



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.

*Members of the public can join the Zoom webinar at
<https://blainemn.zoom.us/j/94488660195>*

Questions? Email - communications@BlaineMN.gov

Monday, May 3, 2021

6:00 PM Council Chambers and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, city meetings will also be held as virtual meetings

NOTICE OF WORKSHOP MEETING

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:30PM. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this hybrid meeting was held both virtually and in person.

2 Roll Call

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; City Planner Lori Johnson; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; City Engineer Dan Schluender; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; Recreation Manager Nate Monahan; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Senior Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

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

3 New Business

3-1

Cub Foods Corporate Staff Introduction

Community Development Director Thorvig reported Councilmember Massoglia had arranged for representatives from the Cub Foods corporate offices (United Natural Foods) to introduce themselves, discuss Cub Foods' presence in the city, and the general business plan

for the company moving forward.

Councilmember Massoglia explained he had reached out to Cub Foods to thank them for their investment in Blaine. He stated he had a great meeting with their leadership group then introduced Mike Stiegers and Ryan O'Connor from Cub Foods.

Mike Stiegers, Cub Foods, thanked the council for their time. He stated he appreciated the support Blaine has offered Cub Foods over the years. He discussed the remodels that have occurred in the four Blaine stores, noting Cub Foods now had a wine and spirits store as well.

Ryan O'Connor, Cub Foods, stated he believed Cub Foods has been a great employer in the community and offers high school students a great opportunity for their first job. He thanked the city and its staff for being easy to work with.

Councilmember Hovland questioned how the store on University Avenue was doing since they opened. Mr. Stiegers reported this store was smaller than typical Cub Foods stores but this site was doing very well.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the acquisition of Super Valu would change the way Cub Foods looks going forward. Mr. Stiegers reported Cub Foods has a solid remodel program going forward and the future for Cub Foods was looking very strong.

Councilmember Robertson thanked Cub Foods for being engaged and committed to the community.

Mayor Sanders inquired what the plan was for Cub Foods in the community for the next five to 10 years. Mr. Stiegers explained Cub Foods has four stores in Blaine currently and he saw a potential for one to two more stores in Blaine in the future.

Councilmember Massoglia thanked Mr. Stiegers and Mr. O'Connor for their attendance and for being valuable members of the community and encouraged Cub Foods to keep Blaine in mind for any new pilot initiatives.

Informational: no action required

15 Minute Discussion

3-2

Northtown Request For Proposals Discussion

Attachments: [Northtown RFP](#)
 [Burnsville Plan](#)
 [Maplewood Plan](#)
 [Northtown Area RFP Discussion](#)

City Planner Johnson stated in February and March 2021, the city council took part in a visioning session and subsequent follow up session to determine which areas of the city are priority areas in terms of potential future development or redevelopment plans. The city council identified four priority areas to focus on, and one of those areas was the area of and surrounding Northtown Mall. Staff has started preparations for a planning process to take place using a consultant to provide an overall redevelopment/revitalization plan for the study area. The first step in this process is to develop an RFP to send to consultants who are qualified to do the work. Staff reviewed the companies that would be sent an RFP for the project, described the scope of services and estimated the project would cost the EDA \$100,000 to complete. The timeline for the project was discussed with the council and staff asked if the council supported the study moving forward.

Councilmember Hovland asked who owned Northtown Mall. Ms. Johnson reported the Northtown Mall was owned by The Washington Prime Group and indicated staff had been in contact with this group.

Councilmember Hovland understood this group has been investing and bringing in new stores to the mall and recommended if the study moves forward that Washington Prime Group be brought into the conversation. He wanted to ensure the surrounding areas were enhanced in an effort to reduce the vacancy rate and asked if this study would include the small area on the other side of University Avenue. Ms. Johnson reviewed the areas in and around Northtown Mall that would be included in the study. She commented the area on the west side of University Avenue would not be included.

Councilmember Hovland suggested the area west of University Avenue be included in the study because he considered this part of the Northtown area. Ms. Johnson stated this portion of retail could be added to the study then reiterated the goal of this study would be to plan for the revitalization and success of the mall. Mr. Thorvig agreed it made sense to include this area in the study.

Councilmember Robertson appreciated the fact that the small retail area west of University Avenue would be included in the study. She explained while she did not like to spend funds she supported the city spending money on this study in order to revitalize the Northtown Mall and the surrounding area. She believed this study would assist the city in

sustaining and maintaining retail business in the community. She indicated this area of the community cannot fail. She discussed how the Maplewood Mall area had redeveloped and supported Blaine going forward with this study. She recommended some level of communication be included in the study to assist with engaging the public in this study. She stated she supported the objectives set out by staff.

