



City of Blaine

City Council Workshop

September 8, 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 5:30PM.

2. Roll Call

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders (arrived at 5:58PM), Councilmembers Terra Fleming, Chris Ford, Leslie Larson, Chris Massoglia, Tom Newland, and Jess Robertson.

ABSENT: None.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: Interim City Manager/Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Assistant Community Development Director Sheila Sellman; Safety Services Director/Police Chief Brian Podany; Finance Director Jason Zimmerman; Director of Administrative Services Scott Johnson; Director of Engineering Dan Schluender; Public Works Director Nick Fleischacker; Deputy Public Works Director Jason Grode; Public Works Street Supervisor Pat Parenteau; City Forester Kris Paulseth; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3. New Business

- 3.1.** 2025-204 Metropolitan Council Representative Peter Lindstrom
Sponsors: Erik Thorvig, City Manager

Interim City Manager/Community Development Director Thorvig stated representatives from Metropolitan Council were in attendance to update the city council on activities occurring at the Metropolitan Council that impact Blaine.

Peter Lindstrom and Elias Montesa, Metropolitan Council, provided the council with an update. Mr. Lindstrom described the services that were provided by the Met Council throughout the metro area which included metro transit, sewer and waste water services, as well as serving as a planning agency and HRA. He reported the city sends the Met Council 1.6 billion gallons of waste water each year for treatment. He explained the challenges facing water and waste water are reduced groundwater recharge and increased water demand along with an aging infrastructure. He stated he was excited for the bus rapid transit F Line to be coming to Northtown in 2028. In addition, he was looking forward to micro transit coming to Blaine. He reviewed the zones that would be covered by Met Council's micro transit program. He commented on the regional guide that was just launched by the Met Council, noting Blaine would begin planning for its next Comprehensive Plan in the coming year. He congratulated the city for receiving grant funding for ash tree removal and provided further information on the water efficiency grants that were available from the Met Council.

Mr. Thorvig explained the city would be working on the 2050 comprehensive plan over the next three years. He noted a staff representative from the Met Council would be discussing the comprehensive plan update at the October 6 workshop meeting.

Councilmember Larson questioned who paid for the micro transit service. Mr. Lindstrom explained the micro transit program would be covered by the sales tax that was enacted in 2023.

Councilmember Newland inquired when the micro transit system would be expanded to the east side of TH65. Mr. Lindstrom reported a whole host of things would be taken into consideration before expanding this service to the east side of TH65.

Councilmember Newland asked how District 10 would expand in the next 15 years. Mr. Lindstrom commented he would have this information for the council in October. He estimated the population of Blaine would grow by another 18,000 people by 2050.

Councilmember Newland questioned if all cities pay the same rate for wastewater treatment services. Mr. Lindstrom stated this was the case.

Councilmember Newland inquired if Met Council positions would become elected at some point. Mr. Lindstrom explained he was uncertain noting the legislature would be making a decision on this matter.

Councilmember Robertson asked how the city can balance groundwater reserves and a constant drive for additional density. She stated the majority of the land left for development in Blaine was wetlands and the city had to consider how to protect the natural resources. She discussed how every community in the metro area was different and it was her hope Blaine would be able to hang on to some of its unique features and larger lots for the residents in Blaine who wish to live on one-acre lots. Mr. Lindstrom stated he looked forward to further discussing these topics with the council in October.

Councilmember Massoglia questioned if Met Council had any future plans for the park and ride at 95th Avenue off of 35W. Mr. Lindstrom reported this park and ride would be getting

more express service.

Councilmember Ford inquired what the numbers are looking like when it comes to affordable housing. Mr. Lindstrom explained there continues to be a great need and noted this topic would be further discussed in October.

Mayor Sanders thanked Mr. Lindstrom and Mr. Montesa for their presentation.

