City of Blaine
Anoka County, Minnesota
Minutes
City Council Workshop

Blaine City Hall
10801 Town Sq Dr NE
Blaine MN 55449

Monday, August 12, 2019 | **6:00 PM** | **Cloverleaf Farm Room A**

NOTICE OF WORKSHOP MEETING

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ryan at 6:00 p.m.

2 Roll Call

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: Acting City Manager Joe Huss; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Brian Podany; Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Bob Therres; City Engineer Dan Schluender; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; Communications Coordinator Ben Hayle; Recreation Manager Nate Monahan; Senior Engineering Technician Al Thorp; Budget/Fiscal Analyst Ward Brown; Communications Technician Roark Haver; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

Present: 7 - Councilmember Garvais, Councilmember Jeppson, Mayor Ryan, Councilmember Swanson, Councilmember Robertson, Councilmember Paul, and Councilmember Hovland

3 New Business

3-1

SOUTHERN BLAINE WETLAND SANCTUARY RESTORATION

Attachments: BWS
BWS Southern Portion

Water Resources Manager Haug explained the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) has been receiving a lot of positive recognition since it opened in August 2017. Some of the big accomplishments of the site are the number of successful programs held along the boardwalk with the help of Growing Green Hearts and the Wargo Nature Center. This has brought over 400 people out to the site to experience hands on learning. The City has also hosted several field trips with the Minnesota Institute for Talented Youth, Summer Fun, Woodcrest Spanish Immersion 3rd

graders, Avail Academy, and the National Mitigation and Ecosystem Banking Conference. On Wednesday of this week, approximately 60 metro watershed partners will be touring the site.

Ms. Haug stated in addition to the field trips, ongoing partnerships are being formed. Anoka Ramsey Community College has created interpretive signs that are close to being ready for installation at the site. The college has also had research students out the past two summers documenting the various wildlife species that have made the BWS their home. Spring Lake Park High School Advanced Placement science classes have incorporated the site into their class curriculum bringing students out to the site. Both Aveda and Christ Lutheran Church have volunteered at the site by painting animal tracks and removing invasive species.

Ms. Haug reported there is an additional 220 acres of the site that are in need of restoration. A BWS subcommittee made up of members from the Natural Resource Conservation Board (NRCB) has been created to work on the next steps for the southern site restoration as well as future planning for the BWS. The subcommittee was created because of the November 8, 2018 City Council Workshop meeting, where the Council recommended staff moving forward with putting a plan together for the restoration of the southern half of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary utilizing the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund grants received by Great River Greening (GRG).

Councilmember Jeppson asked if the City was 100% committed to the tree line. She stated she did not want to see the City raise the same concerns with the neighbors that was done with the last restoration project. Ms. Haug explained part of this process would be determining where the tree line boundary would be. She understood the City would need to work with the residents on the surrounding large lots. Staff would work to answer resident questions prior to the questions being asked.

Councilmember Hovland suggested the City consider holding an open house to review the plans with the neighbors.

Mayor Ryan anticipated the Pulte development would have some input about the proposed restoration project. He believed the City should keep the neighbors apprised of the situation and allow the neighbors to provide the City with feedback.

Councilmember Garvais stated he supported moving forward with the restoration project then questioned what the timeline would be for the restoration work. Ms. Haug reported the plan would be to complete the restoration work this winter and that information would be sent to the affected neighborhood. She commented further on how the project would proceed with grant funding.

Mayor Ryan recommended the restoration work not disturb the site too much as he valued the wildlife living in the area.

Councilmember Swanson asked if a concept plan would be brought to the Council prior to staff speaking with the neighbors. Ms. Haug stated this would be done.

Councilmember Paul questioned if there was a sense of urgency to complete this project. Ms. Haug commented the City was simply finishing a project that was started and noted there was no sense of urgency.

Councilmember Hovland inquired what the long-range goal was for this site. Ms. Haug reported the subcommittee has discussed that rather than constructing an interpretive center the subcommittee would like to see a park pavilion with storage at some point in the future. She explained this type of space could still be used as a classroom.

Councilmember Swanson asked if an outdoor pavilion could be used in the winter months for teaching. Ms. Haug stated this would be the case. She explained it would be quite expensive to build a facility with sewer and water given the fact those services were not readily available.

Councilmember Robertson thanked staff for seeking grants to assist with the expense of this project then requested further information on where the trail would be located. Ms. Haug reviewed the proposed trail location with the Council and noted some neighbors were excited about having access to the preserve.

Councilmember Hovland stated access to the preserve without having to drive through the neighborhood would be important. Ms. Haug commented on the location of the proposed parking lot.

Mayor Ryan expressed concern with the amount of water that was running through the City's splash pad.

Council consensus was to direct staff to proceed with the Southern Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Restoration project.

