

CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Wednesday, January 19, 2022

6:00PM
Council Chambers
10801 Town Square Drive

CALL TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Sanders, Councilmembers Julie Jeppson, Chris Massoglia, Richard Paul, Jess Robertson, and Jason Smith.

ABSENT: Councilmember Wes Hovland.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; City Planner Sheila Sellman; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Deputy Human Resources Director Sheri Chesness; 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 Senior Management Analyst Lisa Derr.

3.1 2022 Lobbying Contract and Legislative Priorities.

City Manager Wolfe stated the city contracts with the firm of Lockridge Grindal Nauen (LGN) for state lobbying services. For the past three years, the annual cost paid to LGN for lobbying services has been \$36,000. LGN has submitted three options for a new contract. The three options were reviewed in detail with the council. In reviewing proposed costs, staff believes they are reasonable as proposed. We have not had an increase since first engaging with the firm for lobbying services. In checking with six other metro suburbs, our costs are in line with what other cities are paying. It was noted staff has discussed the options with Mayor Sanders and recommends a two-year contract. The annual cost is within the City Manager's authority to approve per purchasing guidelines, however, Council consensus to move forward with this recommendation is desired prior to approval.

Mayor Sanders commented on his thoughts regarding the upcoming legislative session. He anticipated the session would be complicated because it would be virtual and short but noted there was a lot of opportunities for positive things to happen. He indicated LGN was looking for a multi-year contract. He stated because things change so quickly at the state level he recommended the city pursue a contract for only two years and that the lobbying contract be reevaluated after this time.

Safety Services Manager/Police Chief Podany discussed his role with the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association and noted he serves on a legislative committee. He explained this group was going to be addressing prosecutorial accountability in 2022.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she would trust the recommendation from staff and the mayor for the two year agreement. She indicated LGN was only as good as the strength of the partnership, because this allowed LGN to accomplish the city's goals.

Councilmember Robertson agreed stating the city council was pretty tough on LGN two years ago. She appreciated the fact that the council asked to be engaged and for more accountability because this made a huge difference for the city. She wanted to see the city council continue to build relationships with LGN.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he would trust the recommendation from staff and the mayor as well. He indicated he was not a fan of some of the priorities, specifically cities working to keep permit fees down. He believed development fees were driving the cost of everything up.

Mayor Sanders commented he knew if LGN was working or not, which helped the city of Blaine. He was confident LGN was working on behalf of the community to a level that exceeded what the city paid for. He reported the city received \$8.5 million for TH65. He appreciated the fact that committee chairs were now discussing TH65 which meant this project was moving in the right direction.

Councilmember Robertson asked how LGN was being effective with communication given the fact the Capitol was closed.

Mayor Sanders discussed how LGN was working to create relationships and have conversations with individuals outside the Capitol.

Community Development Director Thorvig explained the city did not want the pendulum swinging too far in the interest of builders, because this would become disruptive of the city's goals. He reported Blaine's fees were proper at this time, when compared to other communities.

Councilmember Paul stated he appreciated the efforts of LGN over the years and noted he would support the two year contract as recommended.

Councilmember Jeppson was of the opinion it would benefit the city to have a number of lobbying forces working in conjunction on the TH65 project.

Mayor Sanders explained he has questioned if other organizations can get him into conversations and he was uncertain if other groups could make this happen. He reported good lobbyists are worth so much more than they are paid. He stated the city needs \$100+ million to finish TH65, so any dollars spent on lobbying to receive these funds would be worth it. He commented he supported the city pursuing federal lobbyists in order to pursue additional funding for TH65. He believed it would be advantageous for the city to be in the game at this time.

Councilmember Jeppson agreed with this assessment, but recommended specific expectations be written down by the city.

Councilmember Robertson stated she had mixed feelings about this. She indicated there was a reason the city was no longer a part of the North Metro Mayors organization. She explained TH65 was not a new issue. She commented she would be willing to invest in a federal lobbying organization, but did not support the city working with other local organizations. She reported she would also like to see Anoka County fully supporting this project as well.

Councilmember Smith indicated he supported the two year contract and suggested the city consider what the asks should be for the Northtown area and 105th Avenue.

Mayor Sanders stated representatives from LGN would be attending the February 7 council workshop meeting and future priorities could be discussed.

Councilmember Smith supported the city pursuing federal lobbyists in order to secure additional dollars for TH65.

Council consensus was to direct staff to move forward with the two year contract with LGN.

3.2 Proposed Code Amendment – Chapter 58 - Personnel.

Deputy Human Resources Director Chesness stated council may recall staff's recent work to shift human resources/personnel language from city code for incorporation into a comprehensive policies and procedures manual. Reasons for this shift include the need for a centralized location for employee-related references and ease for amendments should the need arise. Currently city policies exist in three locations: ordinance, administrative policies and the employee handbook. Following the best practice of centralizing the location to one document, staff has been diligently

working to incorporate and update all policies into one document. She shared the proposed ordinance that would remove the personnel ordinances from city code and move them to the city policies and procedures manual.

Mayor Sanders thanked Ms. Chesness for her report.

3.3 2021 Communications Annual Report.

Communications Manager Hayle stated at the beginning of each year staff prepares a report for the council detailing the city's communication efforts from the previous year. Over the last several years the city has put a renewed focus on both external and internal communications. In 2018 a communications division was formed within the Administration department. In 2021 the communications team underwent change as the communications technician position was redesigned as a communications specialist position. After the retirement of the communications technician in April 2021, staff worked to develop the new communications specialist position. This position was filled in December 2021. Over the last year there has been continued growth in the reach and engagement of the city's communications. Staff reviewed the current members within the communications team, described the ways in which the team communicates with the public and discussed specific metrics in further detail with the council.

Councilmember Jeppson asked if the tone of posts on social media were considered. Mr. Hayle discussed how the tone of posts were evaluated by staff. He explained on a whole, the tonality on social media towards the city of Blaine was neutral or positive on social media.

Councilmember Massoglia suggested parking and water sprinkling information be pushed out to the public on a quarterly basis within the newsletter.

Mayor Sanders stated the council should consider how they can be more proactive in getting the city's story out. Mr. Hayle discussed how staff was working to have paid content on social media to spread a positive message from the city.

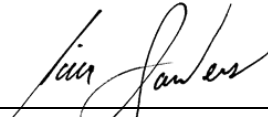
Mayor Sanders indicated the local newspapers may be another way for the city to spread its message.

Councilmember Paul commended staff on its efforts on the city's webpage.

Councilmember Robertson agreed stating the city's website was very well done. She appreciated how easy it was to navigate the city's website.

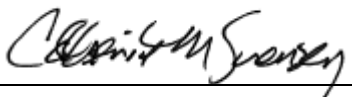
Mayor Sanders indicated the website was very well done and he appreciated all of the infographics that were included on the site. He thanked the communications team for all of their efforts on behalf of the city.

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:15PM.



Tim Sanders, Mayor

ATTEST:



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