



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 Council and staff to discuss issues before them. It is not for the purpose of receiving public input.

*To participate in the meeting join the Zoom Webinar at
<https://blainemn.zoom.us/j/93136264336>*

Questions? Email - Communications@BlaineMN.gov

Monday, May 11, 2020

6:15 PM Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, city meetings will now be held as virtual meetings until further notice.

NOTICE OF WORKSHOP MEETING

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ryan at 6:15 p.m. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this meeting was held virtually.

2 Roll Call

PRESENT: Mayor Tom Ryan, Councilmembers Andy Garvais, Wes Hovland, Julie Jeppson, Richard Paul, Jess Robertson, and Dick Swanson.

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; Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Bob Therres; City Engineer Dan Schluender; City Planner Lori Johnson; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Coordinator Ben Hayle; Recreation Manager Nate Monahan; Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; Communications Technician Roark Haver; Anoka County Assessor Alex Guggenberger; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3 New Business

3-1

ANOKA COUNTY ASSESSOR UPDATE

City Clerk Sorensen stated Anoka County Assessor Alex Guggenberger was present to provide a recap from the Open Book meetings held May 5 and May 6 for property owners to appeal their 2020 assessed values. As a reminder, the change to Open Book format was a result of a training requirement of current Special Board of Review members that had not yet been met by the deadline outlined in Statute.

Mr. Guggenberger had technical difficulty and was unable to join the meeting. Ms. Sorensen stated staff would forward his presentation information and if requested would reschedule to a future workshop.

30 Minute Discussion

3-2

NORTH MEADOWS DEVELOPMENT PARKING LOT AND TRAIL HEAD LOCATION DISCUSSION

Attachments: [North Meadows Lot](#)
 [North Meadows Trail Parking Lot](#)
 [Site 7 South Wetlands Uplands South Half](#)

Water Resources Manager Haug stated at the April 20, 2020 City Council meeting, the proposed North Meadows Development parking lot was discussed. Council asked that the location of the parking lot be moved to the first lot off of 109th Avenue on the west side of the development and remove proposed lot with cul-de-sac from the northern portion of the plat. Staff wanted to give a little background on what has changed for the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) Southern Portion parking lot location and provide some pros and cons for the proposed parking lot locations in the North Meadows development. Ms. Haug reported the original plan completed by Stantec in 2014 included a large fishing pond and trailhead at the southern end of the BWS requiring a large parking lot off of 109th Avenue. This large fishing pond is no longer allowed under the State and Federal Wetland rules. Staff and the NRCB subcommittee have started rethinking the trail plan for the BWS because of this change, the comments received from residents in Site 7 as well as the cost of the existing boardwalk. This change includes utilizing more of the upland islands which is going to be the driving force to make a cost effective trail system throughout the BWS and reduce the number of trails in close proximity to backyards. The existing boardwalk in the northern portion, Site 7 of the BWS cost the city approximately \$1 million and is 0.9 miles. Ms. Haug explained staff brought forward the original parking lot location, which was suggested in the North Meadows Development, to better utilize the upland island, be more cost effective and would eliminate trails along the western boundary backyards of the development. What has been envisioned is a small parking lot similar to what is found at East Lake Park to allow for another access point to the

trail system. This parking lot is not envisioned to be used for any programming or field trips. Those activities would continue to utilize the parking lot off of Lexington Avenue. It was noted the cul-de-sac had been removed from the plan. Costs for the different parking lot options were reviewed in detail. The NRCB and staff were recommending the trailhead be located in the northern portion of the development. Staff commented further on the pros and cons for the proposed parking lot and requested feedback from the City Council.

Mayor Ryan commented the confusing part about the newly proposed location was that the Council wasn't aware of how close the trail would come to the new homes. He stated the Council has never discussed where the primary parking lot should be located.

