



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

May 20, 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 5:30PM.

2. Roll Call

PRESENT: Mayor Sanders, Councilmembers Larson, Newland, Robertson, Massoglia, Fleming, Saroya.

ABSENT: None.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; City Planner Sheila Sellman; Safety Services Director/Police Chief Brian Podany; Finance Director Jason Zimmerman; Director of Engineering Dan Schluender; City Attorney Tom Loonan; Fire Chief Dan Retka; Deputy Fire Chief Matt Grantz; and City Clerk Cathy Sorensen.

3. New Business

- 3.1.** 2024-183 Closed Session Pursuant to Minnesota Statute 13D.05, Subd. 3(a) - City Manager Performance Review
Sponsors: City Council

After motion, second and vote, the council entered a closed session for the city manager performance review.

- 3.2.** 2024-177 SBM Fire Department SAFER Grant
Sponsors: Dan Retka, Fire Chief

City Manager Wolfe discussed the SAFER Grant noting there was some concern from the council regarding the timeline. She explained the fire chief was brought back in to address this topic in further detail with the council. She noted this item would be coming back to the council for further discussion as to the financial impact if the city were to receive the SAFER Grant.

SBM Fire Chief Dan Retka provided an update on recruitment and staffing and the current status of the department. Information was provided about the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant and how the fire department would utilize the grant if awarded. Chief Retka presented rationale for the grant request, which includes funding for 12 full-time positions. He explained a follow-up workshop is scheduled to discuss financial impacts in more detail. It was noted the grant covers personnel-related expenses for three years. Beginning in year four, SBM Fire (via funding from the three member cities) would be responsible for full funding of the 12 full-time positions. During the first three years, there are some related expenses that will need to be covered by SBM. The Minnesota State Fire Department Association (MSFDA) has been awarded \$1.4 million in funding through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program to improve recruitment of volunteer firefighters in Minnesota. The program can assist with marketing and onboarding of new firefighters and possible reimbursement for health screenings for new hires.

Deputy Fire Chief Matt Grantz reviewed the current staffing model for the fire department and described how the 12 additional positions would benefit the department. He noted a crew of three was now available at both the north and south stations Monday through Friday. He commented on how staffing would move to a 48-on/96-off staffing model, which was consistent with the Roseville and Eagan Fire Departments.

Chief Retka stated Recruitment and Retention Coordinator Natalie Streich has done a tremendous job recruiting new individuals for the department, but there was still a need for more firefighters. He discussed how SBM was serving as trainers for full time departments in the metro area. He explained it was getting expensive to customize gear for individuals who only work for the department for a short time before leaving the department for another opportunity. He commented on how response times have improved since moving to the duty crew model. He discussed how busy the city was between hosting special events at the NSC, the golf tournament and having the largest reliever airport in the state. He indicated all of these special events impact the fire department. He reported he needs to continue staffing his stations like this was a first class community, noting this meant he had to begin staffing overnight. He commented further on how the SBM Fire Department would score well on the SAFER Grant. He stated the department would not hear about the SAFER Grant until August 2024.

Councilmember Massoglia commented he was taken aback by how Chief Retka approached the conversation and felt like he was telling the council how the staffing model would change instead of asking or seeking support for a change. He stated he supported police and fire and had tremendous respect for their service to the community but did not appreciate his approach.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she did not receive the information in the same

manner. She stated this grant had a short window and the conversation held a few weeks ago was not long enough to give the council time to process the request. She explained she was not a public safety expert. She commented on how there has been cultural shifts in public safety for both police and fire. She stated the manner in which the fire department has been operating was no longer sustainable. She understood the department was doing its best but the department was beyond stretching a dollar and was now in need of a new staffing model. She wanted the community to be as safe as possible, and she had to understand the undertone of multiple conversations that have been held between the council and the Fire Chief that the on-call fire model was no longer working. She appreciated the fact staff made time for the fire chief to further address the timeline and reasoning for the SAFER Grant.

Councilmember Newland appreciated how Chief Retka is always direct and delivered facts and how he was sharing with the council what they need to do and the council would have to decide what they can support. He was of the opinion the council should support the shift and discussed how the SAFER Grant would assist with phasing in the new employees over the next three years. He respected what Councilmember Massoglia shared but understood the staffing situation had to change at the fire department.

Councilmember Larson stated offense may be taken if the department was requesting electric fire trucks next year for example, but she liked the way the safety aspects were discussed. She appreciated how response times were improving under the new staffing model and she would support improving safety for the community.

Councilmember Fleming thanked the fire chief for his presentation. She also appreciated the fact that response times had improved noting this would mean there was a chance to save more structures in the community. She clarified the SAFER Grant would fund 12 positions for three years and after that the city would be responsible for funding those positions. Chief Retka reported this was the case.

Councilmember Fleming questioned if staff knew what the cost would be for these 12 new positions. Chief Retka indicated he was working on final costs with the finance director.

Councilmember Larson asked how a decision like this would be made between the three cities. Chief Retka stated he would work to bring all three cities on board with the decision.

Councilmember Saroya thanked Chief Retka for his detailed presentation and said she respected the vision he had for the department for the future of the city. She asked if additional positions could be requested such as a recruiter or grant writer. Chief Retka indicated the 12 positions were all the department could ask for at this time.

Councilmember Saroya questioned what the chief needed from the city council and asked how funding could be sustained for the new positions. Chief Retka stated he was in attendance to provide the council with information on what the SAFER Grant was and the opportunity it would provide for the department. He commented the next side would be to further address the finances and how this would impact each of the three cities.

