



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

May 8, 2023 | 5:30 PM
Blaine City Hall
10801 Town Square Drive NE
Blaine, MN 55449

MINUTES

NOTICE OF WORKSHOP MEETING

In accordance with the provisions of Section 3.01 of the Blaine City Charter, a Council Workshop meeting is scheduled for the following purpose:

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 PM by Mayor Pro Tem Robertson followed by Roll Call.

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders (arrived at 6:34 PM) , Councilmember Tom Newland, Councilmember Jess Robertson, Councilmember Terra Fleming, Councilmember Chris Massoglia, Councilmember Leslie Larson

ABSENT: Councilmember Lori Saroya

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; City Planner Sheila Sellman; Safety Services Director/Police Chief Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; Deputy Finance Director Ali Bong; City Engineer Dan Schluender; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Administration Director Cassandra Tabor; Public Works Director Nick Fleischhacker; Community Outreach Coordinator Emily Douglas; Mental Health Coordinator Amanda Terwey; Officer Brian Wiens; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen

2. New Business

- 2.1. 2023-160** Assessment Review #1 - Hardships and Tax Exempt Parcels
Sponsors: Daniel Schluender, Director of Engineering

Director of Engineering Schluender stated staff reviewed Special Assessments at the council workshop in January 2023. The review provided for an initial city council discussion as well as information and background on the use of special assessments within the framework of the city's pavement management plan. At that meeting, staff was directed to research the possibility and financial impacts of removing tax-exempt properties from the assessment policy and if there are any existing programs available to provide assistance in cases of hardship. Staff reviewed what hardship(s) other communities have and all are similar to what Blaine currently

provides pursuant to state statutes. Instances where hardship deferrals may be granted include Senior Citizen, Total Disability, and Military deployment special assessment deferments. All are clearly defined in statutes and are all deferments, which state that the assessment is levied and payment is deferred. Payment is typically deferred until the sale of the property, at which time the full assessment and any accrued interest become due. Staff was unable to identify specific grants that were designed to aid in the offsetting assessments for individual properties. If any exist, they would be designed for the specifics of the individuals and not based on the properties. The next thing to be determined is what are the financial impacts of removing these parcels from a typical street reconstruction project as it relates to the assessment of the entire project. Staff commented further on how the removal of tax exempt properties and the deferral program would impact the city's assessment program.

Councilmember Newland asked if hardships were defined by state statute. Mr. Schluender reported this was the case, noting the hardships were outlined within the 429 process.

Councilmember Newland questioned if there was any discussion at the state level to redefine what a hardship was. Mr. Schluender stated he was not aware of any discussions.

Mayor Sanders stated the loss of almost \$1 million, if tax-exempt properties were removed from the assessment process would have to be covered by the city. Mr. Schluender reported the city would have to find a way to cover these expenses.

Councilmember Massoglia thanked staff for the information. He asked why the city can't pick certain types of tax-exempt properties. Mr. Schluender deferred this question to the city attorney. He reported it was his understanding the city assessed properties based on their zoning. Mr. Huss explained there are certain SEC and internal revenue service rules regarding the statutes. He stated for tax-exempt properties they must be handled all the same way in order to meet the uniform spread of assessments.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he could speak with the city attorney further regarding this matter. He asked if the city has to have a rebate program for the past 10 years. Mr. Huss reported there was no legal obligation to rebate or refund property owners.

Councilmember Robertson inquired if staff was seeking direction from the council this evening. Mr. Schluender stated staff was hoping to compile feedback in order to bring back recommendations at a future meeting.

Councilmember Robertson explained nobody likes assessing residents. She indicated she found value in what Councilmember Massoglia was trying to do, but in helping the tax-exempt properties, an additional burden would have to be taken on by other properties. She was of the opinion that the current policy was the most fair manner to assess property owners in the community.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he did not believe \$100,000 a year to cover the assessments for tax-exempt properties in Blaine was a huge burden.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she still did not support the city moving in this direction. She stated it would be one thing to exempt churches, but she anticipated schools would also have to be exempt from assessments which she did not support.

Councilmember Massoglia reported he would speak further with the city attorney regarding this matter in order to determine if there was a way to categorize the tax-exempt properties in the city for assessment purposes. He stated his original intention was to exempt places of worship and non-profits.

Mayor Sanders requested staff speak to the language provided to residents when it comes to how and when assessments are paid. Mr. Schluender described the communication process that is followed by staff regarding assessments and noted the payment options that were available to residents.

Councilmember Fleming asked if there was a payment for paying off an assessment early. Mr. Schluender indicated there was no penalty.

