

CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Monday, November 16, 2020

6:00 p.m.

Virtual meeting due to COVID-19 pandemic

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ryan at 6:00 p.m. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this meeting was held virtually.

ROLL CALL

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

ABSENT: None.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Bob Therres; City Engineer Dan Schluender; City Planner Lori Johnson; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Technician Roark Haver; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.1 2021 Government Relations Contract with Lockridge Grindal Nauen.

City Manager Wolfe stated the City has retained the law firm of Lockridge Grindal Nauen P.L.L.P. (LGN) and its government relations team since 2016. The firm assisted with the legislative bonding request for 105th Avenue in 2016 and 2017. For the years 2018 and 2019 the firm assisted with the planning efforts and strategy for a state bonding request for a public safety training facility and assisted in advocacy of the TH65 infrastructure improvements. The total project fee for 2020 was \$36,000. It was noted Ann Lenczewski from Lockridge Grindal Nauen was in attendance via Zoom to provide an overview of their work to support the City of Blaine during this past year and provide background for consideration of a 2021 contract with Lockridge Grindal Nauen.

Ms. Lenczewski, Lockridge Grindal Nauen, provided the Council with a presentation on the activities her firm addressed on behalf of the City of Blaine at the State Capitol. She stated she was proud of the fact her organization had the largest state government relations team at the Capitol. She commented further on the team approach that was pursued.

Angie Huss, Lockridge Grindal Nauen, described the calls and meetings that were attended routinely by her staff on behalf of the City of Blaine.

Ms. Lenczewski explained her organization was brought on in during the previous biennium to pursue funding for the 105th Avenue project. She recalled her role in this project and how her organization secured site visits and funding for this project. She indicated the next biennium led her to work on the regional training facility and Highway 65.

Ms. Huss stated six special sessions were held in 2020 to extend the powers of the Governor. She noted each special session has allowed the legislature to get other work done. During those times, she has remained in close contact with legislators to keep Blaine projects at the top of their mind and to push for additional funding for Highway 65.

Cullen Sheehan, Lockridge Grindal Nauen, commented on the recent election results for the State of Minnesota. He stated the big news federally that will impact cities will be the redistricting process based on census numbers. He explained Minnesota could lose a congressional seat for the rural areas of the State. He then reviewed the results of the election at a national level. He reported Minnesota remains the only divided State legislator in the entire country. He discussed how this would be challenging given the large deficit the State would be facing in 2021. He indicated the 2021 budget would be difficult for many reasons, especially given the pandemic. He anticipated there would be fewer meetings and committees would be virtual. He stated this would not make lobbying efforts impossible but this would be different then noted the leadership in the House and the Senate would remain the same.

Ms. Lenczewski indicated she had met with all of Blaine's legislators since the election and reported all are ready and willing to help. She explained she has good relations with each of these individuals.

Ms. Huss discussed her organization's plans for working for the City in 2021 and what this would encompass. She reiterated that all of this work would be conducted at the direction of the Blaine City Council.

Mayor Ryan thanked the lobbyists for their efforts on behalf of the City of Blaine. He discussed how difficult this year was because of the virus and anticipated 2021 would be another difficult year. He commented on how Blaine was impacted because it did not receive LGA.

Councilmember Robertson stated she understood Lockridge Grindal Nauen had a lot of clients and questioned what would happen when for example the City of Becker asked LGN to lobby for dollars for Highway 10 while Blaine was asking for funding for Highway 65. Ms. Lenczewski explained these projects were not pitted against each other and reported bonding bills have hundreds of projects from all over the State and cannot pass without having projects from all over the State. She described how a bonding project works and the different tactics that are used by her team and should a conflict arise, State law requires her to not lobby on the City's behalf.

Mayor Ryan understood that 2021 would be a difficult year and he reported salary caps should be addressed in the coming year. He stated politicians have to find a way to come together in order to work for the betterment of the State of Minnesota.

Councilmember Jeppson stated it was her understanding three cities were requesting funding for regional training centers and asked if LGN worked for the other cities requesting funding. Ms. Lenczewski clarified that the three cities seeking funding for the regional training center were Blaine, Spring Lake Park and Mounds View, all members of the SBM Fire Department.

Councilmember Hovland explained the City had received some funding for the 109th Avenue overpass. He recommended the lobbyists continue to work for additional funding for this intersection.

Councilmember Swanson requested further information regarding the legislative redistricting. Mr. Sheehan provided the Council with further information on how the redistricting would be completed.

Councilmember Paul asked if the lobbyists had support from local legislators. Ms. Lenczewski reported she meets regularly with local legislators. She commented on a recent meeting she had with Senator Newton and explained he was ready and willing to represent Blaine. Ms. Huss reported Representative West has been very vocal that his priority is Highway 65.

