



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

July 17, 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 5:30PM by Mayor Sanders followed by Roll Call.

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders, Councilmember Tom Newland, Councilmember Lori Saroya, Councilmember Jess Robertson, Councilmember Terra Fleming, Councilmember Chris Massoglia, Councilmember Leslie Larson

ABSENT: None.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Director of Engineering Dan Schluender; City Attorney Tom Loonan; Senior Park & Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; Deputy Fire Marshal Todd Miller; Police Captain Joe Gerhard; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen

2. New Business

2.1. 2023-293 114th Lane Closure Discussion

Sponsors: Erik Thorvig, Community Development Director, Daniel Schluender, Director of Engineering, Brian Podany, Safety Services Manager/Police Chief, Michelle Wolfe, City Manager

City Manager Wolfe provided the council with the history of the 114th Lane closure. She explained there have been concerns voiced by residents in both the Sanctuary Preserve as well as North Oaks Ponds East regarding the presence of the barrier and explained multiple staff members were involved in drafting this staff report and would have presentations for the council on this item.

Community Development Director Thorvig discussed the development history of the Sanctuary Preserve neighborhood. It was noted this subdivision has four different areas for

the 150 lots. He commented on how the development flex property developed over time from April 2015 through the end of 2016. He explained a connection was proposed at 114th Lane. However, with the final plat, the council added a condition that barricaded the road. He indicated the barricade was originally put in place to keep construction traffic out of the Sanctuary Preserve neighborhood. This barricade was to be reconsidered in 2018. He stated in December of 2018 the council held a public hearing, notice was sent, and the council voted to keep the street barricade in place and be considered for removal by the city council when the traffic control and development access changes on Lexington Avenue, or when commercial development occurs at the northwest corner of 109th and Lexington Avenue. He commented further on the properties located at the northwest corner of 109th and Lexington Avenue.

Director of Engineering Schluender commented on the considerations that must be made in order for a development to access a county road. He explained staff engaged with Anoka County in 2015/2016 regarding this development and the county reviewed their long term plans for Lexington Avenue, which were to have three lanes in each direction. With that, the county asked for the development to provide a right turn lane from southbound and also a northbound turn lane.

Ms. Wolfe commented on the response she received from Chief Podany regarding the onboarding and training his officers receive when navigating the city. She explained all officers have to study geography of the city. It was noted the CAD (computer aided dispatch) system used by the city's fire and police shows 114th Lane is not a through street. She indicated Allina uses a different CAD system, but their system also shows a barricade in the street. She commented on how opening the barricade may or may not impact response times. She discussed the accident that occurred on March 1, 2023 noting traffic would have still backed up even if the barricade was removed. She indicated she spoke with the school district regarding their bus routes and transportation and it appeared students were on buses 12 to 18 minutes longer because the barricade was in place.

Councilmember Larson requested the council consider the cost to the taxpayer if this barricade remains in place. She noted four buses run through this neighborhood that have to complete a three point turnaround and have 12 to 18 minutes added to their route because the barricade is in place. She commented further on how this barricade was directly impacting taxpayers for both extra busing expenses and snowplow expenses. She explained that the director of transportation recommended that buses never go backwards for safety purposes and four buses were doing this on a daily basis in this neighborhood. In addition, the city's fire trucks, squad cars and ambulances had to complete three point turns. She reviewed comments that were made by the city council in 2018 regarding the barrier and stated the barricade was never intended to remain in place indefinitely. She discussed how the resident closest to the barricade was being impacted by people walking through his yard to get around the barricade. She noted a sidewalk was proposed along 114th Lane which would take residents to the nature area boardwalk. She questioned why a child on the other side of the Sanctuary Preserve should have to go around a barricade, take Lexington to 114th to use the new entrance. She did not believe this was a safety risk residents should have to take. She indicated this same issue was raised in Ward 1 near 99th and Councilmember Robertson was not in favor of closing the road and encouraged the council to follow this same precedence. She commented on the Crown Woods development and stated there would be a road that connected The Lakes development to Lexington

Avenue. She recommended the council use the same discretion with the 114th barricade that was used with The Lakes barricade which was always intended to be removed. She noted the 114th barricade was only intended to be in place for two years. She supported the council restoring public trust and recommended the safety of all Blaine residents be considered and suggested the barricade at 114th Lane be removed.

