City of Blaine
Anoka County, Minnesota
Minutes
City Council Workshop

Blaine City Hall
10801 Town Sq Dr NE
Blaine MN 55449

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, January 3, 2022 | **6:00 PM** | **Cloverleaf Farm Room A**

NOTICE OF WORKSHOP MEETING

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:00PM.

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; City Planner Sheila Sellman; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; Stormwater Coordinator Megan Hedstrom; Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; City Engineer Dan Schluender; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Deputy Finance Director Ali Bong; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

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

3 New Business

3-1 Discuss Potential Pioneer Park Preservation Project

Attachments: Presentation

Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Krieger stated city staff is

exploring a park preservation project at Pioneer Park. This project was originally identified in the city's Open Space Plan, developed in 2007. The project proposes the removal of trees at Pioneer Park in the existing wetland on the west side of the park. This would include dead and diseased ash trees, and staff recommends the additional removal of non-native invasive trees. In addition to the wetland removals, public works staff has identified 572 dead and diseased trees along the 1.4 miles of trails that are hazardous to public safety and the city's infrastructure that staff proposes to remove as part of this project.

Stormwater Coordinator Hedstrom provided the council with a presentation on the proposed project identified in the 2022 Open Space Fund. She explained the removal of the dead and diseased trees would encourage the health of the existing oak and maple trees. Staff recommended 1,300 ash trees and 740 non-native trees (boxelder and aspen) be removed. A detailed tree survey was reviewed with the Council and staff requested feedback from the council regarding the proposed tree removal project at Pioneer Park.

Councilmember Hovland stated he understood the park had dead and diseased trees and he did not oppose to having these removed. He commented he found it difficult that a line was being drawn and everything south of that line would be eliminated. He reported Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) would not stop at the trail and noted the rest of the park would have to address the ash tree loss and suggested all ash trees within the park be removed. He supported the city replanting trees that would flourish in this area. He indicated he would like to see where the wetlands and highlands are located within the park. He explained staff was proposing to fund this project from the sale of wetland credits, which were from the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS). He had the understanding these credits would be used to support and maintain the BWS and were not to be used for other projects throughout the city. He believed this was something that the council should honor. Mr. Krieger stated the city also had park dedication funds available to assist with the cost of this project.

Councilmember Massoglia questioned if the city would continue to proceed with the wetland bank or would this park land be considered open space.

The consensus of council was to support the removal of the dead and diseased trees within Pioneer Park.

Councilmember Jeppson asked if the wetland credit sold for the BWS would far exceed the future maintenance needs for the BWS. Mr. Krieger

reported this was the case.

Councilmember Hovland noted the original intent was to have the wetland credits put aside for long term preservation.

Councilmember Jeppson commented the city was proposing another wetland preservation project and questioned why available funds should not be used for this project.

Councilmember Hovland indicated this was the original agreement for the BWS. Finance Director Huss stated the city had to commit the wetland credit sales for the preservation of wetlands. He explained it was likely the city would generate far more in funds than would be necessary to maintain the BWS.

Councilmember Robertson inquired if the funding from the wetland sales could be used for trails or only for wetland maintenance. Mr. Huss commented this was a fine line, noting the trails were not part of the wetland, but could come from park dedication fees.

Councilmember Hovland questioned if Pioneer Park could be designated a wetland area in order to assist with the generation of wetland credits and the restoration of this area. He asked if the city should bond to complete the tree removal project.

Councilmember Robertson commented this project felt methodical and she did not want the city to create a wetland bank, given the concerns that arose out of the BWS. She did not believe the city needed to create another wetland bank. She was concerned about how difficult it would be for the city to explain to residents surrounding Pioneer Park the difference between an invasive versus a non-invasive tree.

Councilmember Jeppson stated in this situation there were not a lot of different funding sources available to assist with this project. She reported if this land were a wetland bank it would not be developed, rather the land would be preserved. She indicated this could lead to a potential revenue source for the city to help pay for future maintenance.

Councilmember Robertson agreed this land could not be developed because it was city-owned wetlands.

Councilmember Paul supported the dead trees being removed. He suggested after this, further discussion be held to evaluate how the park should be addressed. He commented he would like to see the native trees preserved. He understood dollars were earmarked for wetland

restoration, but noted the council could decide which wetlands were restored.

Councilmember Hovland stated he was not entirely opposed to creating a wetland bank. He viewed this project as having two separate parts. The first being the removal of the dead and diseased trees in order to reduce the spread of EAB, while also assisting with the preservation of native tree species. He supported the council moving forward with this portion of the project. He noted the council could then discuss future projects after this work was completed. He recommended if this project were to move forward the city would have to be very open and a great deal of education would have to be offered to the public. He suggested staff look into grant opportunities to assist with the removal of the dead ash trees.

