the Gezer Regional Council expressed desire to see something acknowledging each of the 23 communities in Kibbutz and Moshav of the Gezer Region. The current scope of the project does not include this element and will have to occur in some other fashion, such as through private fundraising.

Councilmember Bussing questioned how the project costs went from an estimated figure of \$750,000 in the CIP to an approved \$1.1-million budget. Mayor Dunn corrected that the budget is conceptual and has not yet been approved. It was probably a mistake to use the estimated figure gleaned from costs for I-Lan Park as this project was done years ago and is on a lower scale than Gezer Park.

Councilmember Bussing stated the appropriate process should have been to determine a budget and then develop a plan within the set limit. He expressed doubt that the proposed plan could be achieved for under \$2-million. There is a history of this type of budget-creep activity, which raises concerns about the estimated costs of other projects such as the Justice Center and Community Center. Mayor Dunn reminded the CIP is evaluated on an annual basis in order to review information as it becomes known.

Councilmember Rasmussen clarified that the \$1.1-million figure does not include funds for the public art. Payment for “The Ladder” is to come out of the Public Art Fund. While the second potential piece of art is yet to be funded, the project budget will not be utilized. Mayor Dunn added that the stone sculpture of the Gezer calendar is being gifted by our sister city.

Mr. Reynolds concluded the PowerPoint presentation by reviewing designs of the playground, sand volleyball court, sculpted landforms, and plants/materials to be used. He estimated the cost of a proposed water feature as \$200,000.

Councilmember Filla confirmed with Councilmember Rasmussen and Mayor Dunn that “The Ladder” sculpture was approved at \$100,000.

Mr. Reynolds informed the \$1.1-million preliminary budget was created in the fall of 2005 based upon the drawings, which contain many variables. During the past 18 months, the bidding environment has been very aggressive with the cost of copper increasing four times. The breakdown of costs needs verification at this time. He also stated the scope of work could be matched to available funding. At this time, costs are projected as:

- \$120,000 – parking (\$25,000 per space)
- 60,000 - grading
- 15,000 – seeding
- 50,000 - plant material
- 10,000 – walkways
- 120,000 – restrooms
- 90,000 – shelters
- 90,000 – stone wall
- 40,000 – play area
- 24,000 – utilities
- 90,000 – pond liner (if needed)
- 20,000 – pond well
- 30,000 – lighting
- 20,000 – signage
- 30,000 – furniture
- 100,000 – water feature equipment
- 100,000 – water feature pool
- 50,000 – dry screen bed

The original estimated total of \$789,000 increases to \$1.1-million with added contingencies.

Ms. Claxton noted that irrigation costs are not included in the budget. She informed Mayor Dunn that Leawood City Park is irrigated, Ironwoods Park has some around the peripheral buildings, and I-Lan Park has none.

Councilmember Azeltine stated agreement with Councilmember Bussing's fiscal concerns and reminded that changes can still be made as the CIP is not yet approved. In terms of practicality, he questioned the kid-friendliness of the play area as Mission Trail Elementary School is directly across the street from the park. Mr. Reynolds stated the play area will be a terrific opportunity for neighborhood children and schoolchildren to learn about the Gezer Region. The play area can be designed to any intensity level desired but currently contains features seen in any typical playground such as slides, explorative passages, and climbing features. The equipment will be constructed with stone, however, rather than brightly colored steel. Ms. Claxton added the play structures are somewhat less traditional but are interactive.

Noting the sloped landscapes, Councilmember Azeltine verified with Mr. Reynolds there is an open, flat area between the parking lot and play area that can be utilized for activities such as football or Frisbee.

Mayor Dunn and Councilmember Rasmussen discussed the concept of utilizing a modular budget in which certain items may be omitted if costs exceed the \$1.1-million.

Councilmember Peppes agreed that consensus on a fixed budget amount should be obtained this evening. Stating concern for residents of the abutting Waterford Homes Association, who were in agreement to a passive park, he asked if the neighbors were aware of the planned play area, parking lots, and trails. He reminded how volatile this area was during approval of the Price Chopper project.

Mayor Dunn stated an Interact meeting should take place.

Councilmember Gulledge also agreed that a dollar amount should be decided upon. If the project exceeds the amount, a substantial amount of money could be raised through private funding in order to complete the project as envisioned. Mayor Dunn stated she does not want to commit the Leawood Foundation; however, reported they are completing fundraising efforts for the art piece to honor teachers at Ironwoods Park. She noted the group has honed their fundraising skills and are very enthusiastic about projects they support. Another opportunity for collaboration with the City has been mentioned to the Chair of the Leawood Foundation.

Councilmember Azeltine concurred there is great fundraising capabilities. In terms of using a modular budget, he stated incremental improvements should be planned in such a way that it does not look like a half-finished park. Mayor Dunn stated they have experienced this type of situation with the amphitheater at Ironwoods Park.

Councilmember Gulledge suggested including members of the Jewish Federation of Greater Kansas City as part of the design process in order to identify available funding assistance.

