



City of Blaine Anoka County, Minnesota

Blaine City Hall
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Legislation Text

File #: WS 18-37, Version: 2

WORKSHOP ITEM *Robert Therres, Public Services Manager/Asst. City Manger*

DISCUSSION ON BLAINE WETLAND SANCTUARY WETLAND RESTORATION

Councilmembers Jeppson and Clark have requested discussion on how to move the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) project forward. Below is a summary of the history of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary:

Blaine Wetland Sanctuary - 500 acres

Chronology of the Site

- In the late 1980s the vision for the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) being a wetland classroom was started because of land donated (in exchange for park fees) to the City.
- Open Space Committee was created in the 1990s to begin an open space and trail plan:
 - The Committee had a Natural Resource Inventory completed in 1999 for the entire City, a Trail Corridor Study, and survey to determine citywide support.
 - Based on the results of the survey, the City Council put a \$3.5 Million Bond Referendum to vote in November 2000.
 - On May 17, 2001 through Resolution 01-88, the Natural Resource Conservation Board (NRCB) was appointed by City Council to begin work on deciding which properties to recommend to the City Council to be preserved for open space and trails.
- The first purchase with the Bond Fund by the City was in 2003. The purchase was for the 62 acre wetland and 8 acre oak forest in The Lakes development. This purchase added to the existing 435 wetland acres the City already owned.
- Research work began at the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary in 2006 by Critical Connections Ecological Services (CCES) to establish restoration monitoring plots within the northern section, referred to as Site 7 and Branch 3 in the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary.
- The research work continued in 2007 and staff along with CCES began discussing the viability of creating a wetland bank in the area.
- December 18, 2008, EDA Resolution 08-21, the City and Rice Creek Watershed District entered into a Joint Powers Agreement to study Branch 3 to determine if it was eligible

for a wetland bank.

- In 2009, 9.2 acres off Lexington Avenue was purchased for a future public access point to the 500 acres.
- November 18, 2010 EDA adopted Resolution 10-15 to hire CCES to initiate the wetland bank permitting process for Branch 3 (the first wetland banking site.)
- Restoration activities began for the Branch 3 wetland bank from January - March 2010. Restoration work entailed winter tree/shrub removal, mowing, dethatching and treating invasive species.
- Five years of maintenance was required to establish the EDA wetland bank along with annual reporting to the regulatory agencies. This area will require continuous maintenance to keep invasive species out, but has generated 55 acres of wetland credits for the EDA to sell.
- On March 20, 2014, the City Council awarded a contract to Stantec Consulting Services, Inc. to develop a detailed conceptual plan of improvements (trails and other amenities) for the large, 500 acre open space west of Lexington and north of 109th Avenue.
- On March 20, 2014, the City Council awarded a contract to Critical Connections Ecological Services to complete the Wetland Banking Project for Site 7 (the second wetland banking site) also known as the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (Improvement Project No. 14-10).
- May-June 2014 City Newsletter provided information about the plans for the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary.
- The first sale of wetland credits for Branch 3 was made on September 4, 2014.
- On December 4, 2014, the City Council approved entering into a contract with Stantec Consulting Services, Inc. to complete final design of the first phase of the open space improvements for the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (Improvement Project No. 14-09).
- In 2014, meetings were held with the Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) consisting of members from the Rice Creek Watershed District, Anoka Conservation District, Board of Water and Soil Resources, Department of Natural Resources and the Army Corps of Engineers to review the Wetland Bank Plan Scoping Document, which is the first step towards creating a wetland bank.
- Meetings with the TEP continued through 2014, 2015, and 2016.
- On April 30, 2015, a community meeting was held to gather input on the Concept plan for the 500 acres. Approximately 50 people attended and provided comments on the plan.
- May 7, 2016 Wetland Information Event held at East Lake Park with information about

the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary.