Councilmember Jeppson indicated the council supported having the dead ash trees removed. She questioned how staff was proposing to fund the project. Mr. Huss stated the city had enough park dedication fees to fund the project in total.

Councilmember Massoglia questioned what the price would be to remove only the dead and diseased trees along the trail. Public Works Director Haukaas reported a large part of the project cost was mobilization and staff has proposed the most efficient project in order to have a contractor complete the project. He stated doing the trail alone may still cost the city $100,000. He reported Pioneer Park has been a priority for the city's open space.

Councilmember Hovland discussed how the numerous dead trees within Pioneer Park was fuel that could threaten surrounding homes. He did not support limiting the tree removal to just the trails but rather recommended the entire park be considered.

Councilmember Massoglia asked why all of the dead trees within the park were not being considered for removal. He stated if the council was preparing this open space for a wetland, this should be discussed and decided before this project moves forward.

City Manager Wolfe reported Public Works Director Haukaas provided the council with a presentation on tree removal. She indicated this presentation provided the council with information on the number of ash trees that have to be removed in the city and was meant to be a policy discussion. She stated the Pioneer Park project was a piece of the overall proposal and would assist the city with removing a portion of dead and diseased ash trees. She commented if the city were to hire a

contractor for this project, get them mobilized, from a cost efficiency standpoint, it would make the most sense to have invasive trees also removed. She explained the council could stop at the baseline and only have the ash trees removed.

Councilmember Massoglia commented he would like the council to make a decision on whether or not Pioneer Park would become a wetland bank. He did not support the council taking steps and taking steps without a decision being made up front.

Councilmember Paul stated the dead trees had to be removed and after this was done, the council could evaluate how to move forward with this park.

Mayor Sanders inquired if the $300,000 was approved, further decisions could be made in the coming weeks. Mr. Huss reported this was the case.

Mayor Sanders asked if the council supported spending $300,000 on tree removal at Pioneer Park.

Councilmember Hovland questioned what the timeline was for this project. Mr. Krieger stated if the council offered their support, the city would have to hire a contractor and meet with the residents before the project could move forward. He anticipated the project would not move forward until late 2022 or early 2023. Ms. Hedstrom estimated it would take a year or possibly even two to have all of the dead and diseased trees within Pioneer Park removed.

Councilmember Hovland reported the city was already allocating $175,000 a year for tree removal. He indicated Pioneer Park had a high concentration of ash trees that had to be removed and staff has stated it would take a year or two to have all of these trees removed.

Councilmember Paul requested further information regarding the neighboring property. Mr. Haukaas reported the neighboring property was going through the wetland banking process.

Mayor Sanders thanked the council for the discussion and stated he looked forward to future discussions on Pioneer Park.

Discussed

3-2 American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funding Discussion

Attachments: ARP EDA Ideas

2021-12-28 ARP Fund Infrastructure Ideas

2021.01.03 ARP Funding Discussion Presentation

Mr. Huss stated on March 11, the American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA" or "ARP") of 2021, also called the COVID-19 Stimulus Package or American Rescue Plan, was signed into law. The act is a $1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill that builds upon previously enacted aid measures in 2020. Blaine's total allocation is $6,793,793, and the first payment of $3,396,896.50, equaling one-half of the total of Blaine's allocation, was received in June 2021. The balance of the allocation is expected by mid-2022. In July 2021, a staff committee comprising of the Finance Director, Public Works Director, Director of Administration, and Economic Development Specialist was formed. The committee reviewed the act in greater detail and drafted a listing of potential uses of ARP funds in accordance with the act. The potential uses for the ARP funds was discussed in further detail with the Council.

Councilmember Robertson stated business needs, in terms of dollars needed may have changed. She discussed how businesses were struggling to find people to work.

Councilmember Hovland agreed with Councilmember Robertson stating businesses were in need at this time. He suggested 90% of the dollars go to businesses and 10% go to government needs. He indicated businesses are really in need at this time. He did not want to see further shut downs and closures of local businesses. Mr. Huss stated the use of the funds was very important for the ARP dollars and noted businesses would have to qualify for funding based on revenue losses.

Councilmember Jeppson supported the city helping businesses as well. She believed the money should be given to businesses, however she did not believe this should be the majority given the fact the city also can use the ARP dollars for infrastructure. She recommended the council stay away from ratios at this point.

Councilmember Paul stated there were small businesses that were surviving this pandemic but were still in need. He hoped that these businesses could apply for assistance if the city were to provide funding to businesses. He recommended funding also be provided for homeowners who were struggling. He wanted the good news to reach all sectors in order to meet the needs of those who were struggling.

Mayor Sanders asked if staff needed approval tonight for a dollar amount. Mr. Huss stated it may be too early for this, but noted he has heard there was strong support for business assistance and

infrastructure improvements.

Further discussion ensued regarding how businesses were struggling to find workers at this time and how this was impacting their productivity.

Discussed

ADJOURN

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:25PM.