Ms. Wolfe reported staff could request the city attorney to provide a memo to the council regarding this topic within a future meeting packet.

2.2. 2023-175 Parking Ordinance Discussion

Sponsors: Sheila Sellman, City Planner

City Planner Sellman stated staff annually reviews the zoning code to identify areas for improvement. This process was established following substantial revisions to the zoning code in 2020 to ensure that the code remains current. Changes generally serve to address situations not covered by the code, improve clarity, and to modify code requirements to address issues brought up by the Council and Planning Commission. In addition, to the annual review, it was determined that a more thorough review of the Parking Ordinance should take place as some of the requirements were of concern with recent projects. Several other similar-sized community parking ordinances and Blaine's community needs were reviewed by staff. The proposed changes or additions to the parking requirements for certain uses were reviewed to bring the parking section inline with current development needs and with what other cities require for similar uses. Staff commented further on the draft parking ordinance and requested feedback from the council.

Councilmember Newland questioned if the proposed changes were based on national data or trends. Ms. Sellman explained staff reviewed parking requirements for cities that were similar in size and noted she also reviewed national journals.

Councilmember Newland asked if staff had discussed the proposed parking ordinance with any local business owners. Ms. Sellman reported she has not brought this forward to any local business owners, but did speak with a senior housing complex to better understand their trends.

Councilmember Newland inquired if this ordinance would impact the 105th Avenue Redevelopment Area. Ms. Sellman explained the 105th Avenue area would be exempt from these parking requirements. She noted the 105th area has their own parking regulations.

Councilmember Newland stated overall he agreed with the proposed changes within the parking ordinance. He believed it made sense to keep requirements fluid.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if the drive-thru requirements were enough. She discussed how traffic was backed up frequently at Chipotle, Starbuck's and Cane's on a routine basis. While she supported the vast majority of the language, she suggested the drive-thru language be further considered. Ms. Sellman stated it was hard to plan for every use. She reported some cities regulate drive-thrus through conditional use permits.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she would be interested in seeing how other cities regulate drive-thrus.

Councilmember Massoglia supported the drive-thru language being further reviewed as well.

Mayor Sanders thanked staff for their efforts to modernize the city's ordinances.

2.3. **2023-55** Police Department Community Outreach and Mental Health Program Updates

Sponsors: Brian Podany, Safety Services Manager/Police Chief

Safety Services Director/Police Chief Podany stated the police department community outreach coordinator, Emily Douglas, and the mental health coordinator, Amanda Terwey had a presentation for the council on their respective programs.

Community Outreach Coordinator Douglas explained she began working for the city in August of 2022. She reported she has been partnered with Community Outreach Officer Brian Weens and together they were working on the structure for the community outreach department. She reviewed the duties and focus areas for the program. She commented on the importance of crime prevention, community engagement and social media. The number of citizen inquiries and other statistics were reviewed with the council. She discussed how she would be involved with parks programs this summer.

Community Outreach Officer Brian Weens commented on the Arrive Alive program that was held at Centennial High School. He explained he was pursuing a community outreach trailer and indicated he was also interested in finding ways to engage with the public at USA Cup and the 3M Open. He described the crime free multi-housing program that he was working to put in place.

Mayor Sanders arrived at the meeting.

Councilmember Massoglia asked how success was being measured through the community outreach program. Ms. Douglas stated social media engagements were easy to measure. She noted having positive contacts with the public was a way to show value added to the community. She indicated she was working on how to measure the events that would be brought to underserved communities.

Councilmember Massoglia questioned if any events have been held at Northtown. Officer Weens stated they have not held any events at Northtown yet.

Councilmember Massoglia suggested future events be considered for the Northtown Mall

area because this was an area of concern for Blaine. He requested further information regarding the crime free multi-family housing program. Officer Weens explained this program had three components, which was assessing properties, meeting with property managers and helping to resolve tenant issues. Police Chief Podany commented on how there was a direct correlation between mismanaged properties and higher levels of crime.

Councilmember Newland asked if National Night Out would be a focus for this department. Ms. Douglas reported she has begun planning for this event, which would be held on Tuesday, August 1.

Mental Health Coordinator Terwey introduced herself to the council noting she was an licensed independent clinical social worker at the Blaine Police Department. She discussed her education and past work experience. She noted she has been full-time with the department since October of 2022. Her primary job duties included co-responding to calls for service around mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence or with the unsheltered population. She reported she works to connect people with services at the time of the call or after receiving a reference. She explained she found value in serving on a suicide prevention committee in the north metro. She commented further on the types of calls she responded to and how she offered support to the community. She stated in the past seven months she has had 382 referrals, 66 on scene assists and she has attended 19 outreach events. She believed these numbers were showing a great need in the community. Her goals would be to continue to identify populations in need, to reduce calls for service for law enforcement and to redirect. She stated she was proud by the work being done by the Blaine Police Department when it comes to addressing mental health in the community.

