



City of Blaine Anoka County, Minnesota Minutes

Blaine City Hall
10801 Town Sq Dr NE
Blaine MN 55449

City Council Workshop

While this is a public meeting where interested persons are welcome to attend, it is a work session for City Council and staff to discuss issues before them. It is not for the purpose of receiving public input.

Monday, November 8, 2021

6:15 PM

Cloverleaf Farm Room A

NOTICE OF WORKSHOP MEETING

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:15PM.

2 Roll Call

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders, Councilmembers Wes Hovland, Julie Jeppson, Chris Massoglia, Richard Paul, Jess Robertson, and Jason Smith.

Adjunct Member Drew Brown.

ABSENT: None.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; City Engineer Dan Schluender; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

Present: 7 - Councilmember Robertson, Councilmember Paul, Councilmember Hovland, Massoglia, Smith, Sanders, and Councilmember Jeppson

3 New Business

3-1

Council Requested Items for Discussion

Councilmember Paul stated he would like to receive a presentation from a member of the Housing and Economic Development Committee from Metro Cities.

Councilmember Jeppson indicated she was not opposed to receiving a presentation but noted the city's workshop agendas have been quite full

and scheduling should be prioritized with the current schedule. Councilmember Massoglia stated if the time was right, he supported the council having a presentation on affordable housing.

Councilmember Robertson was of the opinion the council should have a better vision for its housing before inviting in guest speakers.

Mayor Sanders recommended the contact at Metro Cities be given to Mr. Thorvig and that this individual be invited to attend a future workshop meeting. Ms. Wolfe explained she would reach out to the resource and would plan future housing discussions for the council.

Discussed

10 Minute Discussion

3-2

Development Customer Service Final Report

Attachments: [Final Customer Service Session](#)

Mr. Thorvig stated customer service is an integral part of any government and business function. As an internal goal for 2021, and in response to Mayor and Council input, staff identified the need to review customer service practices specifically related to development and permitting processes. He reviewed the development process as well as permitting process and how both processes involve personnel from planning, economic development, building inspections, engineering and fire inspections. He shared next steps identified by staff to assist the public through these processes, and noted that overall, considering the volume of development and permits reviewed by the city, Blaine does a very good job of providing customer service, however, there is always an opportunity to improve and educate.

Mr. Thorvig reported the city hired Craig Rapp to provide staff training and assistance. Mr. Rapp assisted the city with the strategic planning process and is very familiar with Blaine and municipal government. City staff attended two training/information gathering sessions. Approximately 35 staff from the departments mentioned above attended. The city's four values (Professionalism, Integrity, Respect and Innovation) were an overarching theme in these discussions. Staff commented further on the training sessions held in order to improve the development review process, along with proactive and effective communication.

Councilmember Hovland recommended the City's outside inspectors be included on the training.

Mayor Sanders questioned who would be responsible for ensuring there

was a cultural integration as a result of this training. Mr. Thorvig stated it will fall on the city manager and department heads to communicate the message regarding the importance of customer service.

Councilmember Hovland indicated this training was geared towards the inspection and planning department, but all departments should review this information.

Councilmember Robertson inquired if staff has had buy in from employees. Mr. Thorvig stated he has seen a shift in staff and sensed that customer service is on the forefront for his department. Public Works Director Haukaas stated the Public Works Department has also been involved in these discussions and he too has seen a shift towards better customer service.

Ms. Wolfe commented work was being done with department heads and senior leaders to identify and define organizational values. She reported these would be built into performance evaluations and everything the city does. She stated she would also be working on norms of behavior.

Councilmember Robertson discussed how she has been educating herself while working to phrase questions to staff in a positive manner to assist where possible.

Councilmember Hovland asked if there was a metric in place to measure success going forward. Mr. Thorvig stated a metric was not in place but would be created as part of this process, adding one measure could be a reduction in the number of complaints. Ms. Wolfe commented if the council believed something should be added in this could be done, otherwise staff would continue to provide updates on staff's progress.

Councilmember Paul appreciated the fact staff went through this training.

Mayor Sanders stated he has appreciated seeing a shift and thanked staff for their efforts and encouraged staff to celebrate the victories they have experienced.

Discussed

45 Minute Discussion

3-3

Board/Commission Appointment Process Review

Attachments: [September 2021 Council and Commissions List](#)
 [Board-Commission Appointment Process - Council Policy](#)
 [Board and Commission Appointment Process](#)

City Clerk Sorensen stated after the 2021 board/commission appointments occurred, council requested that staff review and make recommendations on ways to better streamline the process including a review of current boards'/commissions' purpose/focus. Councilmember Jeppson offered to assist in the review as she had some suggestions. These suggestions were reviewed with the council. Staff is requesting Council input on the proposed board/ commission appointment process. Once direction is provided, an amended policy will be presented for approval if necessary.