3-2

STORMWATER ENCROACHMENT

Attachments: Photos

Ms. Haug stated the Clean Water Act was passed by the federal government in 1972 to clean and protect the nation's lakes, streams, and rivers and was amended in 1987 because regulators and environmentalists realized that even every day activities of all residents had some impact on water quality. The amendment

required the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to delegate permitting authority of the national stormwater program to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). The national program is called the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program.

Ms. Haug explained the stormwater program was developed to reduce the pollution and damage caused by runoff from construction sites, industrial facilities and urbanized areas Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s). In Minnesota, where water contributes to a high quality of life, extra attention has been directed toward cleaner water and ways to reduce pollution from entering the storm sewer system and degrading water quality in Blaine and the cities and waters downstream. Preventative methods include controlling erosion on construction sites, regular maintenance of storm sewer systems, using phosphorus free fertilizers and keeping grass clippings and leaves out of the streets as well as addressing stormwater encroachments. Staff requested guidance from Council on how to enforce City Code regarding stormwater encroachments such as docks, swings and other items.

Councilmember Robertson requested further information regarding docks that have been placed in stormwater ponds. Ms. Haug explained the City currently had over 50 docks on stormwater ponds. She reviewed the location of these docks with the Council.

Councilmember Hovland commented on how bridges were built along Rice Creek and how this led to basements backing up with water. He explained residents can impact water levels and for this reason the City had to take action to address this concern. He supported the City educating the public on City Code requirements and having the docks removed if not removed by the resident in a timely manner.

Councilmember Paul requested further information on how stormwater ponds worked. Ms. Haug described how stormwater ponds worked to clean and filter stormwater after large rain events.

Councilmember Swanson stated he wanted to see the City strongly educate the public prior to enforcing City Code. He recommended this education occur over the fall and winter with enforcement occurring in the spring. Ms. Haug reported the watershed district was working on educational videos for public viewing and education.

Councilmember Jeppson suggested the City work to educate the public over the next year with enforcement beginning in 2021.

Councilmember Paul supported the City making contact with the homeowners at fault because he anticipated these homeowners may not read a letter from the City.

Council consensus was to direct staff to educate the public on City Code and to begin enforcing City Code in 2021.

3-3

COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Attachments: Strategic Communications Guide V2

Communications Coordinator Hayle stated at the direction of the Blaine City Council staff has worked to develop a guide to direct communication and community engagement. The guide outlines roles and responsibilities for communications staff and gives direction for how to communicate with the community in different situations. The communications department strives to provide Blaine residents, visitors, and businesses with effective communication at all times and works with all City departments to achieve this goal. This guide includes best practices and yearly checkpoints that are designed to keep all City departments connected to the community in an effective way. He commented further on the communication guide with the Council and requested feedback.

Councilmember Hovland stated with outgoing information, it becomes important for the City to carefully manage sensitive information, especially coming from the Police and Fire Departments. He explained social media was allowing information to get to the public quicker than in the past. He asked who was filtering and reviewing this information on behalf of the City. Mr. Hayle stated for more sensitive information, he would be working closely with the Police Captain Boerboom or other Public Information Officer. Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Podany commented further on how the Police Department manages its communication.

Councilmember Hovland encouraged City staff to be very careful when addressing sensitive situations.

Mayor Ryan discussed how media has changed over the past 30 years with technology.

Councilmember Garvais stated information was key and did not support limiting the information the City was presenting to the public. He recommended all department heads be properly trained to speak in front of a camera and suggested the City work to improve its media relations.

Councilmember Hovland indicated the importance of crafting an official statement from the City Council prior to individual Councilmembers responding to the media or public.

Councilmember Robertson recommended there be a single point of contact and

that Council connect with that staff member prior to making any statement to the media then asked how the City was working to reach residents not on social media. Mr. Hayle commented this was a concern noting the City had 60,000 residents and only 11,000 of these residents followed the City of Blaine on Facebook. He noted this number had increased by 3,000 in one year. He explained Next Door and Twitter were other resources available to the City, along with the City newsletter. He indicated the City would have to continue to diversify its communication platforms.

Councilmember Hovland asked if there was a way for the Council to receive feedback about the numbers of followers and comments received from residents. He indicated this would be valuable information for the Council.

Councilmember Paul stated he appreciated the fact that communication with the public was improving, along with the City's website.

The Council thanked staff for the comprehensive work on the Communication and Community Engagement Guide.

Discussed.

3-4 **PARKS MASTER PLAN AND PROJECT FUNDING**

Attachments: Parks and Recreation Master Plan
Parks CIP
Parks and Trails Tax Levy Budget

Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Therres reviewed the revised Parks Master Plan that is under consideration for adoption by the City Council. This plan includes adjustments based on comments from the City Council when the master plan was discussed at an earlier workshop. Part of the master plan lays out improvements for our current parks and includes significant capital upgrades and improvements to Happy Acres and Aquatore Parks. The equipment replacement and routine upgrades to existing parks over the next seven to ten years is estimated to be around $7.7 million. A significant amount of these costs can be funded from the Park Dedication Fund and the Parks and Trails Levy the Council initiated several years ago.

