



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

August 7, 2023 | 5:00 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 by Mayor Sanders at 5:00PM.

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders, Councilmembers Terra Fleming, Leslie Larson, Chris Massoglia (attending remotely from 10473 Waltz Road, Kabetogama, MN 56669), Tom Newland, Jess Robertson, and Lori Saroya.

ABSENT: None.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; City Attorney Tom Loonan; Craig Rapp, Consultant.

2. New Business

- 2.1.** 2023-348 Governance Session
Sponsors: Michelle Wolfe, City Manager

City Manager Wolfe stated a governance session would be held with Consultant Craig Rapp and the city council. She reviewed the agenda topics to be covered during this session. It was noted this presentation was originally scheduled for the spring council retreat. Due to the postponement of the retreat, there was limited time for the strategic planning session, so the governance session was removed from the agenda, to be rescheduled.

Craig Rapp, consultant, introduced himself and explained this session would be organized in a manner to assist the city council with being more effective. He commented on how important it was for a community to have strong governance and for the city council to find

ways forward in order to properly serve the public. He reviewed the roles and responsibilities for each councilmember. He asked each of the city councilmembers to introduce themselves and speak to why they ran for office and how they would like to be remembered.

Councilmember Saroya began by saying she has been on the council since January of 2023 but has lived in Blaine for 20 years. She noted she ran because she understood the work and growth that could occur in Ward 1. She hoped to be remembered as someone who tried their best to do what was in the best interest of Blaine residents.

Councilmember Fleming indicated she has been on the council since January of 2023 and has lived in the community for 20 years. She indicated she ran because she loves this city and would like to keep the best interests of the city at heart. She wanted to be remembered as being fair, for looking at both sides of the issue and for not voting based on emotion.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he has been on the council since January of 2020. He explained he originally ran after attending a conference about the importance of getting involved in the community. He stated he had no idea what he was getting himself into, but was very excited to serve. He hoped to be remembered as someone who tries to do right by Blaine and that he was a person of integrity.

Mayor Sanders reported he was elected mayor in 2020. He indicated he has lived in Blaine for 22 years and he loves this community. He believed the community had a lot of potential and he understood it would take some intentionality to move the community forward. He stated Blaine had a long-standing mayor prior to him who served this community well, but it was time for a transition. He explained he was passionate about moving Blaine forward. He hoped to be remembered as a public servant, someone who served the people well and who helped set Blaine on a path to its full potential.

City Manager Wolfe explained she has been with the city of Blaine since September of 2019. She indicated she previously worked for Cottage Grove and Arden Hills. During this time, she always had the understanding Blaine had an outstanding reputation. After moving to Colorado and working for a larger community, there was a short list of communities that she would return to Minnesota to work for. She learned that previous City Manager Clark Arneson was retiring and she was fortunate to be selected. She hoped to be remembered as a public servant that was fair, that served with her heart, and that she did her best always.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she has lived in Blaine for the past 25 years and this was her fifth year on the council. She explained she got to the council through organic means after being plugged into the Chamber of Commerce for 19 years. She noted her neighborhood had some issues that she worked with the city to resolve. She reported she was raised as a missionary and pastors kid, which left her with a heart to love and serve. She stated she was trying to do her best to serve the community. She indicated she did not like the spotlight, which meant the "how would she like to be remembered question" was difficult for her. She reported she could not do anything individually without the support of colleagues, staff and the community. She explained she was not doing this job for a thanks or a prize.

Councilmember Newland reported he has been on the council for a year and a half and he

has lived in the city for 19 years. He explained he was on the council as a continuation of his active service in the community. He hoped to be remembered as being responsive to requests, as being proactive and helpful in moving the city forward.

Councilmember Larson indicated she has been on the city council since May 1. She reported she ran for office after being told by her father there was no sense in complaining about things unless you want to do something about it. She hoped to see change in government and she was willing to be the hands and the feet. She wanted to be remembered as someone who unapologetically stood up for someone else's voice and that she was listening to residents.

Mr. Rapp asked what the council learned from these comments.

Councilmember Fleming stated each councilmember wanted to serve and had a servant heart.

Mr. Rapp questioned what the differences were. He noted many of the councilmembers have lived in Blaine for a long time. He inquired how the differences would matter.

Councilmember Newland stated he did not believe the differences would matter if the council was working together towards a common goal.