Councilmember Fleming thanked the residents that have emailed her and the rest of the council regarding this controversial subject. She understood there were emotions on both sides of this issue and she understood both sides. She explained she would be approaching this issue from a non-biased and practical viewpoint based on safety, precedence, and what is in the best interest of the city as a whole. She reported she has met with the city engineer on two occasions and has read every email she has received. She noted she spoke with resident Adam Bo whose house was at the barricade. She stated she drove the roadway from both neighborhoods. She indicated her first concern was that the barricade was originally erected for two years and was to be reconsidered. She stated there were two options for the council to consider in 2018 and the council opted to go in another direction. She did not understand why council moved away from staff's recommendation. She explained in December 2018, staff strongly recommended the street be opened in order to connect the community, provide efficient street maintenance, public safety response, bus routing of schools, etc. She reported staff were the experts when it comes to this and the council opted not to follow staff's recommendation. Based on this information, she would support removing the barricade. She then read statements from James Foreman (trainer for school bus drivers), Walter's Recycling and Refuse, and Waste Management noting each were concerned with having to complete three point turns and supported the removal of the barricade for safety purposes. She provided further comment on her conversation with Adam Bo regarding the number of vehicles that have to back up onto his street such as delivery trucks, garbage trucks and emergency vehicles. She recommended the council not ignore the safety policies and procedures that should be followed by those that serve and protect the community.

Councilmember Newland indicated there were two conditions referenced in the resolution when it was approved in 2018. He asked if any proposal had come forward to the city. Mr. Thorvig stated the only proposal that had come forward for this site was three years ago for an apartment building but the project was moved to another site.

Councilmember Newland explained the other criteria had to do with traffic management on Lexington Avenue and noted the city does not have control over the timing of this project. Mr. Schluender stated the county does not have the expansion of Lexington Avenue in their five year plan.

Councilmember Newland stated at this point, with respect to the resolution that was passed in 2018, nothing has changed except the additional residents who would like to have the barricade removed. He indicated he would defer to the wisdom of the council at the time the resolution was passed because they were more involved with the development process. Seeing the size of the neighborhood to the north and the density that is apparent compared to the development to the south, to him, the lots were quite different. He understood the convenience of it, however, there are reasons and rationale for having decisions made by the previous council and he would respect their thought process without having to revisit everything and supported keeping the barricade in place until the two criteria were met.

Councilmember Larson asked why the apartment complex did not locate on this corner and questioned if this was because the site was a wetland.

Councilmember Robertson explained the council refused staff's recommendation, which happens a lot and was a byproduct of this neighborhood not having an apartment complex in their backyard. Mr. Thorvig stated the property was guided for apartments and Roers came to the city and requested an apartment building but when it was brought to the public there was resistance from the Sanctuary Preserve neighborhood and council recommended the building be moved to the south side of 109th Avenue.

Councilmember Robertson indicated new councilmembers were dealing with this for a couple of weeks but she had been dealing with this issue for almost five years. She noted she lived in this area, which was why this had become a bigger issue. She stated she was the farthest property from this barricade and there was no financial benefit to her if the barricade remained in place. She indicated her comments may seem personal but was frustrated how this topic has evolved over the past few years. She discussed the history of this barricade, noting she purchased a home in this neighborhood 10 years ago because she open enrolled her kids in the Spring Lake Park school district. She stated this neighborhood was the farthest point in the Spring Lake Park school district. She indicated the side of her house was adjacent to Lexington Avenue, which generates a tremendous amount of noise. She explained she never called the city to complain about this roadway, nor could she complain about the gun club that was behind her home because it had been in place for the past 60 years. She commented on the proposed uses for the property behind her home and noted she did her due diligence. She discussed what drew her to the neighborhood and explained she was not opposed to the adjacent neighborhood, but rather did not want construction vehicles cutting through. She stated her neighborhood was zoned residential flex, which had different requirements. She discussed how the neighborhood worked to preserve its integrity. She loved that people in her neighborhood could use the street for walking and biking. She indicated many of the lots in her neighborhood had ponds and children from the neighborhood bike to her yard with fishing poles. She explained she was not interested in driving around the barricade then shared how an individual who did drive around the barricade had stolen mail from the neighbors and was trying to get away. She reported she signed up for long bus times when enrolling her children at Spring Lake Park and did not believe she was receiving any special privileges. She indicated the city could not meddle in the school districts business or their bussing routes. She explained when her neighborhood was constructed a cul-de-sac was put in place at 114th Lane then asked staff how many cul-de-sacs the city had in place. Mr. Schluender estimated the city had between 400 and 500 cul-de-sacs.

Councilmember Fleming reported the road was designed to be a temporary cul-de-sac.