Councilmember Larson asked if Ms. Terwey responds to calls by herself. Ms. Terwey explained she was partnered with a police officer three days a week and if she was not with an officer she responds in her own vehicle. She reported she does not wear a bullet proof vest when she responds to calls, but had one available for her in the squad car, should it become necessary.

Councilmember Newland questioned how much staff training she provides to officers. Ms. Terwey stated two weeks ago she participated in scenario based training with the Blaine officers.

Councilmember Newland inquired if mental health calls were coming in at certain times of the day. Ms. Terwey reported she would like to have a full year of data before responding to this question. She noted she has done several night shifts with officers to see what types of calls they were responding to in the evening hours.

Police Chief Podany commented further on the mandated crisis intervention training his officers have to attend each year and noted his officers also attend special additional training.

Mayor Sanders thanked the department for the update on these two new programs.

This item was heard first in the agenda.

Communications Manager Hayle stated the city council and staff will be participating in a strategic planning retreat on May 19 and 20. As a part of preparing for the retreat, staff completed an environmental scan of the organization. An environmental scan is designed to learn about services currently provided by the organization, trends that each department is seeing, and challenges that the organization is facing now and in the future. Staff commented further on the environmental scan that was completed for the organization and noted each department head would be speaking to the council on this further.

City Planner Sellman reviewed the services provided by the community development department. She noted there was uncertainty in economic times, the housing market along with nymbiosm. The challenges her department was facing were managing the high work loads for building inspectors and the lack of land for prospective new development in Blaine. Another concern facing her department was misinformation on social media and the future vision for the city.

Safety Services Director/Police Chief Podany discussed the services provided by the police department, community standards department, the facilities department and the SBM Fire Department. He commented on the trends he was seeing within the police department, noting how policing was being done has changed. He explained specialized units were being created to meet the needs of the department and the value of deescalation techniques was noted. He commented further on how crime analysis was helping his department. The challenges with recruiting and retaining officers was discussed.

City Manager Wolfe reviewed the services provided by the parks and recreation department. She explained this department manages parks, programming for the community as well as at MAYC. She commented on the trends in the area noting pickleball was a fast growing sport and there was a growing need for trail connectivity in the community. The challenges facing the parks department was staff related along with the condition of the city's warming house facilities.

Administrative Services Director Tabor commented on the services provided by the administrative services department. She reviewed the trends she was seeing within her department, which were difficulty in hiring building officials and police officers, rising costs for employee benefits, moving from communication into a marketing feel, and how the growth in the community was impacting the city. The challenges facing her department included regulating legislative changes, recruitment, rising costs for benefit expenses, and public transparency. She explained she was working to embrace an internal brand for the city as well as a centralized model for Blaine.

Finance Director Huss reviewed the services provided by the finance department. He commented on the trends he was seeing within his department, which were increasing inflation and interest rates, supply chain disruptions, and declining reserves in utility funds. The challenges facing his department were cyber security, the highly competitive hiring environment, and maintaining council approved service levels. He commented further on the city's long range planning models that staff were working on.

Public Works Director Nick Fleischhacker discussed the services provided by the public works department, which involved street maintenance, water, sewer/storm and parks maintenance. He reviewed the trends he was seeing within his department, noting there was a push to become more sustainable, which was becoming possible through new technology. The challenges facing his department included aging infrastructure and deferred maintenance, staff numbers, and cyber security.

Director of Engineering Schluender reviewed the services provided by the engineering department. He discussed the trends he was seeing within his department and noted the challenges he was facing included increasing project costs and how this impacts assessments, the TMDL's, and change fatigue.

Mr. Hayle stated some of this information may feel repetitive, but he wanted to refresh the council of everything that was being done by staff prior to the strategic planning retreat.

Ms. Wolfe explained rather than doing this at the retreat, the information was provided at this meeting in order to get the council thinking about current trends and challenges facing the city. She thanked the council for allowing staff to walk through this information.

Mayor Pro Tem Robertson thanked staff for sharing this valuable information with the council.

Mr. Hayle reviewed several questions with the council and asked for feedback on trends the council was seeing.