Councilmember Swanson explained the parking lot on 109th Avenue was supposed to be a major or main parking lot. He stated the pond was meant to be a pond where fishing could occur. He indicated he was not concerned about putting a trail behind these homes given the fact they were new. He anticipated the City had funding in place to locate the parking lot directly off of 109th Avenue. He did not support placing the parking lot within the development as this would force additional traffic through the neighborhood.

Councilmember Hovland agreed.

Councilmember Jeppson noted the comments received from the NRCB and stated she appreciated their input, concerns and points of view but expressed concern about locating a public park access within a private neighborhood. She did not believe this made sense and was not a good idea. She liked the 109th Avenue access point even though it would cost a little more and recommended public parks be accessed from a public space.

Councilmember Robertson agreed with Councilmember Jeppson, stating she did not want the City to underestimate the popularity of the wetland sanctuary and explained there could be a good number of vehicles traveling through this neighborhood to get to the parking lot. She stated the northern location did not make sense to her given the fact this was a private neighborhood. She recommended the parking lot be located along 109th Avenue. She questioned if the proposed lot along 109th Avenue would have enough parking. She asked how far the boardwalk would be behind the new homes. Ms. Haug explained the boardwalk would be approximately .4 miles long. She indicated the proposed parking lot off of 109th Avenue could not be expanded in size given the surrounding wetlands.

Mayor Ryan stated if the parking lot were located directly off of 109th Avenue this

would provide nice access to those living in the Dominion development.

Councilmember Jeppson questioned if there was a benefit to having a second access point or would the Lexington Avenue access point be sufficient. City Engineer Schluender reported that was several miles away and the additional access point would benefit users. He commented there were no other access points available along 109th Avenue.

Councilmember Paul asked if the trailhead location decision could be made at a future date. Ms. Haug reported staff would follow the Council's direction and noted staff's recommendation would be to place the lot in the northern location due to the upland and cost savings.

Mayor Ryan explained he was in favor of locating the parking lot along 109th Avenue. He suggested more benches be considered.

Councilmember Jeppson recommended the Council make a decision on the parking lot at this time and not cause the developer any further delays.

Councilmember Garvais supported the parking lot being located along 109th Avenue. He feared if the lot were located within the neighborhood, this would become a concern.

Councilmember Hovland recommended the parking lot be located off of 109th Avenue. He believed this was the City's most viable option. He questioned why changes had been made to the pond to not allow for fishing. Ms. Haug stated the wetland rules had changed.

Councilmember Swanson did not believe it was a good idea to have a trailhead at the end of a neighborhood. He recommended the trailhead be located along 109th Avenue.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if this was a "chicken and egg" situation. She questioned if a trailhead was necessary and perhaps the trails should be installed first. She suggested the City speak with Anoka County to see if there is another access point that could be located along 109th Avenue.

Councilmember Swanson reported the trailhead had to be identified in order to allow for the trails to be completed. He discussed how popular this area would be once a trailhead was completed. He supported the City installing a parking lot trailhead along 109th Avenue.

Mayor Ryan agreed a trailhead should be designated. He questioned if the Council

would have to vote on this matter. Ms. Haug reported staff simply needed direction from the Council and this information would be brought back to the developer.

Councilmember Paul supported the parking lot being located off of 109th Avenue.

Council consensus was to direct staff to speak with the developer to have the North Meadows parking lot be located off of 109th Avenue.

15 Minute Discussion

3-3

COUNCIL/CITY MANAGER FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Attachments: [City Attorney Memo](#)

City Clerk Sorensen stated at the May 4 Council meeting, discussion was held regarding the process surrounding emergency declarations, differences between a city manager form of government versus a city administrator form of government, and clarification of powers in both those roles and with the City Council. She reported the City Attorney would be providing information to the Council regarding these topics.

