

CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Monday, March 20, 2023

5:30PM
Cloverleaf Farm Room A
10801 Town Square Drive

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Pro Tem Robertson at 5:30PM.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders (arrived at 5:45PM), Councilmembers Terra Fleming, Chris Massoglia, Tom Newland, and Jess Robertson.

ABSENT: Councilmember Lori Saroya.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Eric Thorvig; Safety Services Director/Police Chief Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; Deputy Finance Director Ali Bong; City Engineer Dan Schluender; Community Standards Director Bob Fiske; City Attorney Tom Loonan; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Director of Public Works Nick Fleischhacker; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.1 No Mow May.

Community Standards Director Fiske stated No Mow May is a conservation initiative first popularized by Plantlife, an organization based in the United Kingdom, but was now gaining traction across North America. The goal of No Mow May is to allow grass to grow unmown for the month of May, creating habitat and forage for early season pollinators. This is particularly important in urban areas where floral resources are often limited. Over the past few years, several cities throughout the metro area such as Edina, West St. Paul, Vadnais Heights, and Columbia Heights, have been promoting No Mow May and allowing their residents to register and participate in not mowing their lawns during the month of May. Last year there was a lot of media attention given to No Mow May which resulted in multiple inquiries from Blaine residents wondering if the City of Blaine was participating. Due to how late in the spring this question came up there was not sufficient time to bring something forward for official Council action. Staff is bringing forward this workshop item to discuss with Council if they are interested in supporting No Mow May in 2023, and to provide information as to what it would

look like, how it would work, associated costs, and what would need to be done to temporarily modify our tall grass and weed ordinance.

Councilmember Robertson asked how many complaints the City received each year for long grass. Mr. Fiske estimated the City received over 200 calls each year.

Councilmember Robertson stated she understood residents were interested in participating in No Mow May and was glad the Council was having this discussion. She suggested this be a fee-based program to cover the cost of the signs. She noted she does not mow her lawn in May but noted she would not be registering with the City if this program moves forward. She indicated she could support the program and asked that staff consider how the program would be communicated to residents.

Councilmember Newland commented he could support No Mow May but did not want to see the City spending a lot of money on this program.

Councilmember Fleming stated the City needs to support the bee population and anticipated there were people who would participate in the program and not need a sign. She supported the City educating and promoting the program to residents.

Councilmember Robertson asked if City parks would not be mowed in May. Mr. Fiske reviewed the parks and open space areas that would not be mowed as part of the program but noted many would still be mowed such as athletic fields.

Councilmember Robertson suggested signs not be printed but a template be available online for residents that wish to print their own sign. She suggested staff engage with local schools to create a logo for the No Mow May signs.

Mayor Sanders stated his only concern with this program was that it may lead residents into having “native lawns”. Mr. Fiske reported this would be a concern that would be addressed by staff.

City Manager Wolfe recommended residents be asked to register for No Mow May to assist staff with managing complaints. The Council supported this recommendation.

Council consensus was to support moving forward with No Mow May as proposed and direct staff to work with communications on educational component, including specific areas in some parks, to create a participation registration for residents and for staff to bring forward a resolution for the Council to consider in April.

3.2 Traffic Studies.

City Engineer Schluender stated over the past few months, the Council has raised concerns over traffic issues as they relate to proposed projects throughout the City. He described in detail the traffic study that was completed for the Walmart off Ball Road. Staff reviewed the process that is followed in determining when a traffic impact study is required for a proposed project and how the findings or mitigation measures identified in a study are incorporated into a proposed project.

Councilmember Newland questioned when a determination is made that a traffic study was required. Mr. Schluender explained staff makes a determination when a proposal is brought to the City, which was six to twelve months before a proposal comes before the Planning Commission.

Councilmember Robertson stated she understood change was difficult. She questioned how staff factored in travel patterns within the community. Mr. Schluender reported a base model is set when traffic counts are taken in real time. Further discussion ensued on how the City's traffic patterns continue to change as the City develops and roadways are connected.

Councilmember Newland thanked staff for the presentation and reported he supported staff's recommendation for the traffic study threshold.

Ms. Wolfe requested staff comment on the traffic study being completed for 99th Avenue. Mr. Schluender discussed the traffic study that was being completed for 99th Avenue then noted staff learned this neighborhood was not interested in sidewalks.

Council consensus was to support the traffic threshold for studies as proposed by staff.

3.3 CivicClerk Meeting Training.

Communications Manager Hayle stated as staff has shared, the City will be replacing Granicus/Legistar and would be transitioning to CivicClerk agenda management effective the first meeting in April. As part of that transition, staff and CivicPlus will be providing Council with training on how to navigate agendas through their board portal overview as well as e-voting for agenda items. He encouraged the Council to be patient through the transition as there will be bumps along the way. Staff screened several short videos, provided further training to the Council on the web based CivicClerk program and asked for comments or questions.

City Clerk Sorensen explained all packets and agendas will now be posted within the web-based program and Councilmembers will be notified via email when a packet was posted before a meeting.

Mr. Hayle commented on how staff was working to bring historical data into CivicPlus. He noted staff was excited to make the transition to this new system and reported staff would be available for technical support along the way.

Councilmember Robertson asked if her notes within CivicClerk would remain private data. City Attorney Loonan explained he believed this information would remain private, but noted he would investigate this further.

Other Business

Mr. Schluender reported the City would be moving onto the next process for congressional district spending. He noted staff would be providing them with more information on the bonding request for TH65.

Safety Services Director/Police Chief Podany updated the Council on the proposed Johnsville area garage sale which would be held in May and commented on how the event would be administered through a special event permit. The Council supported this recommendation.

Police Chief Podany noted the department would like to apply for a two-year victim services grant. He explained the application would be drafted by the community outreach individual within the department. The Council offered their support for this grant application moving forward.

The Workshop was adjourned at 6:49PM.

Tim Sanders, Mayor

ATTEST:

Catherine Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk
Submitted by Minute Maker Secretarial