3.2. 2025-205 Forestry Update

Sponsors: Nick Fleischhacker, Public Works Director

City Forester Paulseth presented the following forestry updates:

- Diseased and Hazard tree program
- Staffing
- Tree Inventory
- Tree Replacement
- Maintenance of Urban Forest
- Resident Consultations/Education

Mr. Paulseth estimated the city had an estimated 1,200 boulevard trees that were diseased/dying and needed to be removed. He reported the number of diseased trees in the city's parks was unknown. He estimated it cost \$1,000 to remove a tree and the city has allocated \$150,000 for tree removal. He indicated it would take the city eight years to remove the diseased trees in the boulevards. He explained in-house staff was able to remove some trees and noted staff was also seeking grants to assist with tree removal. He stated his goal would be to hire dedicated arborists to assist with maintenance of the city's trees. He indicated this would assist the forestry department by expanding capabilities and making the department more proactive versus reactive. He discussed the benefits of completing a tree inventory noting the cost would be \$150,000. He discussed how the city offers trees through a tree sale to residents that have lost diseased trees on the boulevard. He stated he would be looking into completing some social media pushes in order to assist with educating the public on pertinent tree information. He commented on the grant the city received to assist with tree removals and reviewed a map of the priority areas where trees would be removed. He indicated he would continue to pursue grant opportunities that would assist property owners with EAB tree removal.

Councilmember Massoglia asked how the boulevard was defined by the city. Mr. Paulseth reported the boulevard was the 15 feet from the back of the curb. He noted the right of way was to be maintained by the property owner, but the city had the right to make these areas better. He noted all the city's funding was focused on boulevard tree removal at this time.

Councilmember Newland inquired how the city addressed diseased trees on private property. Mr. Paulseth indicated he can inspect the trees and deem them a hazard or non-hazard. He reported if a tree is deemed a hazard, he can begin the abatement process. Mr. Thorvig explained the abatement charge is then forwarded to the property owner.

Councilmember Fleming stated she was hearing that staff needed more support in order to

properly address the diseased and hazard trees in the city. Mr. Paulseth indicated he would need more staff in order to properly address the diseased and dying trees in the community. Mr. Thorvig reported the 2026 budget has been set at this point but noted funding for forestry work could be further considered within the 2027 budget.

Councilmember Robertson explained she was pleased the city had a forester on staff as the council had been advocating for this position for some time. She noted a lot of communities are struggling to manage their tree inventory and Emerald ash borer (EAB). She was hopeful it would only take the city eight years to address this concern. She asked how abatement fees were charged to residents. Mr. Paulseth reported the abatement fees were charged to homeowners' property taxes.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she wanted to see the city forestry department properly staffed but noted when she advocated for this position, she did not intend to hire an entire department of arborists. She supported the council further discussing this topic and what the forestry department looks like long term. Mr. Paulseth clarified the three new positions he was proposing would not be new positions; rather, he would take two individuals from the streets positions and one position from parks, noting these individuals were already doing tree work. Public Works Director Fleischhacker explained the city already had a forestry department and the city has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in forestry equipment. He reported this was a specialized job and noted it was difficult to safely put staff members into positions they are not properly trained for. He noted future hires would take into consideration forestry needs for the city.

Councilmember Ford commented on the history of EAB and stated the city now had numerous dead ash trees that had to be removed. He asked how many residents knew about the EAB injections. Mr. Paulseth anticipated not many residents knew about or participated in the EAB injections.

Councilmember Massoglia inquired if the abatement expenses for removing a tree could be spread out over several years. Mr. Paulseth was uncertain, but noted other cities he has worked for were able to spread the payments out over five years and charged an 8% service fee.

Councilmember Massoglia supported the city looking into this further because he anticipated residents could not afford to pay a \$6,000 abatement fee for a diseased tree in one year. Mr. Paulseth stated he could look into this, noting many trees would be coming down in the next two or three years before they cause property damage in the community.

Councilmember Larson indicated she was curious to learn how other communities were managing dead and diseased trees. Finance Director Zimmerman reported the city had a process in place within city code to address tree abatements. Mr. Paulseth explained there would be a lot of tree abatement going forward due to the large number of dead and hazardous trees on private property.

