



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

November 6, 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 by Mayor Sanders at 5:30PM.

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders, Councilmembers Terra Fleming, Chris Massoglia, Tom Newland, Jess Robertson, and Lori Saroya.

ABSENT: Councilmember Leslie Larson.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; City Planner Sheila Sellman; Safety Services Director/Police Chief Brian Podany; Finance Director Jason Zimmerman; City Attorney Tom Loonan; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

2. New Business

- 2.1.** 2023-546 North Metro TV (NMTV) Merger Option
Sponsors: Michelle Wolfe, City Manager

City Manager Wolfe stated Blaine is a member of the North Metro Telecommunications Commission. The Commission operates North Metro TV and offers community television programming which is a form of mass media in which a television station is owned, operated or programmed by a community group to provide television programs of local interest known as local programming. Community television stations are most commonly operated by non-profit groups or cooperatives. The cable commission operates North Metro TV (NMTV). NMTV offers news and sports coverage, broadcast and streaming of local meetings, and a variety of services and classes. The current Executive Director of North

Metro TV is retiring in January 2024. The cable television landscape has been changing with the advent of streaming and satellite television. Given these and other considerations, Councilmember Massoglia would like the city council to consider exploring options for the future of NMTV. Potential options were reviewed in detail with the council and staff requested direction on how to proceed.

Councilmember Massoglia discussed how he serves as the liaison to NMTV. He explained Executive Director Arnson has done a tremendous job leading NMTV but was retiring January 2024. He stated he would like the council to consider next steps and what options are available to the city in order to provide Blaine residents with the best possible cable coverage. He understood that many residents are switching to streaming services, which was creating a loss in PEG fees and supported the city consider merging with CCX. He commented further on the benefits of merging with larger peer cities.

Councilmember Newland commented on what a great resource NMTV was for Blaine residents. He supported the city keeping this local asset going for Blaine residents and noted he would support the recommendation of Councilmember Massoglia and Executive Director Arnson. He stated his only concern was that he didn't want to become the "little fish in a big pond" if NMTV were to merge with another entity that had many larger cities than what Blaine experiences now with NMTV.

Councilmember Massoglia indicated there were pros and cons of merging with another entity and discussed how being among peer cities could benefit Blaine.

Councilmember Robertson thanked Councilmember Massoglia for taking this on. She agreed NMTV was an asset to the community and she wanted to see these services continue. She questioned how reduced franchise fees were impacting CCX, noting she did not want to see the city merge with this organization, if they were struggling as well. She supported the city continuing to elevate the ways in which they community with residents and was open to exploring options.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he anticipated all cable commissions were facing the same challenges at this time, but this was why he felt it would benefit Blaine to band together with another organization. He commented further on how the CCX news budget was larger than NMTV's entire budget.

Mayor Sanders supported the city exploring a potential merger and recommended staff collect information and further explore solutions for the city. He thanked Councilmember Massoglia for bringing this matter to the council and for recommending Blaine join with its peer cities. He commented on how a merger would mean the city would lose some of the community that has been established through NMTV, however understood the city had to begin planning for what was next.

Councilmember Fleming asked what percentage of Blaine residents utilize NMTV programming. Ms. Wolfe estimated well over half of Blaine residents were still using cable.

Councilmember Massoglia commented if the majority of the council supported further exploration, he could reach out to CCX in order to gather more information.

Mayor Sanders supported this recommendation.

Ms. Wolfe reported the operations committee is comprised of city managers and city administrators from the member cities. She explained this group has discussed needing to have an interim director in preparation for Ms. Arnson's retirement in January.

Councilmember Newland thanked Executive Director Heidi Arnson for her tremendous service to the community and wished her all the best in her retirement.

Council consensus was to explore the possibility of merging NMTV with a larger cable commission such as CCX.