Councilmember Jeppson discussed how Blaine has changed over time and stated she would like to see the board/commission process change as well. She explained she could not understand why commissioners had to reapply each year when they are appointed to two three year terms. She recommended interviews only be held when there was an opening. She reported she would always like to see a diversity of wards on each commission, but also wanted qualified and knowledgeable individuals serving the city. She indicated she supported commissioners having a term limit, such as three, three-year terms.

Councilmember Hovland agreed he did not like having to decline an appointment for a qualified individual because they did not live within a certain ward. He discussed the unique skill set the planning commissioners had to have in order to review planning cases. He noted the natural resource board members also had to have a unique skill set.

Councilmember Robertson supported commission/board members having a term limit that would two three-year terms. She stated a term of two years was challenging because it was too short. She recommended the interview process be condensed in order to streamline the process.

Councilmember Hovland recommended the chairs from each commission meet with the council in order to hear ideas and thoughts. Ms. Sorensen stated this was one thing discussed under the strategic plan to grow the relationships between the council and its commissions. She explained staff was working on this and noted an annual report could be given by each chair to the council.

Councilmember Paul discussed how the city was changing and stated he supported the city changing its interview process for the commission/board appointments.

Councilmember Smith stated he supported commission/board members have a term limit of two, three-year terms. He commented he could support an adjustment or extension for the planning commission. He

indicated he would like to see some flexibility being offered to commission appointments when it comes to wards.

Councilmember Hovland explained he was in favor of two-year terms with a maximum of six years.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he did not support term limits for board and commissioners because there were not term limits for the mayor or councilmembers.

Councilmember Jeppson commented she believed two years was too short and suggested a term be at least three years. She stated she understood Councilmember Massoglia's point, but noted every board she has ever served on, it has been common place to have term limits.

Mayor Sanders supported the council honoring the wards as a goal, with the understanding the best candidate should get the appointment.

Councilmember Hovland indicated he was not opposed to taking someone from outside a ward, but if the terms were too long, a qualified person from within a ward may not be able to serve.

Councilmember Smith suggested some sort of screening process be considered in case the council receives a large number of applicants. Ms. Sorensen stated a staff/chair prescreening process could be considered if a large number of applications were received.

Councilmember Jeppson questioned if the council was going to set a limit on the number of interviews that were held. Councilmember Smith suggested candidates only be able to apply for a maximum to two positions.

Councilmember Hovland suggested the number of candidates be capped at 10.

Further discussion ensued regarding commission/board appointments being at the council's discretion.

Council consensus was to set term limits at two, three-year terms, advertise for vacancies only, and interview only new applicants, not incumbents.

10 Minute Discussion

Attachments: [2021.11.08 - 2022 Storm budget narrative](#)
 [11.08.2021 - Presentation 2022 Storm Sewer Fund Budget](#)

Finance Director Huss stated the City's Storm Sewer Utility Enterprise Fund accounts for the operations of the City's storm drainage system. The fund was created in 2006 as staff began separately accounting for storm drainage activity. Prior to that, storm sewer operations were accounted for in the Sanitary Sewer budget. A storm water utility fee was approved by Council in 2007, and implemented in January 2008. As an enterprise fund, the utility is designed to recover the cost of maintaining the City's storm drainage system, which includes over 100 miles of storm sewer pipes, and almost 80 miles of ditches as well as numerous catch basins, outfalls, manholes, weirs, culverts, and ponds. The system serves roughly 23,000 parcels throughout Blaine. The storm sewer operation functions as a division of the City's Public Works Department under the direction of the Deputy Public Works Director and input from the Storm Water Coordinator.

Mr. Huss reported the division has an authorized staffing level of 6.5 fulltime equivalent (FTE) positions, which in addition to the Storm Water Coordinator includes ½ FTE for supervision, ½ Working Foreman, and 4½ Public Service Workers. The proposed budget also includes requests to fund 1.5 new FTE positions in 2022 one Public Services Worker and one-half of a proposed Project Manager. Staff commented further on the projected revenues and expenditures for the Storm Drainage Fund and requested comments or questions from the council.

Councilmember Hovland asked what the extra costs were when pipe is added to the city. Mr. Haukaas stated this comes from the long-term inspection and maintenance of the pipe.

Councilmember Hovland questioned what type of expense the additional storm sewer system would add to the city and inquired if the city had funds set aside to dredge/clean its stormwater ponds. Mr. Haukaas discussed how slip lining extends the life of pipes and prevents future problems. He noted the city has reserves in place to address excavating and dredging concerns. He commented further on how he works with the finance director to plan for projects five to ten years down the road, while keeping the level of projects balanced each year.

Councilmember Massoglia stated it would be nice to have clarity on if the \$425,000 in payment to a project manager was needed to support the stormwater fund. Mr. Huss indicated he would provide the council with more detail on where the costs were coming from. He commented further on how the city's funds had to be properly accounted for.

Councilmember Robertson inquired if ARP funds can be used for any of these infrastructure improvements. Mr. Huss explained ARP funds could be used for storm sewer improvements.

Councilmember Hovland asked if there would be any new mandates that had to do with stormwater retention and management. Mr. Haukaas discussed the mandates that were already in place to address stormwater retention and management. He commented further on a TMDL mandate that would be coming down to the city.

