



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

January 3, 2024 | 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 5:31 PM.

2. Roll Call

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders, Councilmembers Terra Fleming, Leslie Larson, Chris Massoglia, Tom Newland, Jess Robertson, and Lori Saroya (arrived at 5:41 PM).

ABSENT: None.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Safety Services Director/Police Chief Brian Podany; Finance Director Jason Zimmerman; Director of Engineering Dan Schluender; Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; Fire Chief Dan Retka; Crime Analyst Rebecca Florhaug; Police Captain Matt Carlson; City Attorney Tom Loonan; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3. New Business

3.1. 2024-001 SBM Fire Department - Quarterly Update
Sponsors: Dan Retka, Fire Chief

Fire Chief Retka provided the City Council with a quarterly update. He reviewed the calls for service from 2023, noting calls were on the rise. He stated he was proud of the fact the City's property loss was down 60% which he attributed to prevention and training efforts. He discussed the department's prevention efforts, noting his staff spent over 7,000 hours

interacting and educating the public last year. He provided further comment on the training, marketing and recruitment efforts that occurred within the SBM Fire Department. He explained the SBM Fire Department continues to oversee the Centennial Fire District. He stated he was proud of the fact SBM would be providing EMS training to numerous departments throughout the State, which would provide a new revenue stream. He updated the Council on how the duty crew model was progressing, noting the city would now have a consistent number of firefighters at Station 1 and Station 3. He explained he would continue to fine tune the duty crew in 2024. He thanked the Council for their continued support.

Mayor Sanders thanked Fire Chief Retka for his update and for serving the community well. He stated he appreciated the prevention efforts the SBM Fire Department pursued in 2023. Lastly, he thanked the SBM Fire Department for the Santa Parade noting he appreciated how involved the community was in this event. Fire Chief Retka stated this was a great event for the community and he appreciated the fact 38,000 pounds of food was donated this year.

Councilmember Saroya explained she believed the Santa Parade was a great event, but she asked what the SBM Fire Department was doing to reach other diverse communities. Fire Chief Retka indicated this was something the department was considering and commented on how the department was working with the new citizen's academy.

Councilmember Saroya stated she would be happy to meet with Fire Chief Retka in order to discuss her ideas of how to reach out to the diverse communities in Blaine. She questioned how the construction on TH65 would impact response times for the SBM Fire Department. Fire Chief Retka discussed how GIS would route trucks to major events through traffic. He commented further on how having duty crews in place would assist with improving response times.

Councilmember Fleming explained she recently attended the citizen's academy and noted this gave her a great appreciation for the service provided by the communities police officers and firefighters.

3.2. 2024-002 Police Department Overview of Crime Stats Within the City of Blaine
Sponsors: Rebecca Florhaug

Safety Services Director/Police Chief Podany stated the Police Department's Crime Analyst Rebecca Florhaug would be presenting an overview of crime statistics within Blaine and share a comparison of crime throughout the entire city broken down by Council wards and patrol districts. He commented further on how the city was broken down into districts and described how staff was broken down to patrol these districts and how resources were not deployed based on wards but on need such as calls for service and call volume.

Crime Analyst Florhaug reviewed in detail the crime statistics, including call activity, from 2023 with the Council.

Captain Carlson discussed how the recent staffing study and increase in calls for service led

to the hiring of two additional officers for the department. He reported these officers were being utilized from 10:00AM to 10:00PM, which was when calls were heaviest.

Police Chief Podany commented on how the department makes adjustments to districts based on calls for service or call volume in particular areas. He explained the department would continue to focus on the Northtown Mall area, noting he understands people need to feel safe in this area.

Mayor Sanders thanked the department for their efforts and for this detailed presentation on calls for service.

Councilmember Newland inquired if the National Sports Center was a hot spot for police calls. Police Chief Podany explained the police were at the NSC directing traffic for special events, but noted there were not a lot of calls for service, except for medical calls or thefts from vehicles.

