City of Minneapolis

Request for Committee Action

To: Transportation & Public Works
Date: 9/13/2016
Referral: N/A
From: Public Works Department
Prepared by: Katrina Kessler, Director, Surface Water & Sewers (SWS)
Presented by: Katrina Kessler, Director, SWS
File type: Receive & File
Subcategory: Report

Subject:
Greening the public right-of-way

Description:
Receiving and filing the summary of existing work related to greening the public right-of-way and recommended approaches to further clarify and strengthen related efforts.

Previous Actions:
16-00670 May 17, 2016 - T&PW staff direction: Staff is directed to return to the Transportation & Public Works Committee by the end of 2016 and by the end of the second quarter of 2017 after engaging with stakeholders to report on the implementation of the Complete Streets Policy, including updates on:

- multimodal measurement tools; and
- traffic signal policies and practices; and
- curbside use policy; and
- by August 31, 2016 with recommended approaches to developing greening plans or policies for the City of Minneapolis

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Ward/Address:
Not Applicable

Background/Analysis:
During the May 17, 2016, Transportation & Public Works Committee Meeting that included the adoption of the Complete Streets Policy, Council directed staff to return to the committee to report on implementation of the policy including, among other topics, consideration of greening. Specifically staff was asked to return with recommended approaches to developing greening plans or policies.

To develop a response, a team was formed with representation from Public Works Transportation Planning & Programming, Transportation Maintenance & Repair, Surface Water & Sewers, CPED Long Range Planning and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Forestry Division. The team also consulted with the Sustainability Office and with external partners such as the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) and the Downtown Improvement District (DID) and Downtown Council. Key findings are summarized below.

Definitions are important
With respect to streets, boulevards and public spaces “green” can mean a number of things. For the purposes of planning and engineering public right-of-ways, the group suggests that greening

be defined as: incorporation of trees or other vegetation designed to enhance the public realm, or integration of green infrastructure to maximize stormwater storage or treatment where data show these elements will mitigate flooding and/or improve water quality.

The City has a strong foundation

The City, together with its partners, has a strong history of prioritizing green streetscapes including but are not limited to: 2007 Local Surface Water Management Plan, 2009 Minneapolis Comp Plan for Sustainable Growth, 2009 Access Minneapolis, 2016 Complete Streets Policy, 2016 Draft Public Realm Guidelines, City of Minneapolis Urban Forestry Policy, Specifications for Construction of Public Infrastructure, Chapter 54 Stormwater Management Ordinance, and complementary local area plans like the Downtown 2025 Plan. These along with other policies, plans and ordinances provide strategic and day-to-day direction.

There are gaps in knowledge

The City needs more data about potential water quality benefits to fully achieve the goals and objectives spelled out in the Comp Plan, the Complete Streets Policy, and to effectively implement the stormwater practices recommended in the Draft Public Realm Guidelines. While research is underway here and around the country, we lack the data necessary to determine what/where green infrastructure will add the most water quality value. To effectively invest public resources in a given location the City is pursuing two avenues of investigation. A City-wide hydrologic model is being developed to better understand and prioritize stormwater capacity challenges and flood mitigation needs. At the same time, work has begun on a water quality model to identify areas of the City with the most potential to contribute to surface water improvements using specific infrastructure choices.

Recommended approaches

While we fill the data gaps it is recommended that we continue to follow the Urban Forestry Policy, Specifications for Construction of Public Infrastructure, and Stormwater Management Ordinance and prioritize protection and propagation of the urban tree canopy as part of public and private development. Ultimately it is our intent to utilize the stormwater capacity and the water quality models to thoughtfully select appropriate infrastructure that will yield the most value in terms of water quality improvements and/or flood mitigation. Both models are expected to be available by the end of 2017.

Long term funding considerations

It is important to recognize that an increase in green infrastructure, at or below grade comes with increased costs for construction and especially for maintenance. Above grade practices such as rain gardens and infiltration basins are maintenance intensive. Long term considerations need to include the cost and benefits of maintaining functional green infrastructure. With regards to maintenance it is recommended that the City explore additional opportunities to partner with organizations like MWMO, DID, neighborhood associations or property associations for trash pickup, mowing, or general maintenance to lower the City's costs, promote local ownership, and raise awareness about the connection between land use choices and the quality of our surface waters.

Attachments:

Greening the Public Right of Way presentation.

Financial Review:

No financial impact.