- The Wetland Bank Plan Full Application was submitted to the TEP on August 5, 2016 and a meeting was held on November 2, 2016 to discuss the next steps.
- The TEP gave verbal approval to move forward with the restoration work at their November 2, 2016 meeting.
- On December 15, 2016, Jim Hafner, Stormwater Manager presented an update to the City Council on the next steps for the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary. In this update, the Council was informed that restoration work would be starting in January 2017 and wetland credits would be available January 1, 2018 - 15% maximum total = 12 acres.
- December 15, 2016, EDA authorized a loan to the City's Blaine Open Space Fund to provide funding to get the BWS project off the ground.
- On approximately January 15, 2017 restoration activities began in the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary.
- January 19, 2017 several residents spoke during the Council Meeting Open Forum to share their concerns with the restoration activities at the BWS. Staff gave an update to the City Council on the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary and Council ceased any additional tree removal to allow for meetings with the neighborhood.
- February 2, 2017 one resident spoke about their concerns with the restoration activities during the Council Meeting Open Forum.
- February 8, 2017 neighborhood meeting was held with property owners adjacent to the BWS to discuss the history and plans for the BWS.
- March 16, 2017 the City Council discussed the BWS at their Workshop.
- March 29, 2017 a second neighborhood meeting was held with property owners adjacent to the BWS to provide information about wetland banking and the goal of the project as well as create a buffer and review landscaping plans for the maintenance access.
- March 29, 2017 during City Council Workshop the status of the BWS was discussed.
- April 6, 2017, the City Council formally created the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Neighborhood Committee.
- April 19, 2017, the first meeting was held with the BWS Neighborhood Committee to address the maintenance access and landscaping planting options.
- May 10, 2017 the second meeting was held with the BWS Neighborhood Committee to review maintenance access options, landscape planting options and future trails.
- June 8, 2017 staff gave City Council a BWS update and Council gave consensus to support a budget of \$100,000 for a landscaping plan and additional information be provided on trail buffer setbacks.

- August 21, 2017 staff met with BWS Committee at East Lake Park, walked the trails, and discussed options for landscaping.
- October 19, 2017 City Council consensus was to propose tree plantings on private property to avoid losing wetland credits, with reimbursement up to \$50,000.
- January 10, 2018 Staff sent out an email to the BWS Neighborhood Committee requesting feedback on a reimbursement program for the purchase of trees to be planted on private property.
- February 8, 2018 City Council discussed the reimbursement program for landscaping on private property, the need to not lose wetland credits, and need to install a gate and fence at the maintenance access area.
- February 9, 2018 Staff had a discussion with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources regarding the implications of the City adding landscaping along the buffer of the wetland bank. Staff was informed that this would be a significant revision to the existing plan and would require the City to amend their existing plan. This could result in the loss of wetland credits due to changes in the rules and regulations at both the State and Federal level for this type of wetland bank - Exceptional Natural Resource Value (ENRV). Staff was strongly discouraged from changing anything in the plan.
- March 1, 2018 City Council discussed the need to let adjacent residents know that the remainder of the trees in the original plan would be cut next winter. This is required by the permitting agencies in order for the City to receive wetland credits that were part of the original wetland banking application.
- March 6, 2018 an email was sent to the resident list explaining the restoration work to be accomplished in March and that there would be a fall meeting to discuss the removal of the remaining trees that were to be removed in the original plan.
- Restoration activities resumed mid March through early April 2018 to finish mowing and raking.
- Trees to be removed in the winter of 2018/2019 when the ground is frozen (see map).
- Annual on-going maintenance activities will occur at this site. Those activities will include monitoring, herbicide treatments, prescribed burns, native vegetation re-establishment if needed, and mowing.
- In summary, the BWS has been a multi-year project that was included on many Council Workshop and Council Meeting agendas, many Natural Resource Conservation Board agendas, several City newsletter and Star Tribune articles, open houses at City Hall and one at East Side Park, and BWS information on the City's website.

Cost Information

- EDA spent approximately \$600,000 over five years on the first wetland banking site (Branch 3) - 103 acre site - 55 acres available for wetland credit sale.
- EDA has sold approximately \$2.35 million in wetland credits - price of credits has ranged from \$1.80-\$2.00 sq. ft. (exception sale to the State of MN was at \$1.25 sq. ft.).
- City will spend approximately \$1.4 million on Site 7 restoration over five years (the second wetland banking site - BWS) - 171.53 acre site - potential of 81 acres eligible for credit if the site restoration is complete according to the original application and accepted by the governing regulatory agencies.
- Credits sold in the range of \$2.00/sq. ft. could be worth approximately \$7,000,000.
- The cost of an ornamental black steel fence with a matching 12 foot sliding steel gate for the maintenance access area will be provided at the Workshop.

Environmental Programming

- Programming is being planned for all age groups.
- Low cost opportunities are being programmed through Park and Rec.
- Programs are well received by the residents with additional environmental programming requests coming in.
- Eight environmental programs offered for Spring and Summer of 2018 at the BWS have 82 registrations as of May 3rd.
- Year round Park and Rec programming scheduled for the BWS include snowshoeing, winter walks, walking storybook and more.

Working Partnerships That Have Already Been Developed

- Anoka Ramsey Community College
- Board of Water and Soil Resources
- University of Minnesota
- St. Cloud State University
- Department of Natural Resources
- Anoka Conservation District
- Spring Lake Park School District
- Wargo Nature Center
- Growing Green Hearts

- Rice Creek Watershed District
- Boy & Girl Scout troops
- Church groups