2.2. 2023-498 Proposed Charter Commission Amendment - Council Salaries
Sponsors: Cathy Sorensen, City Clerk

City Clerk Sorensen stated city charter states the monthly salary of councilmembers and mayor is to be established by ordinance. Council charged the charter commission to annually review council salary surveys from comparable/surrounding cities and make recommendations on possible salary adjustments. Any recommended adjustments would be presented to council and, if supported, an ordinance amendment presented for formal consideration. Per statute, no change in salary can take effect until after the next municipal election. The last increase to council salaries occurred in 2015. It was noted the commission reviewed salary information from comparable cities and Commissioner Anderson compiled a summary of the data that included average salaries, consumer price index, and proposed options for increases. After review and discussion, the commission supported a salary increase based on many factors that included an increased complexity of local government and development in the city, as well as other factors including the lack of increases over the past eight years. Discussion was held on the city's increased population, council-city manager form of government, and roles of mayors in comparative cities.

Ms. Sorensen reported the commission discussed difficulties when comparing Blaine to others due to differing factors across cities, such as the number of employees and enterprise funds, service levels, and the existence of public amenities such as community centers. The commission acknowledged the many complex projects and developments currently occurring in Blaine such as TH65, the Northtown master plan, and the 105th Avenue redevelopment area, and that any increase ultimately recommended should include escalators as increases take effect the following year. They agreed the consumer price index (CPI) could be a good measure for any current increase and have provided an "up to" salary range recommendation that averaged to an increase of a little more than 1% per year since 2015, then suggested using the annual cost of living increase (COLA) provided to employees going forward to provide consistency and recommended new language be added to ensure regular salary reviews occur. After discussion, on a 6-1 vote the commission recommended the following:

- increase the annual salary for the mayor in an amount up to \$18,315.03 (\$1,526.25/mo)
- increase the annual salary for councilmembers in an amount up to \$13,461.54 (\$1,121.80/mo)

- add language to Sec. 2.07 Salaries of the city charter that salary review be conducted in June of every odd numbered year and recommendations for adjustments, if any, be based on the annual cost of living adjustments consistent with adjustments provided to staff.

Ms. Sorensen explained staff and the commission is seeking input from the council regarding both salary changes and the proposed amendments. Once direction is received from council, a public hearing will be scheduled regarding the proposed charter amendment and an ordinance amending salaries will be presented for formal consideration.

Councilmember Saroya questioned what the opposition was from one Charter Commissioner regarding this matter. Ms. Sorensen stated the opposition had to do with the proposed mechanism for measure and not the proposed charter amendment language.

Councilmember Newland thanked staff and the charter commission for their efforts on this matter. He commented on how each city councilmember serves not for the money but to serve the public and supported the proposed recommendations.

Councilmember Robertson indicated this topic came up several years ago and agreed that no one does this job for the money. She commented further on how she felt uncomfortable discussing this topic noting it was difficult for her to consider giving herself a raise.

Councilmember Fleming agreed but recognized that the council had to take this action for this council and all future councils. She discussed how all city employees received COLA increases and believed it was only fair for the council to receive the same consideration.

Councilmember Saroya agreed but stated she also had concerns with the timing and optics of a pay increase. She questioned where the money would come from to cover the additional expense and inquired why the pay increase was being brought up this year. Ms. Sorensen indicated the council requested the charter commission review council salaries and provide a recommendation for the council and explained how the commission responded with a salary range for consideration as well as putting a mechanism in place for regular review based on COLA going forward. She explained the council did not have to approve any proposed increase as that would be done through a separate ordinance. She stated if approved as recommended the increase for both mayor and council totaled approximately \$24,000/year and would not begin until January of 2025 and that there would be sufficient funding budgeted from the general fund for any possible increase.

Councilmember Newland indicated the timing for a pay increase would never be correct or easy for the council to consider. He stated if the council did not act now to try and catch up, the increase would be even higher in the future. He explained he supported the proposed increases as recommended by the charter commission.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he believed the council should be paid \$36,000 a year and the mayor should be paid \$58,000 a year and share surprise how small the salary was for how much time each councilmember spent serving the community. He explained he supported the council pay increase.

Councilmember Robertson indicated there was a ten-year gap between the last time the

council received a pay increase and when the proposed increase would go into effect. She asked how many votes a charter commission amendment would need in order to pass. Ms. Sorensen reported the amendment required a unanimous vote of the council in order to move forward but the actual salary increase would be a majority vote of the council.