Councilmember Robertson stated in 2014, this was a real cul-de-sac and people purchased property in this area based on the knowledge this was a cul-de-sac. She reported the city did not receive complaints at that time from Walter's, public safety, SBM Fire or the school district because there was a cul-de-sac in place. She understood the statements made by Councilmember Fleming, but noted there also was not a policy in place that states all city streets must be connected. Mr. Schluender stated this was correct, there was not a standing policy.

Councilmember Robertson explained she found it interesting that the neighborhood to the south asked to have a barricade put in place on Austin Street to keep construction traffic out of their neighborhood and was approved by the city. She noted the irony was a temporary barricade was put in place and people began moving the barricade in order to drive around it which led the city to fill the barricades with water but people still moved them. She noted when the cement barricades were put in place people drove around the barricade on the sidewalks. She pointed out that the pile of rocks on the cul-de-sac had been in place since 2014. She feared that the heightened emotions surrounding this matter has led to a disappointing dialogue. She shared frustrations with how she has been treated and how council has managed this situation. She expressed concern with how Councilmember Larson posted pictures of her street on social media. She explained her comments from December were taken out of context, but Councilmember Larson made her point for her that the unintended consequences of connecting these types of things were when a resident gets hit. She indicated she worked hard for this neighborhood in December and tried to do everything when it came to traffic because human behavior cannot be quantified. She reported there were residents in Blaine who wanted a gate within The Lakes. She reiterated that the council goes against staff recommendations all the time, to the point where the council got scolded by the previous city attorney. She reported this road was never connected, there was a cul-de-sac in place and taking down the barricade would not solve any issues. She anticipated there would be long term issues going forward for the neighbors in these two developments. She encouraged the council to find solutions that address the concerns of everybody. She indicated there would be concerns by the neighborhood should sidewalks every be added because of the loss of trees that would occur and the cost to the residents. She encouraged the council to consider how the quality of life would be impacted if the barricade were removed. She clarified that the proposed trail off of 114th Lane to the wetland would not be completed by the parks department because there was no place for visitors to park. She stated she has worked hard for this neighborhood by keeping an apartment out of their backyard, putting wetland buffers in place, fixing their park and closing a road upon their request. She did not think doing one thing or the other was a solution but rather this would be a long term conflict between the two neighborhoods. She recommended the council not get involved in issues that breed conflict then asked if the barricade was a public safety issue. Captain Joe Gerhardt stated he has not heard of any concerns or that the barricade was an issue and said from a training aspect they train new officers with paper maps and inform them that the barricade is in place, which was also noted on the CAD system as well.

Councilmember Fleming questioned if it would be easier if the barricade was open. Captain Gerhardt reported this was the case.

Councilmember Massoglia indicated this issue has gotten somewhat personal and everyone can feel that. He stated in looking at this issue, he did not believe it should be that much of a concern but that regardless of what happens, he hoped that both neighborhoods can come together, along with the council coming together. He discussed how the North Oaks Ponds neighborhood went to the planning commission and previous council. He stated they did it the right way when complaining or expressing concerns about construction traffic. He indicated they have the right to do that as does the Sanctuary Preserve. He encouraged the council to remove the emotion from this issue. He explained nothing nefarious had occurred and encouraged residents to review the minutes noting the neighborhood group

asked for the road to be closed. With all that being said, he understood the decision made in 2016 but did not understand the decision of the council in 2018 to keep the barricade in place. He explained in his conversation with the city engineer, it was his understanding the city does not have another situation similar to this anywhere in the community. Mr. Schluender stated this was correct.

Councilmember Massoglia reported this was two fully developed neighborhoods that had a road that was always meant to be connected. It was his hope that some of the back and forth, and personal accusations regarding this topic could stop. He was of the opinion the road should be connected, when looking at the situation objectively.

Councilmember Larson stated Councilmember Robertson asked about public safety. She reported Chief Podany was quoted in December 2018 that the barricade could create a delay and the barricade makes it harder for the fire department to navigate the neighborhood. She expressed concern with the fact buses were having to make three point turns in order to turn around when it was so dark in the winter then asked what the intention of roads were. Mr. Schluender stated the intention of roads was connectivity.

Councilmember Larson stated Councilmember Robertson noted there was contention regarding the barricade and the police have been called numerous times. She wondered if the contention would not be there if the barricade were not in place. She feared the barricade was causing the emotion. She questioned who Councilmember Massoglia was referring to when he was speaking about emotions, but noted everything she stated was fact.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he understood this, but indicated both councilmembers feel strongly about this matter and encouraged the council to move forward with the overall decision.