Councilmember Jeppson believed the timeline was incredibly ambitious. She supported the city providing a Q&A session for the businesses interested in submitting an RFP and was of the opinion this would provide a onetime opportunity for companies to receive answers and direction from the city. She suggested the Q&A be held two weeks prior to the RFP deadline. She questioned why a budget range had not been included in the RFP as this would be helpful information. She strongly recommended the RFP include a diversity, equity and inclusion section. She indicated she supported the study moving forward but stated the council would have to fully support and take action on the results from the study. She suggested a group be formed to ensure the council follows through with the study and understood the owner of Northtown Mall was the number one stakeholder and if they were willing to assist with this study financially. Mr. Thorvig reported staff has not asked Northtown Mall owners to contribute financially to this study but the conversation could be held. He explained staff understood this study had to be put into action and would be followed then indicated he liked the idea of having someone spearhead this initiative.

Councilmember Hovland discussed how the renovation of the Northtown Mall area would improve the surrounding neighborhoods. He recommended the city speak with Spring Lake Park about their city's plans for the area. Mr. Thorvig commented staff has considered how wide to make the scope of this project but wanted to focus on the commercial component. He stated a part two of the project could be considered in the future to include the surrounding neighborhoods but noted the surrounding neighborhood feedback would be taken into consideration in the study.

Councilmember Paul thanked staff for their efforts on this project. He explained the Northtown Mall area needs a lot of changes and was encouraged by how the study would help the city redevelop this area. He recommended each area around Northtown Mall be redeveloped one small area at a time. He appreciated how the manager of the Northtown Mall was engaged with the city for this project.

Mayor Sanders asked what the typical timeline would be for this type of project. Ms. Johnson anticipated the study would take 10 to 12 months to

complete, however, she indicated staff could make a request in the RFP to have the study completed by the spring of 2022 if this was the desire of the council.

Mayor Sanders reported the final product was vitally important and questioned if the city should look at slowing this project. Ms. Johnson noted the city does not have any projects for this area at this time then explained the Rainbow Foods building had a new owner who was interested in redeveloping, along with the Salvation Army building. She commented their proposal appeared to be in line with the city's vision for this area. She reported the only way to stop development or redevelopment in this area would be to put a moratorium in place. However, staff did not believe this was necessary.

Councilmember Smith encouraged staff to heavily weigh the output of the RFP and consider if it will be actionable as he wanted to see the RFP have near and long term goals. Ms. Johnson reported the RFP was to include specific action steps both for the consultant and the city to ensure the plan comes to fruition then indicated staff has not created a scoring system but would be considered by staff.

Councilmember Massoglia supported this study moving forward. He explained he was not excited about paying for the entire study and asked that Washington Prime Group be asked to contribute to the expense. He supported the city partnering with the mall on this project. He understood that this area of Blaine was important but was concerned the city didn't understand the future of malls and retail. He recommended the city look at housing opportunities in the Northtown area as this would be a good fit with the public transportation in place. He encouraged the city to be creative with the options for this area due to the way retail was evolving. Mr. Thorvig agreed stating the city understood they did not want to force more retail if the market was changing. He explained this project was pushed up in priority due to the fact the city does not have control over the land and needs a visioning plan for the entire area.

Councilmember Robertson discussed the study that was completed for the Burnsville Mall and noted a lot of consideration had been made for e-commerce and changing housing needs. She asked what feedback the city would receive from The Washington Prime Group as she wanted to make sure they supported this project moving forward if the city was going to pay for the study. Mr. Thorvig explained he met with representatives from the Washington Prime Group several weeks ago and they recognized value in the study.

Mayor Sanders commented there was a lot of property not owned by

Northtown Mall that would be impacted by this study. He explained the council had to consider how to redevelop this entire area that was cutting edge and would position the city well for the next 20 to 30 years.