City Attorney Nelson compared and contrasted the Council/City Manager form of government to the Council/City Administrator form of government. He explained the City of Blaine allows the legislative authority lie with the Council while the administrative authority lies with the City Manager. He indicated this was most prominent with personnel decisions. He described what a City Manager's role would be in a state of emergency. He commented on the decisions that had been made regarding parks noting the decisions were consistent with the emergency declaration. He reported the City Charter spells out what the scope of the City Manager role is and the differentiation between the Council's role and City Manager's role. Beyond that, State Statute can be used for further reference. He stated for the vast majority of decisions that were made relating to the emergency the Council had made decisions reflected in City Ordinance.

Councilmember Hovland stated items that are not addressed within the City Charter or State Statute would have to come before the City Council. Mr. Nelson reported this was the case.

Councilmember Hovland indicated it may benefit the City Council to attend online training regarding the City's form of government for further education.

Mayor Ryan was of the opinion the City Charter has worked really well and the decisions made by the City Manager were based on the Governor's executive orders.

Councilmember Garvais commented he did not think any actions taken to date had been out of line or inappropriate. He discussed the purpose of an emergency declaration and stated the Council would have to consider how to get out of an emergency state and into a new normal. He agreed closing a park was well within staff's right for health and safety concerns and wanted the City Manager to be empowered to work on behalf of the City under this new normal.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she was not trying to question actions by the City Manager or staff and reported staff was doing a tremendous job navigating this crisis and appreciated all of staff's efforts to work through these unprecedented times. She wanted the Council to consider how to move the City forward in these unprecedented times while being transparent and accountable.

Mayor Ryan stated this was an uncertain time.

Councilmember Hovland said he did not anticipate this would go on forever and indicated as the State and federal government begins to open up a new state of normal would begin. He commented the City of Blaine would then follow the State's lead.

Councilmember Jeppson stated the intent of this emergency declaration was for an emergency that had a start date and end date. She explained the COVID-19 pandemic was not that simple. She agreed the Council should not continue to approve the state of emergency. She indicated she appreciated the City Council's level of transparency and trust but noted this could change after the next election. For this reason, she recommended a process and documentation be created so there is no gray area.

Mayor Ryan commented barber shops and beauty salons were supposed to be opening up in the next week or so, which would be a step in the right direction.

Councilmember Swanson agreed this was uncharted territory and hoped the City would soon be able to come out of the emergency. He indicated this will depend on if things are able to safely open up.

Councilmember Paul stated the City does not know when this illness was going to stop. He recommended the Council discuss this topic at the upcoming strategic planning session. In addition, he supported the City Council receiving training from the League.

Ms. Wolfe stated staff has spent a lot of time on this topic and she understood these were unprecedented times, adding emergency declarations were typically created for natural disasters with start and end. She explained other cities were

having this same discussion about how long their declarations were going to be in place and noted the Council had the power to lift the emergency. She discussed what it would mean to operate without the declaration in place. She reported if the emergency were lifted the Mayor did have the power to put a state of emergency back in place for three days or an emergency meeting could be called by the City Council. She indicated the City may need to have a state of emergency in place in order to receive FEMA dollars.

Mayor Ryan reported the current state of emergency goes through June 6. Ms. Sorensen reported this was the case and noted the Council would have to reconsider the declaration at the June 1 meeting.

15 Minute Discussion

3-4

SUMMER PARK AND RECREATION PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES

Attachments: [Playground Advisory Sign](#)
[Beach and Park Closures](#)
[Emergency Order Park Information](#)
[COVID-19 Outdoor Recreation, Facilities & Public Guidelines](#)

Ms. Wolfe discussed the various summer recreation programs and facilities. Staff's goal is to provide as much information to City Council as possible. Staff is continuing to gather information and data and will advise Council of updates as they are available. It was noted as discussed with Council on May 4, playgrounds will be re-opened. On May 6 staff removed the yellow caution tape and took down the current signs that indicate closure. Staff is posting new signs. The new playground advisory sign was also posted on social media and the city website.

