

## Coeur d'Alene City Council – draft minutes

For: Feb. 17 council meeting

### **Subject: Tree cut on Dike Road**

City Administrator Jim Hammond apologized to the community for the lack of communication regarding the tree removals along the levee. He clarified that the results might not have been different with regard to tree removal; however, the City should have provided communication to the community and stakeholder groups and will do a better job in the future.

Laura Winters, Senior Project Engineer with Ruen Yeager & Associates, presented information regarding the history and process of flood works analysis and certification. She stated that the process included recommended improvements being submitted to FEMA that, once accepted, were implemented. Some recommended improvements were a closure by Harbor Center, construction of a flood wall by North Idaho Museum, and erosion and slope repairs. Once improvements are made a letter of map revision (LOMR) is submitted to FEMA with documentation and is considered the certification of the levee. Once FEMA accepts the LOMR it provides the accreditation of the levee. Ms. Winters also provided the timeline for certification and accreditation that will run through 2017. Councilmember McEvers asked if Ruen Yeager has done this type of certification before. Ms. Winters stated that they had not. Councilmember McEvers asked what would happen if the City ignored the project and just left the levee alone. Ms. Winters stated that if the City abandoned the project it would lose accreditation and it would be federally required that the properties protected by the levee have mandatory flood insurance, which can be pricey. Additionally, FEMA would be more reluctant to provide aid if there was a breach of the levee if it were unaccredited. Councilmember Gookin asked questions related to the number of trees and how it was determined which trees remained. Ms. Winters explained that Ruen Yeager provided the recommendation of which trees should be removed that was based on three categories; tree health, slope restoration, and breach of the levee. She clarified that the original assessments identified a numbers of trees be removed, and that more needed to be removed as part of the slope restoration efforts.

Mayor Widmyer asked about the size of the 1,100 trees inventoried at the start of the project. Ms. Winters stated that original tree inventory included some trees outside the zone of concern and some had a 2 inch diameter. Councilmember Gookin asked if the contract included recommendations for ongoing maintenance. Ms. Winters confirmed that there is a maintenance plan and that there should be an on going yearly assessment of the trees along the levee as part of the certification.

Councilmember Gookin asked for clarification as to when and why the ad hoc committee for the project was dissolved before the process was complete. City Engineer Gordon Dobler said that his understanding was that the committee had fulfilled their mission and dissolved under the prior City Administrator's guidance. Councilmember Miller asked if the LOMR recommendations are automatically accepted or will FEMA negotiate the recommendations. Ms. Winters stated that the LOMR will be about a 1,000 page document and will identify all of the technical conditions to certify the levee, many of which are spelled out in the Federal Code and other technical criteria. She explained that this process has evolved since the Army Corps is no longer providing the certification, and there will be an iterative process of answers and questions and/or providing clarifications and additional modeling. 3

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Mayor Widmyer stated that in the beginning the Army Corp said that all the trees and vegetation needed to go, and the City negotiated to keep trees. The arborist from Ruen Yeager found 300 or so

trees had health issues and needed to go. The community believed the City saved 700 trees without considering the two other elements; slope restoration and breach of the levee. This led to false hope and the City celebrated too soon. Ms. Winters felt the community was excited to not have to remove all of the trees; however, the geotechnical analysis was not complete at the announcement of the 350 tree removal number. Mayor Widmyer asked if there were any trees removed that should not have been. Ms. Winters stated that, in her opinion, there were not. Councilmember McEvers stated that he remembers that the options early on included the installation of a wall around the beach and that the Army Corp was not willing to negotiate the retainage of any trees. Mr. Dobler explained that a cutoff wall would have made it so that the levee was no longer needed but would have been a very expensive fix. Councilmember Miller asked if there was a possibility that FEMA would require additional tree removal. Mr. Dobler said it was possible, but he did not think it would happen. The top of the levee is private property and that property owner could remove trees if they wanted outside of the City's approval process, but that would not affect the accreditation. Councilmember Edinger asked about city ownership of the property. Mr. Dobler explained that the property is only city right-of-way with a maintenance easement. Councilmember Edinger asked what the saving was by having the Street Department conduct tree and stump removal. Mr. Dobler estimated the savings at approximately \$100,000 and explained that the City and NIC are partnering on the costs of the project.