Further discussion ensued regarding the process the city forester follows in order to deem a tree hazardous.

Mayor Sanders thanked Mr. Paulseth for his detailed presentation.

3.3. 2025-206 Public Works Sidewalk and Trail Plowing
Sponsors: Nick Fleischhacker, Public Works Director

Mr. Fleischhacker stated in the past, this item has come up for discussion relating to the cost and process of the city plowing the sidewalks and trails. Sec. 70-2 of the city code states that for the duty of the owner or occupant of the abutting property: (B)(1) "No owner or occupant of any property, in front of which or adjacent to which a sidewalk has been constructed for the use of the public, shall allow snow to remain upon the sidewalk longer than 48 hours after the snow has ceased to fall thereon." Historically, the city has removed snow from sidewalks which is in conflict of the city ordinance. Staff presented the cost of equipment and labor, and what processes public works currently utilizes to get sidewalks and trails plowed during and after a snow event.

Public Works Street Supervisor Parenteau spoke to the council further regarding the equipment that was used to clear the sidewalks and trails in the city. He described the process that was followed to clear the city's sidewalks and trails, noting this process may have to be done twice if the snow begins to blow, if drifts are created, or if the county goes through and covers the sidewalks. It was noted a full plow of the city was called out for a snow event over two inches.

Mr. Fleischhacker stated he understood the city had a very expensive piece of equipment for removing snow in the sidewalks, but noted this has been the only piece of equipment that has done the job well. He explained if residents were responsible for removing snow from sidewalks, this could reduce overtime for public works staff, but noted there would be a lengthy education process that would have to be followed in order to get residents used to the new procedure. He asked if the council wanted staff to amend or follow the current ordinance.

Councilmember Larson stated if the city completes the snow removal, this would require an ordinance amendment. She wondered if a notice would be sent to residents regarding this change. Mr. Fleischhacker stated there were residents who cleared their sidewalks at this time and if the ordinance were amended he anticipated these same residents would continue to clear their sidewalks. Mr. Thorvig indicated the ordinance could be amended and the city would continue its current practice.

Councilmember Newland inquired what percentage of residents currently cleared their own sidewalks. Mr. Parenteau estimated 15% to 20% of residents cleared their own sidewalks currently.

Councilmember Newland asked if staff knew what the sidewalk only costs were for snow removal events. Mr. Fleischhacker anticipated the city was dispatching staff for 12 sidewalk events per year. Mr. Parenteau stated this was the case, but noted each winter and the labor required for each snow event was different.

Councilmember Newland stated it would benefit the council to have a number on how much was being spent because if it was only \$60,000 to remove snow from sidewalks, the

council may not support a change. However, if this number was closer to \$600,000, the council may want to make a change. He explained at this time, he supported the city continuing to clear sidewalks because 80% of the population was not clearing their sidewalk.

Councilmember Ford supported the service remaining as is in order to keep the sidewalks free and clear. He anticipated it would be a headache for staff to try and enforce a "must clear within 48 hours" mandate.

Councilmember Massoglia questioned what the savings would be if the city did not plow 100+ miles of sidewalk going forward. Mr. Fleischhacker explained there was a lot of nuisances to consider because the city would only be responsible for 11 miles of sidewalk, but would then have to enforce the clearing of all other sidewalks, which would still take staff time to enforce. He stated he did not have a good number as to what this would look like.

Councilmember Fleming commented the city would be taking a service away and would then be adding an enforcement service, which was making it difficult for staff to put a number on.

Councilmember Robertson stated the council was looking for answers to this question because this topic was brought to staff at a previous meeting. She explained the council would have to consider the cost of providing what type of amenities should and should not be provided by the city. She asked if staff cleared trails in the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) in the winter months. Mr. Fleischhacker reported these trails were not cleared because it was a boardwalk.