Ms. Claxton informed Councilmember Filla that yearly maintenance costs have not yet been determined; however, the standard estimate is 10%. This figure will increase in conjunction with added features. Mr. Reynolds stated the typical water feature maintenance cycle of chemicals and filters will be avoided. There has also been discussion of using large swaths of no-mow grass, similar to what is seen in the roughs at golf courses, in order to reduce maintenance.

It terms of design features, Councilmember Rasmussen reminded it is intended for the shelters to resemble *succahs*, which are huts used by particular faiths for celebratory meals. Interested organizations may be willing to finance the design of these amenities.

Regarding a timeline, Mayor Dunn stated it is anticipated that delegates from both sister cities may visit in 2008 as it will be Leawood's 60th Anniversary. It would be optimal to have a majority of the park completed in 2008 for members of the Gezer Region to view. The design would have to take place in 2007 with implementation occurring in 2008.

As Council Liaison to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, Councilmember Peppes recalled that the initial plug figure for the project was based upon the 1998 construction of I-Lan Park. The current \$1.1-million estimate is comparable to the 1998 project costs. He stated agreement with the \$1.1-million budget and phasing if necessary.

Councilmember Rasmussen voiced favor with placing the proposed budget in the 2007 CIP in order to begin the design and bidding process. Construction should begin in 2008.

Councilmember Rawlings echoed Councilmember Rasmussen's comments.

Councilmember Bussing opposed the \$1.1-million budget for previously stated reasons.

Councilmember Azeltine stated agreement with the budget.

Councilmember Gulledge concurred with the majority of the Governing Body and reiterated his desire to involve members of the Jewish Federation in the design process. Mayor Dunn verified with Mr. Lambers that Todd Stettner and Marvin Szneler have seen the conceptual plans, but the subject of donating private dollars has not been addressed. She suggested waiting until bidding figures are known before seeking ways to augment funding.

Although saddened that the City was not able to obtain 16-acres of parkland at the old Leawood Country Club site, Councilmember Filla agreed with the \$1.1-million budget to develop the park. Mayor Dunn reminded that developers for the north Leawood site have agreed to privately maintain 9-acres of parkland for public use.

Mr. Lambers recommended against an Interact meeting because zoning is already in place. Normal procedures will be followed regarding site plans approvals. A pseudo-Interact meeting could take place before the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board as soon as possible. Based upon meeting results, the project can either proceed as planned or a subsequent public hearing before the Governing Body can be scheduled if necessary.

Councilmember Azeltine verified with Mr. Lambers that Interact meetings are not required unless there is a rezoning issue.

Regarding the suggestion of representing the 23 regions of Kibbutz and Moshav in the Gezer Region, Mayor Dunn cautioned against committing to an increased number of features within the park. Too many features would make the important task of park maintenance difficult and would also take away from the serene beauty of the green space.

Councilmember Rawlings agreed with Councilmember Gulledge's point in that there are untapped resources for private donations. He asked when the best time would be to involve possible contributors in the project. Councilmember Rasmussen informed there is a Gezer Park subcommittee chaired by Councilmember Gulledge. The members of this group have numerous contacts throughout the area. It would behoove the City to call a meeting with the subcommittee in order to gain their input regarding this issue. Mayor Dunn added that involvement with the Jewish Federation of Greater Kansas City could take place at this level.

Councilmember Gulledge suggested that he, Councilmember Rasmussen, and Mayor Dunn present the concept of collaborative funding to Mr. Stettner and Mr. Szneler prior to a subcommittee meeting. To Councilmember Rawlings' question, he stated the private sector should be involved in the project from the start.

As the designer, Mr. Reynolds offered to attend any meetings necessary in order to provide technical/cost information. Councilmember Azeltine stated specific ideas of how we want the outside party to engage should be presented (e.g. shelters).

Mayor Dunn stated the Jewish Federation is continuously involved in fundraising efforts and noted they are responsible for Leawood's relationship with the Gezer Region. Noting consensus for the \$1.1-million park budget, Mayor Dunn commented the project will need no further explanation during the CIP meeting next week. She also expressed appreciation for Councilmember Bussing's concerns.

Councilmember Rasmussen requested that Staff provide a proposed timetable for the project at the CIP meeting.

Ms. Claxton stated she will review the budget to ensure that all engineering fees are included.

As the City's 60th Anniversary will take place in November, 2008, Councilmember Rawlings suggested setting the project timeline to this event. Mr. Lambers stated visitation to the park would not be desirable past October.

Mr. Lambers recalled that I-Lan Park was delayed by six months due to the placement of utilities. Ms. Claxton stated Brian Anderson, Superintendent of Parks, has done preliminary work on utilities needed at Gezer Park. There is a water main, natural gas line, and 8-10" sanitary line, but there are no nearby transformers for electric power.

There being no further business, Mayor Dunn adjourned the Work Session at 7:20 P.M.

Christy Wise, Recording Deputy City Clerk