Mr. Therres reported the proposed Parks Master Plan also calls for significantly redesigning and upgrading Aquatore Park and Happy Acres Park. The estimated costs of these improvements are $6 million for Aquatore Park and $9 million for Happy Acres Park. While the Park Dedication Fund and the Parks and Trails Levy may finance some aspects of these proposed improvements, there are no funding sources identified to finance the total improvements.

Councilmember Jeppson asked if staff was asking the Council to accept the project. Mr. Therres explained staff was seeking feedback on the project and options for funding the project.

Councilmember Jeppson stated at this time she did not support the proposed costs. She believed the City needed to receive more feedback from the neighbors prior to moving forward with these projects. Mr. Therres commented on the plans for Aquatore Park and noted these plans had been reviewed with the Blaine Festival Committee, the Fogerty Board, and the Senior Advisory Board then explained staff has pursued feedback on the plans for Aquatore Park.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she could support the necessity items, such as the restroom updates but was less likely to support other items. She recommended the parking lot at Happy Acres be redone but did not suggest refrigerated rinks be installed. She stated she would have a hard time rationalizing spending that much money on two parks when additional money was needed for City streets.

Councilmember Swanson stated he believed these plans were premature. He recommended the park plans be reviewed by the incoming City Manager prior to the plans moving forward. He explained the parks would not be receiving $9 million at once, but rather may receive funding over time.

Councilmember Hovland agreed but understood parking was a concern at many City parks. He suggested the Council further review the parking plans to ensure adequate parking was being provided at these parks.

Acting City Manager Huss commented on the preliminary budget for 2020 and how this ties into the Parks Strategic Plan. He agreed the Council needed to further review the plans then hold discussions and set priorities. He stated it was his understanding the Council did not support the plans at this time.

Mayor Ryan explained one of his main concerns with Happy Acres and Aquatore Park was the preservation of trees. He stated the Council also had to further consider how to maintain its trails.

Councilmember Garvais supported the Council holding additional conversations on the parks plan. He proposed a one-day workshop be held for the Council to address the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Councilmember Robertson agreed a half-day workshop should be held to allow the Council to further dive into the parks plan. She suggested the City consider corporate sponsorships or additional grant funding for City parks. Mr. Therres stated staff was always seeking out grant opportunities and noted a sales tax may

be another item to consider.

Mayor Ryan stated he appreciated the members of the community that assisted with gardening in the City parks and believed these residents should be recognized.

Councilmember Swanson commented at this time, he did not believe the Council had enough information to move forward on this item. He supported the Council spending a day to review this plan with the new City Manager.

Councilmember Paul believed the plan was very good but agreed further review was needed from the Council.

Councilmember Hovland asked how the City was utilizing billboard revenues. Mr. Huss reported staff would be reviewing this information with the Council in further detail with the Council under the next agenda item.

Council consensus was to not accept the plan at this time and direct staff to bring this item back to the Council for further discussion at a future worksession meeting.

3-5

CITY MANAGER RECOMMENDED 2020 GENERAL FUND BUDGET

Attachments: PowerPoint

Mr. Huss presented the City Manager's Recommended 2020 General Fund Budget for consideration. The recommended budget will reflect direction provided by the City Council in budget discussions up to this point. The goal is to provide a balanced budget with a safe margin of revenues over expenditures for approval as the Preliminary 2020 Budget and Preliminary 2020 Tax Levy that Council will approve at the September 16 Council meeting. He reported Fire Chief Smith would come before the Council at a future date to review the Fire Department budget.

Councilmember Garvais supported the Council further discussing the recommended General Fund Budget where debt service can be further addressed.

Councilmember Swanson commented he would like to see $50,000 placed in parks.

Mayor Ryan noted he would be meeting with Fire Chief Smith on August 13 to informally discuss the fire budget.

Councilmember Swanson indicated he would like to better understand the SBM Fire Department's joint powers agreement. Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Podany commented on the joint powers agreement in place.

Councilmember Hovland said he believed there was a lot of information that should be brought forward to the Council for further discussion.

Public Works Director Haukaas commented on how Emerald Ash Borer would impact the City of Blaine, noting the City had 60,000 to 90,000 ash trees. He recommended the Council consider adding a staff member to address the City's forest on a full-time basis. He stated another option would be to hire an intern to map out the City's forest.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if Anoka County had any resources available to assist with managing the City's forest. Mr. Haukaas stated he did not believe the County had any resources available.

Councilmember Garvais supported the City hiring an intern to assist with this work.

Mayor Ryan stated he would like to see more budget information for another forester-type position for reporting back to the Council.

The Council thanked Mr. Huss for the presentation on the recommended budget.

Discussed.

ADJOURN

The Workshop was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Adjourned.