Councilmember Robertson inquired if the proposed concrete segments in the BWS would trigger additional costs or the need for additional equipment as she was not in favor of this. She reiterated the need for the council to consider what services or amenities were required for the city to provide, noting the city could not continue to say yes to everything. She stated the council would have benefited by having five-year average costs for overtime/staffing and equipment costs. Mr. Fleischhacker explained it was difficult for him to estimate future costs because he was uncertain how many residents would not clear their sidewalk. He anticipated he would need the same amount of staff because instead of clearing sidewalks he would now be placing staff members in pickup trucks to drive through the city to see if all of the sidewalks have been cleared by residents.

Councilmember Massoglia stated this may be the case, but noted residents would now have to pay to have their sidewalk cleared if they were unwilling to clear the sidewalk themselves.

Councilmember Fleming asked how long the city has been clearing sidewalks. Mr. Parenteau stated the city has been clearing sidewalks since the mid 1980s.

Councilmember Fleming commented on what staff would have to do if the city was no longer responsible for clearing the sidewalks as she believed the city would be far more efficient to remain in the current situation. She did not support the city stopping this amenity after completing this work for the past 40+ years.

Councilmember Ford agreed, noting a precedent has been set by the actions of the city. He said he did not believe it was right to take this service away just for safety reasons alone. He questioned what amount of money had to be saved in order to equal the same amount of safety the city was currently providing. He was of the opinion the city was not wasting money by keeping the sidewalks free and clear of snow and ice in the winter months.

Councilmember Larson agreed.

Councilmember Massoglia said he did not believe it was efficient for the city to be driving over sidewalks that were already cleared. He indicated this was a waste of city resources.

Councilmember Fleming stated it was a better use of resources than having staff driving through the entire city to see which sidewalks were cleared and which were not. She anticipated if the city council were to complete public works tasks in the winter months, the city council's opinion on this matter would change. She commented further on how the workload for staff would greatly increase if they were required to drive the entire city to see which sidewalks needed to be cleared and then bring back equipment to clear these sidewalks.

Mayor Sanders explained he was able to ride along with a plow driver two years ago and he found it to be a fascinating experience. He supported the council having a further discussion regarding service levels at a future council retreat. He stated his neighborhood was extremely active in the winter months and he would rather see residents walking on the sidewalks versus walking in the streets in the winter months. He was of the opinion Blaine residents did not mind paying for the services that were being provided by the city. He commented further on how valuable it was to residents to have parks mowed and sidewalks plowed.

Councilmember Newland asked what the life expectancy was for one of the sidewalk plows. Mr. Parenteau noted the city has been ordering one of these pieces of equipment every year. He indicated the oldest piece of equipment the city had at this time was 2019, noting the city's fleet has almost been replaced. He estimated these pieces of equipment would last 10+ years.

Councilmember Robertson reiterated that safety was important to her as well, but she supported the council having a further discussion on service level prioritization at a future council retreat.

Councilmember Massoglia indicated if the council wanted to move forward with providing this service, he supported the ordinance being amended. He reiterated that plowing city sidewalks was not an essential city service and by providing this service, the council was not committed to leveling off the tax levy.

Mayor Sanders reported there was enough support to amend the city ordinance in order to continue the ongoing practice and recommended another conversation be held regarding service level prioritization.

Council consensus was to amend the ordinance and continue plowing sidewalks but review

the average cost to continue to plow sidewalks over five years for review at an upcoming service level prioritization retreat.

3.4. 2025-207 Utility Franchise Fees

Sponsors: Erik Thorvig, City Manager, Jason Zimmerman, Finance Director

Mr. Thorvig stated earlier this year, the city council was presented with information on alternative revenue sources to reduce the burden on property taxpayers in the city of Blaine. One of the options discussed was utility franchise fees. The council directed staff to explore franchise fees further. It was noted interim city manager and finance director met with all gas and electric utility providers in Blaine. They include CenterPoint Energy (gas), Xcel Energy (gas and electric), Connexus (electric) and Centennial Utilities (gas). The purpose of the meetings was to inform the utility companies about Blaine's potential desire to establish franchise fees, discuss the process for establishing said fee, and obtain data from the utility companies. Utility providers, like those for gas and electricity, are required by Minnesota law to deliver services that are safe, adequate, and efficient. To do this, they often need to use public areas like roads and sidewalks, which are known as public rights-of-way.