Councilmember Larson explained she believed differences were healthy and that it was better to have seven voices and not just one.

Mr. Rapp commented on how differences can make a group stronger when properly working together. He discussed how he heard the council is made up of people and that there was a desire to make things better. He explained he was going to start this session from a place where all councilmembers were coming from a place that they wanted to serve. He understood that each councilmember had a story, but the reality was, each councilmember was different. He indicated the council has to figure out and navigate how the differences can help the greater good. He reported the city council was responsible for running one of the biggest businesses in Blaine, which meant the group had to be effective and committed. He hoped each councilmember could assume the others have positive intent. He explained good governance was about transparency and accountability. He commented further on the roles and responsibilities for the city council, noting there was some level of flexibility still in place. He questioned what might still occur even with flexibility.

Councilmember Newland stated disagreements and different perspectives on how to get there will still occur. He anticipated there would be seven different perspectives on how to reach a goal.

Mr. Rapp further reviewed the traditional roles for city councilmembers as community representatives. He asked how the council should address questions from others outside the community, especially after a tough vote or a tough council meeting.

Councilmember Newland indicated this should be done carefully because the council didn't need to be airing its dirty laundry. He reported it was important to show the city was moving

forward with cohesion.

Mayor Sanders agreed stating the council may not know who they know.

Mr. Rapp asked how the council should be dealing with defeats.

Councilmember Newland stated the council has to move on.

Councilmember Fleming explained the council had to understand they would win some and lose some, which meant people had to move on. She stated issues should not be brought into the next meeting, nor should retaliatory actions. She believed the council had to be mature and move on to the next vote.

Councilmember Larson indicated this was a lost cause situation. She noted if the vote has already occurred the only options were to sulk or move on. Mr. Rapp stated this was correct. He explained if the council was collectively a team, the council would have to agree to fight hard, but would have to respect the vote, for the good of the city. He stated if a councilmember acts out against the vote, the entire group is undermined, along with the council's effectiveness.

Councilmember Fleming reported she viewed this as a "do unto others as you would have done to you" situation. She stated she would not want other councilmembers throwing her under the bus because of her vote, nor would she do this to another councilmember.

Mr. Rapp indicated this was exactly the point. He explained at the end of every vote the council has to remember they are all on the same team, whether they are on the winning or losing side. He then commented on the adhoc roles of the council. He asked if the council was using these roles productively, or what issues might occur if this was not occurring.

Councilmember Newland stated if everyone wants to have the same role, there would not be balance. Mr. Rapp reported this was the case and noted each councilmember had strengths and passions. He encouraged the council to allow for members to flex at times as the group matures.

Mr. Rapp discussed the imaginary roles of the councilmembers, which are the roles the councilmembers slip into accidentally. He noted the imaginary roles can be problematic. He asked if there could be a conflict between the council's role and staff's role.

Ms. Wolfe stated this would lead to confusion.

Councilmember Larson anticipated this would force some people into silence if others are assuming positions. Mr. Rapp reported this was the case and commented further on how important it was for staff and councilmembers working or serving on behalf of the city to fulfill their role in order for the city to operate properly.

Ms. Wolfe stated she had a growing concern with the number of emails being sent by Council directly to staff without her being copied and stressed the need to keep her informed. She said she understood part of this was due to the number of new councilmembers and learning curves but said she needed to be informed in order to best respond to Council questions and

concerns. Mr. Rapp agreed and commented on how difficult it can be for council to work together with the city manager while not encroaching. He stated this was also due to growing pains as Blaine transitions from a smaller community to a larger city. He believed it would be important for the council and staff to have clarity around communication .

Mr. Rapp explained the last issue he wanted the council to address was staff, mainly department heads. He commented on how these individuals carry out the directives of the council. He further discussed how important it was for the council to have proper communication between the council and its staff, along with maintaining proper roles. He stated at the end of the day the council signed up for small group decision making after being elected to the city council. He indicated it was important for the council to show respect, participate actively, to work with each other, be a good team player and be able to resolve differences. He commented on the number of hours a typical councilmember spends serving the community on a yearly basis, versus a staff member. He then discussed how this time was broken down into four buckets. He asked where the council was not spending enough time, or where the council should be spending more time.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she spent the first few years of her term being very quiet in the exploration and analysis phase. She stated there is a reality check after being elected and she tried to learn how to turn no's into yes's.