Ms. Wolfe reported the funding source for the fireworks display is no longer available. Council supported the prioritization of remaining charitable gambling funds for food shelves and emergency shelters. If another funding source is identified, there is potential for fireworks to occur at a later date. Currently a fireworks display with a large gathering of people would not be allowed under current executive orders; it is unclear when that opportunity will be available. Council can consider a tentative alternative date.

Mayor Ryan reported the public was happy to see the parks reopened.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the fireworks display was canceled because of funding or if this was a social distancing issue. She wondered if the business community could be contacted to assist with covering the expense of the fireworks display for 2020, since the City's funding was provided to local food shelves. She

anticipated families would still be interested in taking in the display even if they had to remain in their cars. Ms. Wolfe stated at this time large gatherings were not allowed per the Governor's executive order as well as concerns about social distancing.

Mayor Ryan commented he did not see the fireworks display happening this year.

Councilmember Swanson agreed stating he believed the City should be more focused on the food shelves and the Alexandra House.

Councilmember Robertson agreed funding local food shelves and Alexandra House were high priorities for the City but said she was also trying to see if funding were not an issue if fireworks could still be held this summer.

Mayor Ryan stated it was a shame that this tradition may be lost. He noted there would not be any Memorial Day services this year either.

Councilmember Jeppson commented her only concern would be the stress a fireworks display would place on the police and fire department. She stated it would be difficult for the police to properly social distance people for this large of an event. Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Podany anticipated he would need additional/overtime staff to assist with traffic control and parking. He commented the bigger issue would be how to manage proper social distancing.

Councilmember Paul suggested the City seek public comment regarding the canceled fireworks display.

Mayor Ryan did not recommend this action be taken. He believed residents were looking to the City at this time for leadership. Recreation Manager Monahan reported over 30,000 people attend the fireworks display, which was the largest City sponsored event each year.

Councilmember Jeppson recommended fireworks not be taken off the table completely until more information is known.

Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger explained he had spoken to Hollywood Pyrotechnics and reported the City would have to pay for a 4th of July display in the next three weeks and if we were to cancel some money would be lost. He indicated an alternative date could be chosen over the Labor Day weekend or New Year's Eve.

Ms. Wolfe reported staff would like to send a message regarding the fireworks display in order to remain consistent and transparent stating the fireworks display

has been canceled due to funding.

Ms. Wolfe stated currently under the Stay at Home Order, park shelters are closed and not available for rent. She said there is potential to open for rentals depending on future Executive Orders as it relates to gatherings of groups of people adding there would be no need to hire additional staffing in order to re-open.

Councilmember Swanson reported if the State allows them to be open, the park shelters should open.

Staff commented further on the number of park rentals that were in place for the remainder of the summer.

Mayor Ryan recommended the park restrooms be opened if the park shelters were reopened. The Council supported this recommendation.

Ms. Wolfe explained in-person recreation programs have been cancelled through May 31 due to the Stay at Home Order and said staff has started to develop or collaborate with current vendors on virtual programs. A few programs are already being offered and additional programs are being developed. In-person programs require close interaction with participants and it would be difficult to ensure safe COVID-19 practices for staff and participants. In many cases there is also equipment used that would require frequent cleaning and sanitizing. Hiring of seasonal staff would reduce overall general fund cost savings opportunities. The staff recommendation is to cancel in-person programming for the summer and develop as many alternative virtual programs as feasible. If circumstances and funding allow, in-person programming can be phased back into place.

Councilmember Robertson asked what virtual programming was being conducted at this time. Recreation Manager Nate Monahan described the programming that was currently in place, noting how each had been adjusted to become virtual. Mr. Krieger discussed how the Sky Hawks sports program had moved to a virtual model. Mr. Wolfe thanked staff for being creative to migrate these classes from in-person to virtual classes.

Ms. Wolfe stated the beach is currently closed due to (1) timing - it does not open annually until Memorial Day weekend; and (2) the Stay at Home order. A decision about the future opening of the beach has not been made. Staff commented further on the impact of keeping the beach closed for the summer. While residents can currently use the parks and fields for small group play, this should be done consistent with the COVID-19 Outdoor Recreation, Facilities and Public Guidelines.

