



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

April 7, 2025 | 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 5:33PM.

2. Roll Call

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders, Councilmembers Terra Fleming, Chris Ford, Leslie Larson, Tom Newland, and Jess Robertson.

ABSENT: Councilmember Chris Massoglia.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Assistant Community Development Director Sheila Sellman; Police Captain Russ Clark; Finance Director Jason Zimmerman; Director of Administration Scott Johnson; Director of Engineering Dan Schluender; City Attorney Tom Loonan; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3. New Business

- 3.1.** 2025-65 Charter Review of City Governance
Sponsors: Tom Loonan, City Attorney

City Attorney Loonan provided a presentation regarding the city charter, which was Blaine's governing document. He focused on the form of government and charter provisions regarding the roles of the council and city manager. He explained the hiring of the city manager as the only personnel decision the council gets to make. He stated the primary

focus of the city council was to adopt policy, enact ordinances, set the legislative agenda and approve the budget. He explained the city manager was in charge of running the city, implementing policies, enforcing ordinances, hiring and managing all personnel and administering the budget. He indicated the charter prohibits the city council from interfering with the city manager's authority to appoint officers and employees. He reported the city manager reports to the city council and all city employees report to the city manager.

Councilmember Robertson asked if email questions that were sent to staff could be responded to by staff and sent to the entire city council. Mr. Loonan reported this was allowed, noting this email would then become public data. He explained this is best practice because it provides the entire city council with the same information.

Mr. Loonan further discussed the role of the council and the city manager with respect to the budgeting process. He noted the city manager is tasked with preparing the estimates for the annual budget. After the budget is approved, only certain appropriations or changes can be made to the budget by a super-majority vote of the council. He described how policies and procedures put in place by the council then direct the city manager in the administering of the budget.

Further discussion ensued regarding the annual audit that was completed each year.

Mr. Loonan encouraged the council as they enter into the city manager hiring process to consider what skill sets would be valued. He then shared that he would be stepping away from city government work and that City Attorney Eric Larson would be lead attorney for the city beginning in June.

Mayor Sanders thanked Mr. Loonan for his efforts on behalf of the community.

City Manager Wolfe reported Mr. Larson would be brought in on issues over the coming months in order to get him up to speed with issues the city was currently facing.

Councilmember Newland asked if Blaine being a charter city was unique. Mr. Loonan stated this was a minority position, noting the majority of cities have a city administrator and all employees answer to the city council.

Ms. Wolfe reported Shoreview, New Brighton and White Bear Lake were all city manager form of government but added on a day to day basis, it makes very little difference between having a city administrator or city manager except when it comes to hiring and disciplining employees.

Councilmember Newland requested further information regarding the chief of police position. Mr. Loonan explained city charter allows the city manager to appoint and hire all positions except the chief of police, which is a city council hire.

Councilmember Ford asked where the recruiter was in the process in terms of speaking with each of the city councilmembers. Director of Administrative Services Johnson reported the recruiter has spoken to two councilmembers to date and meetings will be set up with the remaining councilmembers.

Ms. Wolfe indicated she had submitted an official letter of resignation to the mayor and her last day with the city would be July 3.

Councilmember Newland recommended the council set a deadline for the meetings with the recruiter in order to keep this process moving forward. Mayor Sanders agreed and said all meetings should be held by April 18. He thanked City Manager Wolfe for her tremendous leadership for the community through COVID, the robust development of the entertainment district and for securing financing for TH65 then recommended the position of interim city manager be given to Community Development Director Eric Thorvig, noting he had served the city in this capacity in the past.

3.2. 2025-66 Legislative Update
 Sponsors: Michelle Wolfe, City Manager

Ms. Wolfe stated staff members have discussed the city's legislative agendas at previous workshops and provided a brief summary regarding the following:

1. Status of federal funding requests
2. Status of city-proposed state legislation
3. Other miscellaneous legislative updates

Ms. Wolfe explained the city did not receive funding for the mobile command vehicles, which was a plus because the price had increased significantly and the city did not have this in the budget. She indicated staff would be resubmitted a request on the mobile command vehicle in 2025 with new costs. She reported the city would be making a request for \$553,000 for the Blaine trails and ramps rehabilitation project. She indicated the city would also be requesting four mobile monitoring trailers. She stated she would forward documentation regarding the social district to the council.

Mayor Sanders commented further on the bill that was proposed for special taxing districts. He noted a moratorium had been put in place to allow the legislature to study this issue. He indicated the city was interested in putting a special taxing district in place as part of the entertainment district due to the 7 million sports visitors the city receives each year. He anticipated the city was two years away from having a bill in place.

Community Development Director Thorvig explained the city's lobbyists recommended the bill be introduced this year with the understanding it would take several years to be approved. He indicated the entertainment district would also take several years to construct. He discussed how the special taxes raised from the district would help with public safety expenditures, ongoing maintenance and landscaping. He commented further on the area that would be included within the special taxing district.

Councilmember Robertson thanked staff and Mayor Sanders for this providing the council with more detailed information and for working on behalf of the city to pursue the special taxing district.

Councilmember Newland questioned what the likelihood was that the moratorium would go

away.

Mayor Sanders stated he believed the moratorium would go away, but he had yet to understand what the final bill would look like that addresses special taxing districts.

Councilmember Larson asked if the missing middle bill was back before the legislature. Mr. Thorvig reported this bill had been brought back before the legislature for consideration and noted the city had spoken against this bill.

4. Other Business

City Manager Wolfe shared updates on the upcoming LMC conference, Lexington water lawsuit, well interference, and invited the city council to tour the current garage before the next council workshop meeting.

Councilmember Larson requested further information on the EDA agenda item that would be considered this evening. Mr. Thorvig commented the requested action would provide the applicant with a commercial loan to assist with rebuilding the commercial kitchen for the proposed restaurant. He explained based on the applicant's credit report, staff was recommending approval of the loan.

5. Adjournment

The workshop was adjourned at 6:45PM.



Signed by

Tim Sanders, Mayor

Signed by

Catherine M. Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk