



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

July 15, 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 Tim Sanders, Councilmembers Terra Fleming, Chris Massoglia (attending remotely from The Wheelhouse Restaurant, E1209 County Q, Waupaca WI 54981-8432), Tom Newland, Jess Robertson.

ABSENT: Councilmembers Leslie Larson and Lori Saroya.

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; Director of Engineering Dan Schluender; Director of Administrative Services Scott Johnson; City Attorney Tom Loonan; Finance Analyst Nikki Beckers; Community Development Specialist Elizabeth Showalter; Public Works Director Nick Fleischhacker; Senior Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3. New Business

- 3.1.** 2024-301 Closed Session Pursuant to Minnesota Statute 13D.05(2)(a)(2) - Active Fraud Investigation Update
Sponsors: Brian Podany, Safety Services Manager/Police Chief

After a motion and second the council met in closed session to receive an update on an active fraud investigation.

- 3.2.** 2024-214 Local Affordable Housing Aid II
Sponsors: Elizabeth Showalter, Community Development Specialist

Community Development Specialist Showalter stated in October 2023, the State began collecting a new 0.25% sales tax for affordable housing. That tax will be used for local affordable housing aid and local rental assistance programs. The City will be receiving approximately \$550,000 annually, depending on actual sales tax revenues. Changes were made during the 2024 legislative session that expanded and modified the eligible uses of funds. The current eligible uses are:

1. Emergency rental assistance (at or below 80% AMI).
2. Financial support to nonprofit affordable housing providers.
3. Construction or rehabilitation of housing for:
 - a. Homeowners at or below 115% AMI (with priority at or below 80% AMI).
 - b. Renters at or below 80% AMI (with priority at or below 60% AMI).
4. Financing the operation and management of financially distressed residential properties.
5. Funding of supportive services for supportive housing.
6. Costs of operating emergency shelters.

Ms. Showalter reviewed the feedback she had received from the council to date and commented further on the local affordable housing aid.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the city could partner with MAYC on this to see if there were any seniors in the community that could benefit from this funding. Ms. Showalter stated educational sessions could be hosted at MAYC.

Councilmember Newland inquired if the city had run this program by any local banks or realtors. Ms. Showalter reported she spoke with a banker but had not spoken with any realtors.

Councilmember Robertson asked what the timeline was to use these funds. Ms. Showalter stated the city would have three and a half years to use the funding.

Councilmember Newland supported the city pursuing the different funding options in order to assist Blaine residents. He questioned if an applicant would be limited to one program. Ms. Showalter stated the programs could be stacked or combined.

Council consensus was to support accessibility audits and grants, interest rate buy downs with an annual review to ensure need is still there, with funds to be set aside for future programs for manufactured homes.

3.3. 2024-296 Long-Term Staffing Plan
Sponsors: Jason Zimmerman, Finance Director

Finance Director Zimmerman stated each year as part of the budget process, staff reviews current organizational needs, especially as it relates to service delivery, and identifies staffing needs for the next five years. These requests are reviewed by the City Manager with a focus on correlating requests to the City's strategic plan, identifying expected outcomes, and measuring community impact. The identification of staffing needs does not commit the City to filling these positions, but rather gives the Council and staff an idea of the impact those positions could have on the budget to better evaluate priorities and plan for these in advance. This process is meaningful as staffing decisions directly affect the City's ability to deliver customer service and meet expectations. With a growing population, anticipated development, and evolving community needs, the City benefits from strategically monitoring staffing needs and adjusting accordingly.

City Manager Wolfe commented on how the long-term staffing plan was a work in progress and was assisting the city in creating a five year picture for each department. She discussed how last year's budget process was difficult and indicated the city had unmet needs and positions that had to be back filled. She explained the goal of this item was to have each department head giving the council a presentation that addresses their current needs.

Finance Analyst Beckers and the department heads provided an overview of each department's functional responsibilities, described current service levels, historical staffing, long-range direction, operational considerations, and future staffing requests in detail. It was noted that while the 2025 requests are important to dialogue as the associated costs have an immediate impact on the tax levy/utility rates, coordinating a long-term staffing plan that is sustainable and consistent with Council direction will aid in the development of future budgets and comprehensive financial plans. While this model is a full view of City staffing, these figures don't include staff provided by SBM, nor the potential for 12 additional full-time firefighters to become a shared cost of member cities upon the conclusion of the SAFER grant, should the previously discussed grant application be awarded.

Administrative Services Director Johnson commented on HR's long range goals and discussed how special elections and increased development could require additional staff.

Communications Manager Hayle discussed how Blaine was working to be an industry leader when it comes to communicating with residents.

Councilmember Newland commended staff for the incredible content that was included in the City newsletter.

Community Development Director Thorvig discussed how a residential inspector position would be back filled with a commercial inspector given the high level of development that would occur in the community in the coming years. He reported he does not see any needs for additional planning staff. He indicated the staffing levels for his department could potentially be reduced through attrition in the future once the city was fully built out.

Director of Engineering Schluender explained his current staffing levels were set noting a senior tech would be added in 2026 in preparation for a retirement.

Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Krieger commented on the assets and programming that was managed by the Parks and Recreation Department. He reviewed his staffing levels noting he currently had a gap at MAYC he would like filled and in 2026 he was proposing a rec programmer. He discussed how half of his department would be retiring in the next five years.

Mr. Zimmerman provided the council with an update on the staffing levels and reporting requirements from the finance department. He commented further on how he would like to standardize practices and procedures, along with providing more cross-training for employees.

Public Works Director Fleischhacker discussed how the city's aging infrastructure and increased growth were impacting the public works department. He stated the city's goal was to replace infrastructure when it has reached 80% of its useful life. He further described how his project asks were in alignment with current staffing levels. He indicated he would like to grow the city's forestry department versus having this as an ancillary part of the streets department. He reported tree complaints are going to rise with AEB.

Safety Services Director/Police Chief Podany reviewed the services that were provided by the police and fire departments. He commented on how staffing levels have increased over the past five years, while the number of CSO's had decreased. He noted calls for service were up 8% in the past year, noting there were 57,000 calls last year or 160 calls per day. He indicated there

were many special events held throughout the community each year which impacted department staffing. He then described the department's staffing needs for the next several years.

Mr. Zimmerman reflected on the proposed changes, noting the staffing increases would predominantly be for police and the public works department.

- 3.4.** 2024-302 Closed Session Pursuant to Minnesota Statute 13D.053(c)(3) Consider Purchase of 2043 105th Avenue NE
Sponsors: Erik Thorvig, Community Development Director

Mayor Sanders recessed the meeting at 7:00PM then reconvened the workshop at 8:50PM.

After a motion and second the council met in closed session to consider the purchase of the property at 2043 105th Avenue NE.

4. Other Business

Ms. Wolfe discussed upcoming events and council attendance, including the USA Cup and 3M Open and commented on the importance that these events remain free of campaign activities.

City Attorney Loonan encouraged the city council to reach out to him if they have any questions regarding campaign rules.

5. Adjournment

The workshop was adjourned at 9:04PM.



Signed by _____


Tim Sanders, Mayor

Signed by _____


Catherine M. Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk