

CITY OF BLAINE  
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA  
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP  
Monday, March 1, 2021

6:00PM  
Council Chambers  
10801 Town Square Drive

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:00PM. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this hybrid meeting was held both virtually and in person.

**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; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; City Engineer Dan Schluender; City Planner Lori Johnson; Deputy Fire Marshal Todd Miller; Director of Administration Cassandra Tabor; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Community Standards Director Bob Fiske; Interim Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.1 Median Safety Ordinance.

Safety Services Manager/Police Chief Podany stated the median safety ordinance is being proposed due to concerns of pedestrians standing for long periods of time in the median of high traffic intersections within the city. The ordinance still allows for safe crossing of roadways but prohibits standing in the median for multiple light cycles. Details are contained in the ordinance and background. Enforcement of the ordinance will begin with education and requests for movement from the prohibited activity. For continued or repeated violations, enforcement action will be an option. Staff reviewed the proposed median safety ordinance in further detail with the council and requested feedback.

Councilmember Robertson asked if this ordinance addressed both medians and intersections. Police Chief Podany reported this ordinance would only address center medians.

Councilmember Robertson recommended other areas of concern in the city be addressed in this ordinance in order to assist the police department. She commented her only concern with this ordinance was that it could be perceived the city was focusing directly on panhandlers. Police Chief Podany explained he has received complaints about panhandling, religious organizations handing out pamphlets, or businesses advertising their services from a center median.

Councilmember Jeppson understood it was a safety concern to have pedestrians in the center medians but was concerned the optics of this ordinance was too focused on panhandling and those experience homelessness and for that reason she would not be able to support this ordinance. She indicated she would not be able to support any ordinance that criminalizes being homeless and stated she would be able to support the ordinance if panhandling were removed. Police Chief Podany explained it would be difficult to limit within the ordinance who would or would not be allowed within the center median. He reported the Blaine Police Department would continue to work with the homeless community. City Attorney Nelson agreed the ordinance as drafted was neutral and universally applicable. He advised it would be difficult to identify which activities were or were not allowed in center medians when the goal was to address the safety of all persons.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she appreciated how the police department was working with the homeless community by offering hands that were compassionate and recommended the city not adopt an ordinance at this time when it was not needed.

Councilmember Hovland commented anyone in a center median creates a safety concern. He was of the opinion this was simply the wrong place for pedestrians to be. He sympathized with the homeless in the community but indicated center medians were not the right place for pedestrians to be. He believed everyone had a heart for the homeless in the community, but explained this ordinance was about public safety. He indicated he did not want to see someone killed or seriously injured because of pedestrians in the center median.

Councilmember Jeppson understood this was a public safety issue but did not believe having an ordinance in place would prevent people from making bad decisions or being disrespectful. She stated the police department was already responding to calls when people were being unsafe and she didn't believe the ordinance would make the message any stronger.

Councilmember Hovland disagreed stating the ordinance would give the police department a stronger position. He feared that many times this behavior goes ignored. He commented any change was better than no change, especially when it came to public safety.

Councilmember Jeppson stated again that she understood this was a public safety concern then asked how many lives have been lost without this ordinance in place. Police Chief Podany reported a number of pedestrians have been struck by cars at 85<sup>th</sup> and University Avenues.

Councilmember Paul discussed what he has seen around the community and how things are dangerous for both pedestrians and vehicles, adding the speed along Highway 65 was so high. He recommended signage be posted to better educate pedestrians. Police Chief Podany commented on traffic signal light cycles and how these were set by the city and county, including the ability to place signage.

Mayor Sanders indicated this was a public safety issue and asked if there was some kind of tool the council could support to give to the police department.

Councilmember Robertson commented why stop at medians then shared her concerns that if this ordinance were adopted it would just push panhandlers from one area to another. She explained it was difficult to legislate or create ordinances around human behaviors and asked if this ordinance could be upheld in court. Mr. Nelson reported there was a comparable section in state statute that states no person shall stand on a roadway for the purpose of soliciting employment, business or contributions from the occupants of any vehicle. He noted the median is deemed to be outside of the roadway.

Councilmember Robertson stated she did not believe she would be able to support this ordinance due to the optics. She noted Spring Lake Park approved a similar ordinance last week and was concerned about the impacts to law enforcement while trying to enforce.

Councilmember Jeppson commented if panhandling wasn't a part of this ordinance, she could support it.

Mayor Sanders stated there was some opposition to the ordinance framework but this could be addressed if the language were reworked.

Police Chief Podany discussed the requirements for petty misdemeanors noting the police department would be taking an educational approach for this matter. He explained he did not want to create a crime for this action but would like to improve pedestrian safety in medians.

Mr. Nelson commented he was unaware of another mechanism available to the police department other than an ordinance that would assist with enforcement.

Mayor Sanders discussed an event that occurred along Central Avenue where a car stopped to hand money to an individual and how this caused cars to swerve in order to avoid getting in an accident with this stopped vehicle and pedestrian. He stated he has seen this occur in

other cities and in Blaine along University Avenue and it was dangerous. He wanted to believe there was something the city could do to peacefully move these pedestrians to a safer environment. He reported the impetus that brought this ordinance forward was very real. He anticipated if the right language could be brought forward a positive solution could be found to address this concern.

Council directed staff to work to create partnerships to try to address concerns raised in the ordinance language before any formal consideration.

### 3.2 City Hall Clock Repair.

Deputy Fire Marshal Miller stated the design of city hall included a clock tower as a feature of the building. The city hall clock located on the front of the building was installed as part of the original construction and has been in operation for the last 19 years. The clock has required a handful of service calls over the years. In the fall of 2019, the clock stopped working, the cause of which was determined to be the motors failing. Staff was directed to solicit quotes to repair the clock or replace the clock with a new face, which would include a lighted City of Blaine logo. The city's building maintenance contractor, McGough, solicited quotes for both options. Due to the limited number of companies qualified to make the repairs needed, McGough informed staff they were able to secure quotes from only one company - Archetype. The clock parts are not local and would be sent from Lumichron Commercial Clocks, a company in Michigan, to Archetype, which is a local Minnesota sign company. Staff reviewed the quotes for the repair and replacement of the clock and requested direction from the council on how to proceed.

Councilmember Hovland asked if the estimates included installation. Mr. Miller reported this was the case.

Councilmember Hovland supported the city replacing the motor in order to get the clock operating again.

Councilmember Robertson commented she was surprised by the expense to fix the clock mechanics and asked why so few quotes were provided. Mr. Miller indicated there were only a few businesses that completed this type of work. He noted he worked with McGough in order to find companies that would submit an estimate.

City Manager Wolfe explained it was her understanding a lot of the cost was for the specialized equipment needed to access the clock.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she was taken aback by these quotes. She commented if the motor was repaired, what would the long term maintenance costs be to the city. She indicated

at this time she would support the city installing the logo because this would eliminate any future maintenance expenses.

Councilmember Smith stated this was very clearly a clock tower and not a logo tower and would like to see this remain a clock tower.

Councilmember Hovland questioned if staff had contacted the City of Minneapolis to see who maintains their clock tower. Mr. Miller explained he had reached out to the city of Minneapolis.

Mayor Sanders stated he agreed with Councilmember Smith that this was built to be a clock tower and for that reason, he would like to see the clock operational. He appreciated how the clock tower provided a sense of identity at city hall. He indicated he was surprised that so few companies provided these services.

Councilmember Paul supported the clock being fixed.

Mayor Sanders questioned if the company that fixes the clock would be conducting the ongoing maintenance. Mr. Miller explained there would be two different companies working on the clock.

Mayor Sanders commented he would like to better understand if either company would be providing maintenance on clocks long term.

Council consensus was to move forward with the clock repair but to research ongoing maintenance costs first along with the longevity of the maintenance by the selected vendor.