Mayor Sanders understood where both neighborhoods were coming from. He noted that most of these homes were built in the 1990s on a cul de sac and for 30 years buses and delivery trucks have maneuvered through the area just fine. He indicated there has been a way for people to do this and no one complained about it. To his knowledge, until the last couple of years, there were no complaints from the school district either. He stated for years, it was not known how this property would develop and it settled on a neighborhood. He reported when the city connected the roads, the neighborhood to the south didn't have access both ways and then a barricade was put in. Rather the neighborhood was built and the connection was not in place. He understood the residents from the Sanctuary Preserve wanting shorter bus routes. He questioned when the intersection of Austin and 112th would be signalized. Mr. Schluender stated this intersection was currently being monitored for traffic, but was not on a five year plan.

Mayor Sanders asked when 109th and Austin was slated for a signal. Mr. Schluender stated this intersection would have a signal later this summer.

Mayor Sanders indicated he was in favor of pushing the county to get this intersection signalized. He anticipated this would alleviate a lot of the public safety concerns. He supported strengthening the cul de sac that was in place to ensure trucks were able to turnaround safely. He noted the city could then monitor if having 109th and Austin open

and if this curbs some of the thoughts, fears and challenges for the neighborhood. He suggested this be monitored for the next year to see how traffic was being impacted.

Councilmember Fleming stated with all due respect, she understood the cul de sac has been in place for the past 30 years and buses come and buses go out. However, since then, the trucking companies have had to come up with safety protocols because of incidents. She reported buses are not supposed to back up because it is so dangerous. She did not believe the barricade was something first responders should have to deal with in the community, because it was creating safety concerns.

Mayor Sanders explained he was suggesting enlarging the actual cul de sac. He reported the city had over 400 cul de sacs and Walter's was able to pick up trash, plows were able to remove snow and buses were able to pick up children. He supported turning this back into a cul de sac that facilitates a bus and move on from there.

Councilmember Fleming stated this would manage one side of the barricade, but what should be done on the other side. Currently, larger trucks were having to back into the roadway and were using Adam Bo's driveway to turn around, which was a safety concern for the Bo's family.

Councilmember Larson questioned who would pay for a reconstructed cul de sac. Mr. Schluender stated the city had no identified funding source to pay for the cul de sac.

Councilmember Saroya indicated these were healthy discussions to have and appreciated how Councilmember Larson took the lead on this issue. She believed this barricade should have been removed five years ago and did not support any further delay in removing the barricade. She explained she would be happy to have this item added to this evening's council agenda as additional business if there was majority support. She noted she was concerned about the sense of ownership people had over a public roadway. She indicated these were public roadways and the entire conversation was making her uncomfortable. She believed this entire situation has escalated into something that it should not have. She discussed how difficult it was for her to turn around at the barricade when she was driving in the area and apologized to all the residents who had to deal with this situation. She said it was her hope that the neighborhoods would come together once the barricade was removed because there was so much good in both neighborhoods. She commented on an issue that occurred in her neighborhood regarding the sidewalks and discussed how the issue was resolved. In the end, she believed the road should be open to the public.

Ms. Wolfe requested comment from legal counsel on how to proceed. City Attorney Loonan stated staff could bring forward a motion to repeal the action that was taken in 2018 and then council can determine what they want to do from there. He noted the barricade could then be considered or the matter could be referred to the traffic commission for further consideration.

Councilmember Larson asked if this action could be taken tonight. Mayor Sanders was of the opinion it would not be transparent of the city to take action tonight. He recommended this item be brought back to the council for consideration on August 7.

Councilmember Saroya asked if this delay would impact the school district. Ms. Wolfe

indicated she can inform the school district that the council has directed them to bring this matter to the August 7 city council meeting for further consideration.

Ms. Loonan reported pursuant to city charter, a written motion would have to be brought to the council to amend or repeal a previous resolution; this could not be done strictly on a voice vote. Therefore, staff would have to be directed to draft a motion for consideration on August 7.

After discussion, Council consensus (4-3) was to remove the current barricade and to direct staff to place this item on the August 7, 2023 regular agenda for formal action through a motion to repeal Resolution 18-227 and then act to either remove the barricades or possibly refer this item to the traffic commission for review/action. Staff will notify the school district(s) of scheduling of the item and likely will notify residents of both neighborhoods as well.

3. Other Business

None.

4. Adjournment

The Workshop was adjourned at 6:55PM.



Signed by

Tim Sanders, Mayor

Signed by

Cathy Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk