



# City of Blaine

## City Council Workshop

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February 18, 2026 | 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 Ford, Leslie Larson, Chris Massoglia, Tom Newland, and Jess Robertson.

**ABSENT:** None.

Quorum Present.

**ALSO PRESENT:** City Manager Erik Thorvig; 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; City Attorney Eric Larson; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

#### 3. New Business

- 3.1. 2026-50      Community Engagement in Blaine  
*Sponsors: Ben Hayle, Communications Manager*

Communications Manager Hayle stated community engagement is a core function of the City's communications and outreach efforts and supports transparency, trust, and informed participation in City activities and decision-making. The city currently engages residents through a variety of methods, including informational communications, two-way feedback opportunities, and in-person and virtual engagement activities. As community expectations

continue to evolve, it is important for council and staff to periodically align on what effective community engagement looks like for Blaine and identify opportunities to strengthen future efforts. He said the workshop discussion is intended to provide a shared understanding of current engagement activities, allow council to discuss perspectives on engagement expectations, and identify strategic opportunities for future community engagement. Mr. Hayle requested council feedback to inform future engagement approaches and will report back with options or recommendations as appropriate.

Councilmember Fleming said she believed successful community engagement should include communication to the community one topic at a time in order to create better understanding.

Councilmember Larson stated being present and available was important.

Councilmember Robertson appreciated how the community attended specific city-hosted events as well as the adopt a park and special programs hosted by the city.

Councilmember Newland explained it was important for the city to try as many avenues as possible to reach the residents in Blaine as often as the city can.

Councilmember Ford said he believed the city should be listening to all voices, not just the loudest voice, and pay special attention to the underrepresented voices.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he believed the city was doing a good job communicating with the public.

Mayor Sanders indicated it was important that the city was providing accurate information with the public.

Mr. Hayle described how the city was currently informing the public and asked the council how the city what resources were best informing the public at this time.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he believed the city's website and newsletters were the best resources for reaching the public.

Councilmember Larson indicated she believed she found the most information from the city on social media.

Mr. Hayle inquired how the city receives the most meaningful feedback.

Councilmember Robertson reported she believed this was most meaningful through direct contact with residents. She explained it was important to hear the issues at this level.

Councilmember Newland agreed direct communication with a resident was valuable.

Mr. Hayle asked how engaging with the community adds value to the city.

Councilmember Newland stated Night to Unite was a valuable community engagement event.

Councilmember Ford commented the park board surveys were valuable.

Councilmember Robertson explained she did not want Blaine to get too big or feel too big, that people did not have a place to engage with the city and said she appreciated all the ways in which the community can engage with the city.

Councilmember Larson reported she attended the citizens' academy last year and believed this was a great program.

Mr. Hayle questioned if the council believed the community was in a place where they could partner with the city.

Councilmember Fleming commented she believed the answer to this was no because there were residents that believed the council's mind was already made up on certain matters and the city did not appear open to partnering with the public.

Councilmember Massoglia spoke to how the city partnered with business owners through the EDA. He appreciated how there were individuals that lived in Blaine that wanted to invest in this community.

Mr. Hayle inquired if there were ways staff could be more intentional about engaging with the public.

Councilmember Larson believed staff was doing a great job on communicating with the public.

Mayor Sanders discussed how important it was for the public to understand the process that planning applications follow and be encouraged to speak at planning commission meetings. He noted once items get to the city council, he has already done his due diligence to understand the request and that council was ready to take action on the items. Mr. Hayle stated an upcoming newsletter article drafted by staff will speak to this point and help the public better understand city government processes.

Councilmember Robertson explained she appreciated how well the planning commission meetings were run by Chair Goracke and how he encouraged residents to speak with staff and city councilmembers.

Mr. Hayle asked that the councilmembers speak with their ward colleague and provide staff with comments on what issues staff could be directing their efforts on.

Councilmember Newland requested the city complete proactive outreach with the community on University Avenue in order to learn what was important along this corridor.

Councilmember Robertson stated it would be important for the city to learn how to better engage with the public that complains on the internet. She said she believed there needed to be collaboration between the council and staff when engaging with the public.

Councilmember Fleming suggested once or twice a month that the city consider hosting

coffee with a councilmember in order to allow the public to ask the council questions in a public setting.

Mayor Sanders indicated the city does not hear enough from the business community and suggested the city host round-table events with local business owners.

Mr. Hayle thanked the council for their feedback. He noted he would summarize the comments he received and would report back to the council at a future meeting.

**3.2.** 2026-51 Digital Accessibility Requirements  
*Sponsors: Ben Hayle, Communications Manager*

Mr. Hayle stated in April 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a final rule under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II requiring state and local governments to make their digital content accessible to individuals with disabilities. The rule adopts the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA as the required technical standard. For public entities serving populations of 50,000 or more, including the city of Blaine, the compliance deadline is April 24, 2026. Staff has been working diligently over the last year to achieve compliance and to put new systems in place to address accessibility on an ongoing basis. He outlined how the requirements would apply to a wide range of city digital content, including but not limited to city websites, PDF documents and council packets, online forms and applications, videos and live-streamed meetings, digital presentations, social media channels, and other electronic communications used to provide city services. Mr. Hayle provided further information on the federal mandate, explained what WCAG 2.1 means in practical terms, and outlined how these requirements may affect city council meetings, materials, staff presentations, and how content is presented to the community. He described how staff was preparing to meet these new standards to ensure the city's content would meet the proper standards for all digital spaces.

City Manager Thorvig commended Mr. Hayle and his team for being ahead of the curve when it comes to meeting the digital accessibility requirements.

**3.3.** 2026-66 2027 Budget Schedule  
*Sponsors: Erik Thorvig, City Manager*

Mr. Thorvig stated the staff budget team has been meeting to strategize preparation of the 2027 budget. In 2025, several processes and philosophical changes occurred both with the council and staff, which resulted in a collaborative budget outcome. A structured schedule sets expectations for council and staff as the 2027 budget is prepared. As has been done in previous years, small group council member meetings are scheduled to be held in March/April. These meetings are effective in allowing a platform for council members to ask specific questions and provide guidance on their opinions about the budget. Additionally, any guidance provided by council early in the process sets expectations for staff as preliminary budgets are prepared. Last year, key benchmarks/values were discussed early in the year with the council, which set expectations. Staff has also discussed whether there is an ability to reduce meetings by limiting presentation content and combining certain

funds/topics that in years past have not yielded extensive council discussion. By doing so, more focus can be had on the general fund levy, which is generally the most discussed. Retreats may be utilized for more in-depth discussion. Staff is also trying to avoid the need to schedule meetings on a 5th Monday. Lastly, the past two years resulted in budget reduction suggestions by council late in the process. Staff comments on key benchmarks within the schedule and requested feedback from Council on how to address these ideas earlier in the process (July/August timeframe) so suggestions can be vetted and potentially applied prior to adoption of the preliminary levy.

Councilmember Massoglia suggested a budget subcommittee be considered. Mr. Thorvig explained this could be further explored if the council supported pursuing a budget subcommittee.

Mayor Sanders explained the subcommittee was not pursued last year because the finance team was hiring new staff as well as a new city manager. He indicated he supported the council having a budget subcommittee with two or three councilmembers so long as the council was being mindful of the staff time that would be involved.

Councilmember Robertson inquired what policy-driven decisions should be made by the council to impact the budget. She indicated she wanted to respect staff's time and noted she greatly appreciated the new process that was followed in 2025. She explained she did not mind the longer, detailed staff presentations on the budget because they provided a great deal of information and answered many of her questions.

Mayor Sanders commented on how five councilmembers had decisions to make regarding running for council office this year and stated he did not want this process to impact the budget for the coming year.

Councilmember Newland indicated he liked how the budget began with small group meetings. He suggested these meetings still be held prior to the budget subcommittee working on the budget. He explained it was his goal the budget would pass on a 5-2 or better vote this year.

Councilmember Robertson hoped the city would work to spend less money in 2027 in order to gain full council approval of the budget and tax levy. She encouraged staff and the council to look at the budget and future funding with a wider lens.

Councilmember Ford explained the city would benefit by having a two-or three-year financial plan in order to reduce the levy over time.

Councilmember Fleming indicated the city had a five-year financial plan in place. Finance Director Zimmerman reported this was the case for key operating funds.

Councilmember Fleming explained she didn't want to hear that the city just needed to spend less but rather hear definitive and clear goals for moving the budget forward. Mr. Thorvig encouraged the council to bring their ideas forward when it comes to the budget sooner rather than later for staff analysis.

Councilmember Massoglia supported the council having a discussion on what policies

should be set in order to address the levy and tax rate.

**4. Other Business**

None.

**5. Adjournment**

The workshop adjourned at 6:59PM.



Signed by

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Tim Sanders, Mayor

Signed by

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Catherine M. Sorensen, City Clerk