### 3.3 2020 Department Accomplishments.

Ms. Wolfe explained staff had a summary of accomplishments from each city department from 2020.

City Clerk Sorensen explained her department launched online business licenses, reduced the number of massage licenses to 10, enhanced the onboarding for new city councilmembers, conducted five elections amidst the pandemic with 93% voter turnout, and recruited 75 new election judges.

Communications Manager Hayle reported his department saw a huge increase in social media use over the past year, additional CivicReady announcements and increased use of the city's website. He commented further on the number of hours of programming that was offered on the city's cable channel. He explained CARES Act dollars were used to assist with

upgrading technology at city hall. He stated a new fully online (CivicRec) recreational program was launched in August.

Director of Administration Tabor explained 500 applications were processed in 2020 and over 150 interviews were held, the majority of those being held virtually. She stated 30 new individuals started working for Blaine last year. She noted the first employee survey was conducted and she was happy to report there was an 85% participation rate. She commented further on the tasks that were completed by the HR department which included getting employees enrolled in dental and health insurance plans.

Community Development Director Thorvig updated the council on the number of inspections that occurred in 2020. He explained IMS was implemented in October, which was a completely new software program that would allow residents to apply, pay and receive permits online. He reported the city continues to pursue property for future redevelopment opportunities and provided over \$1,000,000 in CARES Act dollars during the pandemic. He indicated the 2040 comprehensive plan was approved and the zoning code was updated.

Finance Director Huss discussed the accomplishments within the finance department, noting GIS was now under the finance department. He indicated the IT department deployed new in squad systems and upgraded connectivity devices in the squad cars. He commented further on how the IT department worked to meet the changing needs of staff during the pandemic. He described how the city used CARES Act dollars successfully to assist the city and local businesses during the pandemic. The 2020 bonding efforts were discussed.

Interim Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger reviewed the park and recreation accomplishments with the council. He commented on how busy the beach and warming houses were in 2020. He discussed the drive in movie event that was held in August. He described the emergency meal program that was being hosted at MAYC for local seniors and noted staff has been working to communicate with seniors in the community throughout the pandemic. Staff described the playground equipment that was replaced at the baseball complex, noting this was the city's first inclusive playground. He noted the miracle baseball field was also replaced.

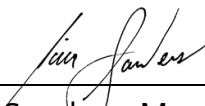
Public Works Director Haukaas discussed the accomplishments from the public works department. He was happy to report the five year CIP for the PMP was formalized. He noted priorities were identified within this long range plan. He stated the engineering group works with the planning group on all development projects. He discussed the major projects that were completed in 2020, noting the city added one new mile of streets. He commented further on the nine miles of streets that were improved last year. He explained over 700 acres of parks were maintained, noting 500 acres were mowed weekly. He discussed the trees that were replanted from the city's forest. He stated his department updated and maintained the

city's warming houses and inspected all city parks. He commented further on the hydrant, sewer and street maintenance that occurred in the city.

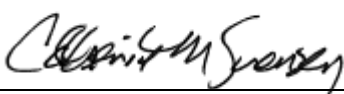
Police Chief Podany explained 12 new officers were hired and trained in 2020 and a sergeant was promoted. He indicated overtime spending was reduced by 15% and grant funding was received for a DWI officer. He reported the infection rate was kept under 11% for his staff throughout the pandemic. He noted homeless outreach events were held by the department and his department oversaw the 3M Open. He described how the department responded to civil unrest in Minneapolis and Blaine. He stated the department was now working with Anoka County on the dispensing of vaccines. He reviewed the number of calls for service and described the numerous ways the department was working to reach out to the community. He commented on the new in squad cameras the department put in place and discussed the training events that were held. The number of housing and fire inspections within the community standards department was reviewed with the council. The training completed by the fire department and number of calls for service was discussed.

Mayor Sanders thanked staff for their tremendous efforts and accomplishments, especially during a pandemic.

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:31PM.

  
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Tim Sanders, Mayor

ATTEST:

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