Councilmember Fleming inquired if the fire department received any feedback from Mounds View or Spring Lake Park. Fire Chief Retka explained he received unanimous

support from both the Mounds View and Spring Lake Park city councils.

Ms. Wolfe indicated the next council workshop discussion would address the financials. She explained the ask would be well over \$1 million in year four. She understood staff was doing things in a different order than usual, but that was due to the timing of the SAFER Grant.

3.3. 2024-151 Trunk Highway 65 West Frontage Road Discussion
 Sponsors: Daniel Schluender, Director of Engineering

Director of Engineering Schluender stated prior to the remarkable success last year in securing funding for the full Phase 1 TH65 project, the council, staff, and other partners were working on multiple grants and funding opportunities for the project. Several of those efforts resulted in funding being awarded. Typically, the requests for the grant/funding were specific to one piece of the project, such as a certain intersection. For example, the \$4 million in federal funding that was awarded to Blaine that was sponsored by Representative Emmer was specifically designated for the intersection of TH65 and 117th. During the 2023 Minnesota legislative session, significant funding was approved that resulted in the ability to construct the entirety of Phase 1. The project coordination has now been turned over to MnDOT and that agency will also manage the funding, including the previous grants that were awarded through state, federal, and regional agencies.

Mr. Schluender explained with this progression in securing funding, there has been interest in discussing the West Frontage Road between 99th Avenue and 105th Avenue. He discussed overall project timing including the West Frontage Road construction. The council has designated that corridor as a priority area for development, and the frontage road is a significant factor in relation to future development. This is also a strong topic of interest to the property owners in the corridor. Staff commented further on the West Frontage Road and requested direction from the council on how to proceed with funding the project.

Councilmember Robertson confirmed MnDOT would be responsible for completing this road.

Councilmember Robertson said she did not believe it made sense to assess the property owners for a project that was fully funded by grants.

Councilmember Larson questioned what property owners would be impacted by this project. Mr. Schluender explained this included all property owners that would receive benefit or access to the frontage road.

Councilmember Larson indicated she had met with the owners of The Pool Store and Ms. B's Dolls and assured them the project would not be assessed. She stated she did not support assessing the property owners given the fact the project had grant funding in place to cover the expense for a new frontage road.

Councilmember Saroya explained she has held meetings with The Pool Store and Ms. B's Dolls because they were in Ward 1. She stated if meetings were being held with these business owners perhaps efforts should be coordinated. Mr. Schluender indicated the city

was not hosting meetings with business owners that were not open houses.

Councilmember Newland reported the frontage road was an integral part of the city's transportation system that was used by the whole city. He indicated the frontage road was key for local traffic and he recommended the project not be assessed.

Ms. Wolfe explained staff became aware of conversations that were happening and that was why this item was placed on the agenda. She stated staff wanted clear direction that could be communicated to property owners. She made it clear that the council was only talking about street assessments and had not made a decision about utilities.

Mayor Sanders agreed this frontage road was an integral part of Highway 65 and he did not support the property owners being assessed for streets or storm.

3.4. 2024-60 Home Occupation Discussion III
 Sponsors: Sheila Sellman, City Planner

City Planner Sellman stated staff is suggesting adding a list of prohibited uses for all districts and permitted uses in FR for properties greater than or equal to three acres. Prohibited uses in all zoning districts were:

1. Auto repair/body shop
2. Auto sales
3. Heavy manufacturing (except in FR districts on a property greater than or equal to 3 acres).

Council consensus was to support this recommendation.

Ms. Sellman indicated permitted uses in FR for properties greater than or equal to 3 acres in size and prohibited in all other districts:

1. Heavy manufacturing.
2. Heavy equipment rental that includes, but is not limited to skidloaders, excavators, trailers or lifts.
3. Landscaping and lawn maintenance.
4. Small engine repair.

Mayor Sanders asked if a conditional use permit (CUP) process would be required for these uses. Ms. Sellman indicated these would be permitted uses and would not require a CUP.

Councilmember Robertson believed it did not make sense to make this requirement apply to only the FR zoning district. She noted there were other lots in Blaine that were four or five acres that were not FR.

Councilmember Fleming suggested the uses be identified for properties that were of a certain acreage. Ms. Sellman stated staff could write the language this way if directed by the

council.

Councilmember Saroya questioned why FR was included. Ms. Sellman indicated this was the direction of council.

Councilmember Newland stated it would make sense to put a timeframe on the frequency of the equipment rental. He did not want items to sit on properties for 10+ years without being rented.

Ms. Sellman inquired if the council supported items being rented, would it be appropriate to store these items outside.

Councilmember Larson supported items being stored outside because these residents had acreage.

Councilmember Robertson understood FR properties had acreage, but stated she did not want to see the council creating issues between neighbors. She did not support the city writing overarching policies as this could lead to future neighbor disputes.

Mayor Sanders stated he supported these uses having to pursue some sort of permit or license. Ms. Sellman indicated parameters could be written into the placement of the outdoor storage so as to reduce the potential for neighbor disputes.

Councilmember Robertson requested staff provide the council with a list of properties that were 3+ acres in Blaine.

- 3.5.** 2024-68 Median Safety Ordinance
 Sponsors: Brian Podany, Safety Services Manager/Police Chief

This item was postponed to the June.

4. Other Business

None.

5. Adjournment

Signed by



Tim Sanders, Mayor



Signed by 
Catherine M. Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk

The workshop was adjourned at 6:58PM.