Councilmember Newland asked what was the biggest increase in calls for service. Police Chief Podany stated mental health calls have seen the biggest increase year after year. He noted these calls were not a crime, but could be linked to a crime or volatile situation.

Councilmember Larson questioned if drug calls were on the rise. Police Chief Podany reported overdose deaths were going down for the department because Narcan was more available in the community.

Councilmember Saroya inquired if lighting has an impact on crime and asked if street lighting should be improved in some of the older neighborhoods in Blaine. Police Chief Podany stated lighting can have an impact on crime, noting the cover of darkness only helps thieves.

Councilmember Saroya questioned if a crime prevention town hall meeting could be scheduled. Police Chief Podany stated he was looking into hosting a town hall event.

Councilmember Saroya asked if the city had neighborhood watch groups. Police Chief Podany indicated there were neighborhoods that still had block captains in place. He commented further on how the department was working to engage with the public more through social media.

Councilmember Massoglia inquired how many patrol officers were working from 6:00AM to 10:00PM and then from 10:00PM to 6:00AM. Captain Carlson reported the department has a minimum of five officers on the street at all times, with at least one sergeant. He noted this minimum of five was supplemented by the power shift, a retail car and a traffic car. Police Chief Podany stated at night the department had a DUI car on patrol.

4. Other Business

- 4.1.** 2024-003 2024 Council Liaison Appointments
 Sponsors: Cathy Sorensen, City Clerk

City Clerk Sorensen requested the Council review the appointment list prior to approval of appointments on the City Council agenda.

Mayor Sanders stated for the most part the appointments would remain the same with the exception of Councilmember Fleming being appointed to the Twin Cities Gateway Board.

Councilmember Saroya indicated she was interested in serving as a representative to the city, even as an alternate then asked why some councilmembers were allowed to serve while others were not.

Mayor Sanders explained the choices were based off past precedent and where the city was at. He stated he has not heard a direct interest from Councilmember Saroya.

Councilmember Saroya stated she spoke at the very first meeting in January 2023, noting she would be open to serving in any capacity. She did not believe it was fair that some councilmembers were serving on multiple committees while two councilmembers were being excluded. She asked what Twin Cities Gateway was and questioned why Councilmember Fleming was selected.

Mayor Sanders explained Councilmember Fleming had expressed interest in this organization, noting Twin Cities Gateway served as the city's visitors bureau.

Councilmember Larson thanked Councilmember Saroya for bringing this up, but noted she understood she was new to the council. She stated she would be willing to learn if an opportunity were to arise.

Councilmember Saroya asked if any feedback would be taken, or would this list be approved by the Council at tonight meeting.

Mayor Sanders stated this list of appointments would be his recommendation.

5. Adjournment



Signed by

Tim Sanders, Mayor

Signed by

Catherine M. Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk

City Attorney Loonan explained he would be out for the month of January through early February and that Eric Larson and Kevin Sandstrom would be serving as his backups during this time.

Ms. Wolfe discussed how there has been a rise in the use of social media and noted she has received a fair number of questions regarding the proper use of social media.

Communications Manager Hayle provided the Council with information on best practices for government use of social media.

Mr. Loonan explained these restrictions come as an extension to the first amendment. He reported as elected officials, councilmembers were an extension of government. He stated councilmembers were to have separate personas, one being personal and the other being public as an elected official. He reported staff was available to provide guidance, but staff did not enforce the policy. He commented on a supreme court case that could provide additional guidance on how social media should be managed by elected officials. He stated once a verdict comes down, he would report back to the city council.

Councilmember Saroya encouraged City Attorney Loonan to review the Ward 1 group that she and Councilmember Newland were a part of. She explained she was not an administrator of this group, nor was Councilmember Newland. Mr. Loonan reported he would be willing to do this. He stated one of the problems with these groups is if a quorum of councilmembers became a part of this group.

Councilmember Saroya indicated she has no control over the group and noted only two councilmembers were a part of the Ward 1 group.

The workshop was adjourned at 6:56PM.