Councilmember Fleming questioned why the charter commission didn't set the pay increase but instead provided a range. Ms. Sorensen explained the charter commission did not feel comfortable setting an actual salary as they understood how uncomfortable this process can be so instead proposed a range for the council to consider.

Councilmember Fleming supported the council having a COLA mechanism in place going forward for council pay and requested the charter commission set the actual pay for the council.

Commissioner Robertson requested staff go back to the charter commission and ask that they set the pay increase so this decision does not have to be made by the city council.

Council generally supported the charter language amendment but wanted more direction from the charter commission on the actual proposed salary amounts. Council requested the topic be presented again after the charter commission met to discuss this matter.

2.3. 2023-500 Proposed Charter Commission Amendment - Redetermination of Ward Boundaries
Sponsors: Cathy Sorensen, City Clerk

Ms. Sorensen stated as part of the redistricting process in early 2022, council shared general support of the charter commission's recommendation to draft potential amendments that would allow the ability to consider possible ward boundaries and restructuring in the future as the city reaches full development. The commission's reasons for creating this ability was based on the potential benefits of more neighborhood-based wards. Staff presented proposed redistricting plans to council and the charter commission at workshops on February 14 and March 7, 2022, with first reading on March 7 and second reading and adoption on March 21, 2022. Factors used to determine the adopted ward boundaries and precincts included:

- 2020 census population
- projected population growth
- registered voters and estimated voters
- wards that were bounded by precinct lines, compact in area, and composed of contiguous territory
- wards that were as equal in population as practicable within the required 5% population threshold
- polling place management

Ms. Sorensen reported at the meetings there was discussion that should future councils/charter commissions ever wish to consider the possibility of more neighborhood-based wards there was no mechanism included in charter to allow for that

review. Redistricting after the census allows for review and adjustment of established precinct boundaries, but work to review any potential ward structure changes needs to occur two to three years before the census. The language being proposed would provide a way to review population data before a census and provide future councils and charter commissions the ability to decide at that time if changes should be explored. The proposed amendment would not result in any ward structure changes but just allow the city to be proactive and provide an opportunity to review the data and make recommendations, which a recommendation could certainly be that no ward boundary or structure changes should occur at all. If the conclusion by future councilmembers and commissioners was to amend the current ward structure, other amendments would then be presented for formal consideration. She confirmed the proposed amendment being presented would just provide a mechanism for future review; no actual ward-structure changes are being recommended at this time.

Councilmember Fleming inquired why this item was brought forward and asked if the current ward system was not working. Mayor Sanders stated the city will always have wards but the council was is being asked if they want to have the ability to restructure in the future with at-large councilmembers for example or possibly a different number of wards.

Councilmember Robertson indicated the census prompts staff to look at the wards due to population shifts.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he did not recall the council giving the charter commission direction to pursue this matter. Ms. Sorensen agreed the council did not direct the charter commission to take on this task but there was general consensus during redistricting to have the charter commission explore this idea.

Ms. Wolfe reported staff researched the minutes and noted the council discussed the fact that there might have been interest in exploring a different way to do the wards. She indicated there was no mechanism for having any discussion about how the wards were structured except for using census data. She commented that as the city continues to grow, the council may want to have further conversations on how wards should be structured.

Councilmember Fleming asked when was the right time to have this discussion. Ms. Sorensen stated two or three years prior to the next census would be the right time. She indicated staff could then monitor growth in the community and consider how this growth was impacting the city's wards and have the charter commission bring forward potential options for consideration.

Councilmember Robertson supported a potential new ward structure discussion being tied to future comprehensive plan discussions. The council was in agreement.

Council supported this amendment being considered later in 2027 as part of the comprehensive plan discussions.

Motion by Mayor Sanders, second by Councilmember Newland to move the council into a closed session meeting to discuss non-public data relating to an active investigation pursuant to Minnesota State Statute 13D. 05 Subd. 2(2) at 6:35PM.

3. Other Business

None.

4. Adjournment



Signed by

Tim Sanders, Mayor

Signed by

Catherine M. Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk

The workshop was adjourned at 6:53 PM.