Councilmember Massoglia questioned if the projected staffing increases were accurate. Mr. Haukaas stated he was currently reviewing workload and believed it was manageable. He noted he was getting better every year at reviewing the data in order to understand the needs of his staff.

Councilmember Massoglia reported he would be in favor of using ARP funds to cover some of the future expenses for storm sewer.

Mr. Haukaas commented further on how project engineers and consultants assist the city with completing projects in a timely manner while also providing specialties city staff may not have.

Councilmember Paul questioned how the budget would be impacted if rates were reduced. Mr. Huss stated expenditures would have to be adjusted if the utility rates were reduced. He reported rates were set to support and maintain the expense of the infrastructure system that was in place.

Councilmember Hovland asked how many miles of ditches the city had in place that it had to maintain. Mr. Haukaas noted there were over 100 miles of ditches that had to be maintained by the city.

Discussed

30 Minute Discussion

3-5

Forestry Program Discussion

Attachments: [Blaine Public Works - Forestry Program](#)

Mr. Haukaas stated the city of Blaine Public Works department manages trees on public property and rights of way throughout the city. This work includes trimming along our streets for clearance and visibility, trimming or tree removal in managed park and open space areas, trimming along trails, mitigation of oak wilt, buckthorn removal, mitigation of hazardous trees, and removal of trees that have been infested by the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). As was the case in 2021, the Forestry Program's base

budget of \$76,000 would be enhanced with an appropriation of an additional \$175,000 for work to be performed by contractual tree companies to address EAB infestation. Staff commented further on the level of service provided which included staffing, priority work, dead and diseased tree removal, tree trimming, and ongoing programs.

Ms. Wolfe explained staff was requesting another \$175,000 in 2022 to assist with EAB tree removal. She noted staff would also like the council to consider what the future looks like for the city's forestry program.

Councilmember Jeppson explained she would like to better understand the cost to remove all of the ash trees in Blaine. She wanted the city to provide the best service possible for Blaine residents, but she understood this would come at a cost. She indicated the council would have to consider how much it wanted to invest in the forestry program which would require her to know more about the expense to remove all of the ash trees.

Mr. Haukaas discussed a tree inventory that would need to be completed and noted high value trees would be denoted within the study.

Mayor Sanders questioned if an educational campaign should be considered to educate the public on options for treating their ash trees if it was deemed a high value tree and to eliminate the expense of having to have it removed.

Councilmember Massoglia asked how many trees were removed this year with the \$175,000. Mr. Haukaas estimated 60 to 70 larger trees were removed with this funding. He noted staff was pursuing grants to assist with replanting trees in the community. However, he noted this was not a one to one replacement value.

Councilmember Massoglia supported the city spending more dollars on ash tree treatment versus tree removal.

Councilmember Smith stated it will be good for the council to have an inventory and he supported the city allocating an additional \$175,000 for 2022.

Councilmember Jeppson asked if the city would ever be able to get ahead of this. Mr. Haukaas discussed how the City of St. Paul was addressing EAB and noted community groups were assisting with reforestation.

Councilmember Massoglia questioned if forest experts supported the

removal of all ash trees versus treatment. Mr. Haukaas stated chemical treatment was effective and could be done on high value trees. However, the experts are also saying EAB was not going away and by removing their food source this would slow the spread. Mr. Haukaas discussed the expense to treat versus remove the ash trees in the community.

Mayor Sanders questioned when the tree inventory would be completed. He stated he would like to understand what trees were worth saving and what was the total number of trees that had to be removed. He believed valuable trees were those mature trees that were located along trails and in parks.

Councilmember Jeppson stated there were so many variables regarding how to determine what was a valuable tree. She noted she would be happy to work with another councilmember or staff member to set guidelines. Ms. Wolfe suggested this work be done after the tree inventory was completed.

Councilmember Massoglia commented he would like to be involved in the ongoing tree discussions as trees were a major concern for residents in his ward.

Councilmember Hovland stated the city was not discussing the removal of trees on private property or within open space areas, which meant the EAB would still have a food source.

Mayor Sanders reported he would like to know more about what dollars or grants were available to assist the city with this overwhelming problem. Mr. Haukaas understood this was a large problem for the city to address and he appreciated the council's feedback.

Mayor Sanders stated again it would be important for the city to educate residents with the options they have regarding EAB. Ms. Wolfe stated the council could allocate more than \$175,000 for forestry in 2022.

Discussed

30 Minute Discussion

OTHER BUSINESS

Councilmember Hovland discussed the gas leak that occurred in Ham Lake and questioned why no notifications were sent on behalf of Blaine in light of the evacuation being recommended from emergency services.

Mayor Sanders commented there was a problem with notification because the City was not made aware of the event, adding the response

was being directed by the county. Police Chief Podany reported he did not learn about the leak until after it was contained and noted he had already spoken to the county regarding this matter.

ADJOURN

The Workshop was adjourned at 8:47PM.

At 8:49PM

Adjourned