Mr. Thorvig reported because cities are responsible for managing these rights-of-way, they often create franchise agreements with utility companies. A franchise agreement is a contract that gives a utility company the right to install, maintain, and repair its equipment within a city's public grounds or rights-of-way. In Minnesota, cities have broad authority under state law to negotiate these agreements, which are formalized as ordinances. In order to continue the delivery of these utility services and ensure uniform provisions, staff have begun the process of meeting with providers to review existing agreements in preparation for renegotiating with Northern States Power Company (Xcel Energy) and Anoka Electric Cooperative (Connexus Energy). In order to establish a franchise fee, current agreements need to be in place with all utility providers.

Mr. Zimmerman explained per [Minnesota Statute 216B.36](#), a city may impose a franchise fee on a gas or electric utility for the use of the public right-of-way by adopting an ordinance that establishes fee terms, including structure, collection, schedule and effective dates. Historically, the City has not imposed its authority to collect franchise fees related to these utility services, although the concept was informally presented at the [January 13, 2025, City Council Workshop](#) and in subsequent budgetary discussions. There is no cap on the fee rate and the fees can be used for any public purpose. Cities have the option of imposing a flat fee (e.g., \$3 per month) or a percentage fee (e.g., 3 percent) based on utility usage. These fees can vary between residential customers and various commercial customer types. While a flat fee is constant from month-to-month, a percentage-based fee varies seasonally. When comparing franchise fees as a revenue source to property taxes, advantages include:

- Local control of processes and fee structure.
- Wider base than property taxes.
- Inclusion of tax-exempt properties.
- Diversification of the city's revenue sources.
- Reliable source of revenue.

- New construction would contribute immediately, which would eliminate the one-to-two-year lag for the City to receive property taxes for property owners receiving municipal services.

Mr. Zimmemran commented some disadvantages of franchise fees include:

- Unlike cable franchise fees paid only by subscribers, everyone must pay since gas and electricity are essential services.
- Significant administrative time is required to establish franchise fees and implement them concurrently.
- Potential resistance from utility providers to implement fees proposed by the city.

Mr. Zimmerman stated if the council directs staff to continue working on establishing franchise fees, the goal would be to have franchise agreements and fees in place sometime in 2026. The process for establishing fees requires approval by each utility's public utility commission or board of directors. Significant communication by the utility companies to rate payers is also necessary. The city has started the process early enough that implementation is feasible in 2026 and revenue projections available for 2027 budget discussions. While the council isn't limited to how the funds are used, cities typically allocate them to specific capital improvements, such as roads and/or parks.

Councilmember Fleming asked how a franchise fee differed from raising the city's tax levy. Mr. Zimmerman explained there were a couple of benefits from instituting a franchise fee which were those that consumed these services would pay, including tax-exempt properties. He commented further on how a franchise fee could assist the city with reducing its debt load over time. Mr. Thorvig reported the intent of the franchise fee would be to assist in lowering the tax levy.

Mayor Sanders indicated it would be important for the city to properly set the franchise fees so as not to price out certain businesses in the community. He asked that staff further investigate the franchise fees that are being charged by Maple Grove, Lakeville, Coon Rapids, Woodbury and Plymouth. Mr. Zimmerman stated he could look into this further.

Councilmember Larson explained she supported the city looking into a percentage for the franchise fee versus a flat fee.

Council consensus was to continue with the process of establishing franchise fees.

4. Other Business

Mr. Thorvig shared comments regarding media contact on the recent proposed beach ordinance.

5. Adjournment

The workshop was adjourned at 8:09PM.



Signed by

Tim Sanders, Mayor

Signed by

Catherine M. Sorensen, City Clerk