Councilmember Swanson supported the beach remaining closed. He noted Anoka

County had closed Bunker Beach for the entire summer and he feared that the City would see a large number of police calls if the beach were to open.

Councilmember Robertson stated if the beach remains closed all summer there would still be police activity. She commented at some point in time, the City would have to allow people to live again. She explained residents should be allowed to make decisions on where they want to go and how to stay properly social distanced. She feared that the entire situation was getting out of hand. She understood the City was under the Governor's executive orders at this time, however, she stated these orders would change as the summer went on and she wanted the freedom to act accordingly. She indicated this was getting to be a lot for people and wanted to see summer activities still occur.

Ms. Wolfe commented the Council could keep the beach closed until there was a change at the State level. She agreed the City should keep its options open because there was a lot of unknowns at this time.

Mayor Ryan indicated it would be difficult for people to swim and take advantage of the beach while maintaining proper social distancing. He discussed how many people come from outside the community to enjoy Blaine's beach.

Councilmember Robertson suggested the parking fee at the beach be increased to \$35 to discourage people from coming from outside the City.

Councilmember Jeppson stated raising the parking fee may push parking into the surrounding neighborhoods and the City didn't want to have to address this concern. She reported because other beaches and water parks were closed people would be funneled to this beach from all over the County. She supported the beach remaining closed for the time being.

Councilmember Swanson supported the beach remaining closed at this time and waiting to see how the State reopens.

Mr. Monahan questioned how the City Council wanted to manage the beach at this time. He suggested snow fencing be installed to keep crowds off of the volleyball court and beach. He commented on how difficult it would be for staff to corral and distance people once the beach was reopened.

Councilmember Hovland discussed how the City of Spring Lake Park has managed beach closings over the years due to swimmers itch and said he supported the beach remaining closed for the time being.

Police Chief Podany anticipated the number of calls would go up as this issue

remained in limbo. He asked if the Council supported snow fencing being installed.

Ms. Wolfe explained staff has not vetted this matter and requested she be allowed to speak with staff prior to moving forward with the snow fencing. The Council supported Ms. Wolfe speaking with staff and making a decision.

Ms. Wolfe updated the Council on group play in the community noting current executive orders do not allow for group sports. She explained it would be quite a process to reopen youth/league sports this summer. The effort to maintain the City's ballfields was discussed and it was noted the City does not know how this was all going to roll out. It was noted the City may have to hire seasonal staff in order to assist with mowing and field maintenance.

Mr. Krieger commented on the meetings he has attended regarding summer/league sports and indicated a phased approach would be taken which would begin with scheduling fields. He reported he would continue to keep the Council updated as information is received.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the City would allow sports associations to assist with field maintenance. Mr. Krieger explained he would be in communication between public works, the parks department and those that want to help but indicated this would not occur until more information was available on when leagues could begin. Ms. Wolfe stated once more information was in place for the leagues to begin staff would be able to begin formulating a plan.

60 Minute Discussion

3-5

COVID-19 IMPACT, SERVICE LEVELS, AND BUDGET

City Manager Wolfe provided updates regarding topics relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. She discussed the number of COVID-19 cases in Blaine and Anoka County. She reported the emergency operations center team continues to meet twice a week. She indicated all City employees had completed a survey regarding the challenges and concerns they are facing at this time. She noted the League of Minnesota Cities was holding a webinar regarding park and recreation activities during COVID-19.

15 Minute Discussion

4 Council Calendar Review

City Manager Wolfe reviewed the Council Calendar.

OTHER BUSINESS

City Manager Wolfe asked if the Council was still available for the Strategic Planning Retreat at the end of May. The Council was in favor of still holding the event on Saturday.

ADJOURN

The Workshop was adjourned at 8:34 p.m.