Councilmember Newland stated specific to community development, he wondered how the city could deal with misinformation on social media. Ms. Sellman stated this was a good question that would have to be an ongoing dialogue between council and staff. Mr. Hayle added that continued diligence would have to be pursued by staff in order to address misinformation, while not engaging with the source of the misinformation. He was of the opinion the city wanted to get to the point where they were having more engagement with the community.

Councilmember Massoglia thanked Mr. Hayle for sharing his perspective. He stated people on social media make up a small percentage of the residents of Blaine and the majority of the residents were positive about the community. He then commented on the one trend that was facing each department which was hiring, and requested further information on the building inspector position. Ms. Sellman discussed the programs and licensing that were required for the city's building inspectors. Ms. Tabor commented on how the city works to bring non-traditional candidates into the city.

Mayor Pro Tem Robertson stated she believed the community development department was the most complex department in the city. She encouraged the new councilmembers to contact staff with any questions they have regarding development projects.

Mr. Hayle asked for comments regarding the trends facing safety services.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he was always impressed by the positive feedback he

receives when out in the community regarding the Blaine Police Department and its officers. He reported this makes him proud to be from Blaine and to support the police department. Mr. Podany thanked Councilmember Massoglia for his comments.

Councilmember Larson noted she attended the Coffee with a Cop while she was campaigning. She appreciated the fact that the Blaine Police Department was fully staffed, when this was not the case in many other local departments. She stated the officers that were at the Coffee with a Cop credited Police Chief Podany for creating a great working environment within the Blaine Police Department.

Councilmember Newland asked how morale and resiliency was being addressed by the department. Police Chief Podany stated the legislative actions were putting additional stressors or constraints on police officers and this was impacting morale.

Councilmember Newland requested further information on how the department and its officers felt about body worn cameras. Police Chief Podany reported his officers supported the use of cameras because they offered a layer of protection for officers. He commented further on the amount of time and money it took to maintain this technology.

Mayor Pro Tem Robertson reported Blaine's park and recreation programming was extremely robust. She appreciated all of the programming that was offered to Blaine seniors and thanked staff for their efforts to engage with the community.

Councilmember Newland questioned how the city was working to meet the growing demands for pickleball. Ms. Wolfe stated Jerome would be able to provide additional information. She noted as courts are being replaced, the city was considering if there was a demand for tennis or pickleball.

Councilmember Newland requested further information regarding LOGIS. Ms. Tabor provided the council with further information on LOGIS and how this group helps the city balance its costs.

Further discussion ensued regarding how the City's tax base was evolving as the city builds out.

Councilmember Massoglia requested the 2023 budget be placed on the city's website. Mr. Huss stated he would coordinate this with staff in order to get the budget posted on the website.

Councilmember Newland requested further information regarding the residential speed limit. Mr. Schluender explained the residential speed limit in Blaine was still 30 miles per hour, but noted there was a legislative change that allows cities to set their own speed limits. He reported some communities have opted to reduce their residential speed limits to 25 miles per hour. He stated at this time staff was not recommending a change due to enforcement concerns.

Mayor Pro Tem Robertson thanked staff for their reports and encouraged the council to provide staff with any other comments they may have regarding trends they were seeing in the community. Mr. Hayle requested each councilmember complete the SWAT analysis

worksheet and hand this into staff by the end of the week.

2.5. 2023-178 2023 Sod Replacement Project Update

Sponsors: Daniel Schluender, Director of Engineering

Mr. Schluender stated the sod replacement project has begun, starting on Jefferson Street the week of May 1. Staff is seeking guidance from Council on how to handle requests from property owners who did not register during the fall sign-up period to be added to the project. In the fall of 2022, letters were sent to 1,530 property owners on the 2019 through 2021 PMP projects. The letters allowed the property owners to report dead sod on the boulevard and sign up for a sod replacement program via phone, email, or the city website. Approximately 400 property owners signed up. The letter specifically stated the date that property owners must register by and that no late registrations would be accepted. However, staff is now getting calls from property owners wanting to sign up as they see the work beginning. It is anticipated that this could become a significant number of requests as the work progresses to more streets. For this reason, staff would like Council guidance on how these requests should be handled going forward. It was noted staff has already received 11 calls for additional sod. At this time, staff is recommending no additional add ons to the project.

Councilmember Newland stated he did not support any additional add ons. He reported the deadline has come and gone and these residents missed the deadline.

Councilmember Massoglia explained he did not support add ons either.

Council consensus was to not allow any additional properties into the sod replacement program.

3. Other Business

None.

4. Adjournment

The worksession meeting adjourned at 7:57PM.