Mayor Sanders explained if he had to pick one bucket he would say exploration and analysis. He stated the council was dealing with complex issues and there was a lot more for this council to explore and analyze in order to fully understand the consequences of what is said and the votes. He noted this was the fifth iteration of the council since he was elected. He indicated there was a lot of complexity in governing and policy making. He reported it takes a lot of time to function cohesively as a group and those that operate the best understand the governing process and what goes into making a sound decision.

Councilmember Massoglia stated exploration and analysis was important along with goal setting. He believed conversations about each councilmember's vision for certain projects had been meaningful.

Councilmember Saroya commented she believed it wasn't just one bucket, but rather it was about balance. She indicated she would start with goal setting in order to set a vision. However, the council couldn't have a vision without having discussions with stakeholders.

Mr. Rapp stated after speaking with many councils, he has learned that these groups see a need for more exploration and analysis due to the complexity of the issues they were facing.

Councilmember Newland asked if staff had this same feeling.

Ms. Wolfe agreed with Mr. Rapp noting this council undertook their first strategic planning session just before she was hired. She stated this was the first step in becoming more proactive. She reported broader community visioning could also be beneficial. She believed the council was making progress in the goal setting area, but she also believed exploration and analysis was important. She was of the opinion that the council meetings were productive. She understood a great deal of information was presented to the council at each

workshop meeting, which was where the bulk of council time was needed.

Councilmember Newland thanked staff for this feedback.

Councilmember Larson questioned if the council was not being efficient with the workshop time. Ms. Wolfe indicated the city had a lot of issues to address and there were a number of items that required closed sessions. All of these were complex and a great deal of information had to be dispensed to the city council. She commented on how the city was working to be proactive when addressing 105th Redevelopment area, TH65 and the Northtown Mall area. She thanked the council for reading through the staff reports and being prepared for meetings. She stated this does help with efficiencies.

Mr. Rapp explained it would be useful for the council and staff to have a conversation around how to maximize time. He commented then on the best practices for the governance process. He stated the Carver Governance Model is seen as the gold standard. He reviewed the four components within these best practices. He noted these four components were the council's main job, which involved what needs should be met, for whom and at what cost. He asked what problems could arise from this.

Councilmember Larson stated one of the problems was that the wards in Blaine were very different.

Mr. Rapp discussed how the councilmembers had a dual role in representing their ward as well as the entire community. He indicated each councilmember has to be open to what is best for the whole. He commented on how difficult it would be to move the collective forward if each councilmember was only acting on the best interests for their ward. He discussed how the council sets the goals and boundaries or limits for staff. He noted this can be a very efficient way for systems to operate.

Councilmember Newland commented on how many more hours staff works for the city versus city councilmembers, which means they have a better handle on issues than the council. He stated the challenge was finding the balance. Mr. Rapp agreed, noting the gray area was with constituent issues.

Mr. Rapp discussed how the council gets to determine its own governance policy and provided the council with handouts regarding governance. He stated the big challenge is organizational politics. He commented on how politics was a game and how power was used to influence. He described the differences between tough politics and dysfunctional politics. He stated with tough politics, respect and trust are still in place. He indicated with dysfunctional politics, there is chaos and accomplishments are delayed. He urged the council to remain passionate, but to not turn dysfunctional. He encouraged the council to be a team that creates win-win outcomes without compromising personal ethics. He explained a team was committed to a common purpose that has a performance and goal approach. He stated this council was a new team that was still forming and storming, before it can begin norming and performing. He suggested the council conduct quarterly review sessions in order to perform quick reviews of priorities and what occurred. In addition, the council can review the performance of its decision making.

Councilmember Fleming questioned if personality tests would be valuable. Mr. Rapp

believed this would be valuable information for the council to have.

Mr. Rapp provided the council with additional handouts and thanked the group for their time.

3. Other Business

Ms. Wolfe requested the council provide staff with potential dates for the upcoming retreat.

Ms. Wolfe discussed the request the city received regarding political campaign signs. Council provided consensus on when political campaign signs can be posted for the upcoming election cycle.

4. Adjournment

The Workshop was adjourned at 6:55PM.



Signed by

Tim Sanders, Mayor

Signed by

Cathy Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk