

March 4, 2013

The Chehalis city council met in a special work session on Monday, March 4, 2013, in the Chehalis city hall. Mayor Ketchum called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. with the following council members present: Terry Harris, Dr. Isaac Pope, Bob Spahr, Daryl Lund, Chad Taylor, and Dennis Dawes. Staff present included Merlin MacReynold, City Manager; Judy Schave, City Clerk; Glenn Schaffer, Police Chief; Dennis Osborn, Community Development Director; and Herta Fairbanks, Public Works Director. Members of the media included Kyle Spurr from *The Chronicle*.

1. **Work Session.** The Chehalis City Council held a special work session to discuss needed repairs to the Chamber Way Bridge over Interstate 5.

City Manager MacReynold reported he attended a sounding board meeting last week, which included a briefing from Bart Gernhart, Assistant Regional Administrator of Engineering for Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT) on the recent damage to the Chamber Way Bridge. He indicated they were running a very tight timeline on repairing the bridge; however, there weren't too many good options at this time. City Manager MacReynold suggested DOT's main concern was to get the word out and have a larger community meeting at a later date to go over the options for repairing the bridge.

Mr. Gernhart gave a brief history, noting the most significant damage occurred last fall when the bridge was struck by a log truck. He reported the bridge had been repaired a couple of times over the last few years, but the existing steel was damaged so badly they can no longer tie it together to keep it functioning as it was originally designed.

Mr. Gernhart stated DOT was researching options on how to repair the outside girder and keep traffic flowing at the same time. He noted the repair work would likely begin at the end of August or early September, and would take between one and two months to complete. Mr. Gernhart stated they would do all they can to minimize that time.

Councilor Pope asked if DOT would consider opening up Louisiana Avenue during the repair work. He stated if they are only going to allow one lane of traffic to cross the bridge he suggested that it flow into the Twin City Town Center. Mr. Gernhart stated it was pretty much unanimous by the sounding board group to keep traffic flowing in that direction. He noted there were a lot of complications around opening up Louisiana Avenue, adding this summer they plan to raise Airport Road for the new Mellen Street Bridge Interchange. Mr. Gernhart suggested if they were to open up Louisiana Avenue, it would delay that project a full year.

Mr. Gernhart reported, in order to minimize the duration of the closure, they would not start the repairs until the contractor has all of their ducks in a row. He thought they might be ready to go out to bid in April or May.

Mr. Gernhart talked briefly about one of the options he shared at the sounding board meeting, which was to cut off a portion of the sidewalk on the north side of the overpass and use that space as part of a lane. He felt they may be able to get a 10-foot lane in each direction, which is adequate to handle two-way traffic at 25 miles per hour. Mr. Gernhart suggested it might mess up the flow at the intersections, but at least they would have two lanes of traffic and enough room for a contractor to do the work. He stated they would be reviewing the concepts over the next week or two, and if anytime during that period they find that none of the options are viable, he would contact City Manager MacReynold and be back before the council to figure out a new game plan.

Councilor Harris asked if this was an emergency situation, and if so, can they hire a contractor without going through the bid process. Mr. Gernhart stated it was an emergency, but they still have to go through the competitive bid process.

Councilor Harris asked if the girder would be replaced all the way to the center support. Mr. Gernhart reported the girder would be replaced over half of the length of the bridge.

Councilor Dawes wondered why it was an emergency now if the damage happened last fall. He stated he could see the project dragging right into the shopping season, while some of the merchants just now started to recover from when the recession hit.

Mr. Gernhart stated it would have been nice to have had money from the insurance company to start the design earlier, but they weren't there yet. He noted they didn't realize the impact that would occur because of the fix, but still felt they could

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get the work done before the next Christmas shopping season.

Councilor Spahr asked if the redesign of the Chamber Way Bridge had been done yet. Mr. Gernhart stated no.

Mr. Gernhart reported the question has come up about building a new bridge; however, a project such as that was pretty substantial, costing between \$50 and \$60 million. He noted the current bridge was too low and didn't meet today's standards for height and only included four lanes. Mr. Gernhart stated in order to get six lanes and wider shoulders they would need to widen the span, making the girders a lot deeper. He noted by the time they touch back down they would be past the current ramps, and perhaps even past State Street and Louisiana Avenue.

City Manager MacReynold asked, "If funding was made available, could the project be done as a permanent fix and be added to the backend of the Mellen Street Project." Mr. Gernhart stated typically once they get funding they have to go through the public process and finalize what needs to be done. He noted it would take at least two years to fully agree on what the solution would be and to start the permitting and NEPA process. Mr. Gernhart stated they would be lucky to begin the project in five years, and that was only if everything goes smoothly.

Mayor Ketchum suggested they might look at putting up a temporary bridge. Mr. Gernhart reported their temporary bridge was currently being used in Klickitat County, to go over the Klickitat River. He noted DOT has way more needs than money.

Mr. Gernhart reported he was cautiously optimistic that they will be able to put something together to keep both lanes open during the repair work; otherwise, he will be coming back to the council to discuss what the next steps would be.

Councilor Dawes asked if the project was weather specific. Mr. Gernhart reported it could be done in the winter; however, the work would go slower and the duration would be longer.

Councilor Dawes stated, unfortunately, for the retail world Christmas starts in September. He felt it would be better to do the work during a slower time of the year.

Mr. Gernhart stated DOT would be willing to wait a little bit, but they weren't going to wait two years because of the risk. He noted the feedback they receive from the city and the business community would be critical in the decision making process.

Councilor Spahr thought the work being proposed was a pretty permanent fix and should last for a few years. Mr. Gernhart stated the fix should make it last as long and the rest of the bridge, unless someone with an even bigger load comes through and hits it again. He noted DOT was working with the truck driver's insurance company, who is on the hook to fund the project.

Councilor Harris asked if there was a guarantee that the project would be done in a short period of time. Mr. Gernhart stated there were no guarantees, except there would be a clause in the contract that there will be a penalty if they go too long.

City Manager MacReynold asked that DOT include city staff when they get to the reality phase, so they can help work through some of the issues if they have to run alternative routes. Mr. Gernhart stated that was pretty standard; however, with it being a shorter contract they don't have as much time to remember to contact everybody.

Mr. Gernhart stated, depending on the option selected, they may have to restrict certain size trucks from crossing over the bridge. He stated once they know for sure, they will figure out a game plan to communicate with the business community.

There being no further business to come before the council, the meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.

Mayor

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Attest:

City Clerk

SUGGESTED MOTION

I move that the council approve the minutes of the special council work session of March 4, 2013.