

CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Monday, December 16, 2019

6:00 p.m.
Cloverleaf Farm Room
10801 Town Square Drive

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ryan at 6:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

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

ABSENT: Councilmember Wes Hovland.

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; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; City Attorney Patrick Sweeney; Senior Engineering Technician Jason Sundeen; Budget/Fiscal Analyst Ward Brown; Communications Coordinator Ben Hayle; Recreation Manager Nate Monahan; Communications Technician Roark Haver; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.2 Homelessness in the City of Blaine.

Safety Services Manager/Police Chief Podany reported there has been an increase in unsheltered persons within the City of Blaine, particularly in the vicinity of Northtown Mall. Chief Podany presented the Council with an overview of the current situation and addressed the ongoing efforts to assist those affected by homelessness. The demographics of those struggling with homelessness was reviewed with the Council. The City's program was described in further detail and how this program benefits the community, along with how a soft approach was taken for people in crisis. He noted the next homeless outreach event would be held December 19 from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. at the former Buffalo Wild Wings then indicated Northtown Mall has been a tremendous partner with the Police Department.

Councilmember Jeppson commented on a recent Supreme Court ruling regarding enforcement of sleeping in public places. Police Chief Podany discussed the importance of finding homeless individuals the services that they need.

Mayor Ryan discussed crimes being committed in the community and asked if they were related to the rising homeless population. Police Chief Podany stated there have been a number of trespassing violations that have occurred recently.

Michelle Reed, Housing Program Coordinator for Anoka County, described the services available at the County to those struggling with homelessness. She thanked Blaine Police for the level of compassion they are showing towards those struggling with homelessness. In addition, she appreciated the soft approach

being taken by the Blaine Police Department. She stated she was looking forward to attending the outreach event and commented on representatives who would be in attendance.

Councilmember Garvais asked who would be representing veterans' services at the event. Ms. Reed reported the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and the Minnesota Assistance Council would be attending.

Councilmember Paul questioned why there was a rise in homelessness. Ms. Reed indicated a lack of affordable housing may be contributing to this.

Mayor Ryan commented on the importance of getting homeless individuals connected with proper services.

The Council thanked staff for the report and for taking a grass roots approach to this issue and said they looked forward to hearing about results of the event.

3.1 Code Enforcement Actions for Eldorado Street and Radisson Road Industrial Properties.

Community Development Director Thorvig stated over the last six months, staff has become increasingly aware of code enforcement concerns for several industrial properties near Eldorado Street and Radisson Road. This area is generally north of Highway 10 and east of Highway 65 in the southern portion of Blaine. There are four properties in particular that have outstanding violations; these properties are 1677 Radisson Road, 1681 Radisson Road, 1701 Radisson Road, and 1801 Radisson Road. The purpose of this report is to provide information to the City Council regarding proposed enforcement action. The properties consist of older industrial buildings with outside storage. All buildings pre-date the current code requirements regarding outside storage and several have legal nonconforming status. There are two dates of concern in identifying the legal nonconforming status of uses at these properties. Staff commented further on the proposed violations and requested feedback from the Council on how to address the concerns.

Councilmember Robertson asked if "discontinue use" meant the use had to stop. Mr. Thorvig reported this was the case.

Councilmember Robertson questioned what the City can do to push the boundaries and bring properties into compliance. Staff explained letters are sent regarding the violations in order to assist bringing the properties into compliance.

The Council thanked staff for the update on these properties and supported staff's continued enforcement efforts.

3.3 Southern Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Restoration Plan.

Public Works Director Haukaas commented on the restoration work that would occur within the Southern Blaine Wetland Sanctuary. He requested the Council discuss the southern portion of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary and provide comment on the buffer analysis.

Mayor Ryan expressed frustration with the fact a large buffer area may lead to additional costs to the City because trees would fall in this area and would have to be cleaned up at a later date by staff. Mr. Haukaas explained all diseased or dead trees would be removed, whether in the wetland sanctuary or the buffer area.

Councilmember Garvais asked why buffer areas were shaped so differently. Water Resources Manager Haug reported this was due to the fact the City was working to protect more trees, especially the oak and cherry trees.

Councilmember Robertson commented she wanted the City to be extremely transparent throughout this entire restoration process and believed it made sense for the houses 50 feet or less from the wetland sanctuary to have a buffer. She supported non-invasive healthy trees such as birch and maples remaining in these buffer areas, along with cherry, basswood and oak. Mr. Haukaas discussed the process that would be followed for the wetland restoration process and noted all trees would be identified by the contractor to ensure the proper trees were being preserved.

Councilmember Jeppson stated after reviewing the map it appears the City will be managing 800 feet or two acres of land if a buffer were to remain a part of the project, which was only about 1% of the project area.

Mayor Ryan expressed concern that private properties would be owning a portion of the wooded area surrounding the wetland sanctuary. He believed the parkland in the City should be owned by all of its residents and not those surrounding the parkland.

Councilmember Robertson encouraged the Council to be fair and take into consideration the comments received from the neighbors after being invited in to speak regarding this project.

Councilmember Swanson asked if the Council had to take action on this item tonight. Mr. Haukaas stated it would be beneficial for the Council to make a decision tonight given the fact we were now entering the winter months and it would be three weeks before the Council's next meeting. He feared the project would be lost because of weather if the Council were to delay action.

Councilmember Garvais said he had no concerns about adding another 1% to 2% of managed area to the project for the buffer areas and indicated support for adding buffer areas A, B and C to the project as outlined.

Councilmember Paul commented he was leaning towards supporting Alternate 2.

Councilmember Swanson stated in order to keep the project moving forward he would support A, B and C, even though he did not really like the concept and explained he could support no buffer but did not want to stop the project.

Councilmember Garvais indicated he could support no buffer as well but because the project already has managed buffers in other areas, he could support the A, B and C options.

Councilmember Robertson believed this was a fair compromise and thanked Council for hearing her concerns and taking into consideration the concerns raised by the neighbors.

Council consensus was to add buffer strips to areas A, B and C and to support the small land swap as proposed for the park.

OTHER BUSINESS

None.

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

ATTEST:

Tom Ryan, Mayor

Catherine Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk
Submitted by TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.