Discussed

30 Minute Discussion

3-3

Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Structure and Updated Trail System Plan

Attachments: [Pros and Cons BWS Structure](#)
[2014 BWS Development Master Plan](#)
[BWS Existing Trailheads and Trails](#)
[2021 - 2025 Open Space CIP Budget](#)

Recreation Manager Monahan stated in 2014, the city council hired a consultant to develop a detailed master conceptual plan of improvements (trails and other amenities) for the large, 500+ acre open space west of Lexington Avenue and north of 109th Avenue now known as the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS). The plan includes a nature center in the northern portion at the main entrance on Lexington Avenue and a phased trail system throughout the northern, central and southern portions with amenities. In December 2020, the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) and City Council held a joint meeting to discuss pros and cons of constructing an enclosed nature center building versus a pavilion.

Mr. Monahan indicated the NRCB has reviewed the options for the BWS structure and is recommending a pavilion with restrooms. One of the NRCB goals is to continue to focus on development of a concept plan for trail connections throughout the BWS. Total cost to hire a consultant for design of a structure at the BWS is \$50,000 and is included in the 2021 Open Space CIP Budget. The structure options were reviewed in further detail with the council and staff requested direction on how to proceed.

Councilmember Smith stated with either option whether it was a pavilion or full nature center, he would like to see restrooms installed. He encouraged staff to reach out to the Wargo Nature Center to see if they would be interested in providing classes at this location.

Councilmember Massoglia questioned if the city has looked at grants or other partnerships to assist with the expense of building a nature center or pavilion. Mr. Monahan stated staff has spoken with Aveda and Infinite Campus. He explained staff could speak with local businesses if the council provides direction on how to proceed.

Councilmember Robertson supported the NRCB's recommendation. She indicated she liked the idea of a pavilion and noted this amenity would generate revenue for the city then confirmed the \$800,000 cost estimate included restrooms.

Councilmember Robertson recommended a pavilion be pursued versus the nature center. She explained this would allow additional dollars to be put into trails within the BWS.

Mayor Sanders supported a pavilion with restrooms at the BWS as well. Mr. Monahan thanked the council for their feedback and direction.

Mr. Monahan reported the conceptual trail plan that was developed in 2014 shows numerous trails throughout the BWS. Since the trail plan was developed, staff and the NRCB have had discussions about the feasibility of constructing all of the trails in the plan. A subcommittee of the NRCB was formed to consider the cost to construct trails, the permitting process, and trail locations. The city's ecological restoration consultant, Jason Husveth of Critical Connections Ecological Services, and Blaine staff have been evaluating options for the build-out of the BWS trail system. Mr. Husveth has been working on this site for over 20 years and has been helping the subcommittee evaluate trail options that will provide trail connections to the neighborhoods surrounding the BWS while maximizing uplands, and reducing boardwalk and wetland impacts. Consideration also has been given to limit the installation of trails behind homes, as that was a request frequently brought up by residents at previous meetings.

Mr. Monahan explained recent restoration work in the southern portion has given the ability to visualize the uplands versus wetlands, which will help to finalize an updated conceptual trail plan. This is being brought forward for discussion at this time based on the increased activity of using haul roads as trails during the restoration project this winter and the volume of inquiries staff has received regarding the next phases of trail construction. The cost for potential trails was discussed and it was noted funds gained from wetland credits could be used to fund the expense. Staff requested feedback from the council regarding future trail construction within the BWS.

Councilmember Robertson understood people wanted to be out in the wetlands, however she encouraged the city to communicate with residents as to where future trails would be located as she wanted to keep hikers on trails and not on private property. She recommended that trails not be placed between homes in order to respect the integrity of the neighborhood and said she supported the city building trails as they

would be the highlight of the project.

Councilmember Smith recommended the trail head at 109th Avenue be coordinated with the reconstruction efforts. Mr. Monahan explained he had spoken with the City Engineer regarding this project and stated Anoka County anticipates this project was five years out. He discussed the sidewalks being planned for both sides of 109th Avenue noting this would assist with creating great access to the southern portion of the trailhead.

Councilmember Smith asked if the Lexington trailhead was the only trailhead with parking. Mr. Monahan indicated there would be a 13 stall parking lot at North Meadows. He commented the other access point was at the northwest corner of the BWS at East Lake Park. He stated this parking lot had nine parking spaces.

Councilmember Paul commented he supported the trail plan being amended and updated.

Council consensus was to direct staff to update the trail plan and to pursue a pavilion with restrooms within the BWS.

30 Minute Discussion

3-4

COVID-19 Impacts/Other/ARP Funds

City Manager Wolfe asked if the council would support staff putting together a business assistance program that would utilize the new American Rescue Plan funds. The council supported staff moving in this direction.

Discussed

15 Minute Discussion

ADJOURN

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:23PM.

Adjourned