Councilmember Paul thanked the lobbyists with LGN for their wonderful work.

Mayor Ryan understood the legislators were supportive of work being done at 105th Avenue. He commented on how unfunded mandates impact local cities. He discussed how much work elections have become and he anticipated election laws would be addressed in the coming years.

Councilmember Garvais questioned what other two cities were vying for a regional training center. Ms. Lenczewski explained she was uncertain because this was a State priority and she had not lobbied for this issue. She reported the State was seeking additional training facilities and had encouraged the Governor to consider the City of Blaine. Ms. Wolfe stated it was her understanding the State was interested only in Blaine and was looking at potential sites. Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Podany commented on his discussions with the State Emergency Management Director and it was his understanding that Blaine was the preferred location by the State, adding he was not aware of the State having any other conversations with other communities.

Mayor Ryan thanked LGN for their continued service to the City of Blaine.

Ms. Wolfe stated staff would be coming back to the Council at a future meeting to discuss the 2021 legislative agenda and approve the 2021 contract.

3.2 Discussion of a Proposal from PLT in the Amount of \$38,531.75 for Ash Tree Removal at the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary.

Water Resources Manager Haug stated the City of Blaine has experienced a significant amount of diseased ash trees caused by the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). The Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) is one of the areas that is experiencing a high number of diseased ash trees. Unfortunately, all ash trees at the BWS are diseased or dead. Due to the difficulty of getting heavy equipment out to the uplands of the BWS, staff has requested a quote from three contractors; Precision Land and Tree (PLT), Minnesota Native Landscaping (MNL) and Reliable Tree Service, Inc. Staff reviewed the quotes that were received and noted PLT provided the lowest bid. The funding source for this project would come from the Open Space Capital Improvement Fund, which has sufficient funds to cover this expenditure. The NRCB has reviewed and is recommending to the City Council to enter into a contract with PLT to remove all ash trees throughout the BWS. She commented further on the proposed work and requested feedback from the Council on how to proceed.

Councilmember Jeppson clarified areas where trees would be removed. Ms. Haug explained only the dead and diseased ash trees in the highlighted areas would be removed.

Mayor Ryan anticipated a lot of ash trees would be dying in the next year or two.

Councilmember Swanson questioned what the odds were of other trees being damaged when heavy equipment was brought in to remove the ash trees. Ms. Haug stated this was a risk but hoped the firm, who specialized in tree removal, would be able to address this concern, adding noted language could be included in the contract that any damaged trees would have to be replaced.

Councilmember Robertson inquired how the City would be communicating with residents about the proposed work. Ms. Haug explained the City was looking at utilizing social media and the CivicPlus function on the website, adding postcards could be sent as well.

Public Works Director Haukaas reported the best practice was to complete this work in the winter months and questioned if other invasives would be removed through the ash tree removal contract. Ms. Haug stated any remaining invasives such as buckthorn would be removed at the same time but indicated the main objective was to remove dead and diseased ash trees.

Communications Manager Hayle explained the City requested residents abutting the BWS were encouraged to sign up to receive updates and noted 160 residents were currently on the notification list.

Councilmember Robertson discussed how this project would impact the surrounding homes and encouraged staff to include all of the homes that abut the BWS on the project map.

Mayor Ryan asked how many trees would be removed. Ms. Haug stated she did not have an exact number.

Councilmember Paul inquired when the work would be completed. Ms. Haug reported this would be weather dependent because the heavy equipment could not roll onto the site until the ground was completely frozen.

Ms. Wolfe reported this item would be coming back to the Council for formal approval at an upcoming meeting.

3.3 COVID-19 Impacts/Other.

Mr. Huss explained the period for expending CARES Act dollars expired on November 15. He reported the City had expended its allotment and all reports would be filed. He noted staff would be considering budget adjustments in the coming weeks.

Ms. Wolfe commented steps had been taken to move all City meetings to fully virtual in order to keep all employees, Councilmembers and the community safe. She discussed how staff was shifting again to working from home in order to remain safe and that City Hall would remain open by appointment only. She indicated staff was reviewing winter programs and modifications may be necessary and that staff would continue to communicate with the Council on any changes necessary due to COVID-19.

Mayor Ryan discussed the upcoming drive-thru senior dinner that would be held December 22. Ms. Wolfe explained the plans for this event have not been finalized and reported staff has been diligently working on the safety protocols for this drive-up event. She noted the Volunteers of America would be involved and had been made possible by a generous donation from the community. She understood several Councilmembers were interested in participating in this event and would be in contact with the Council on how to proceed.

Councilmember Robertson stated she had been speaking with members of the community about having inflatable Christmas decorations at the event and to have children with signs in order to make this a festive event. She reported the event would be fun and safe for the community's senior citizens.

Councilmember Hovland asked if staff was aware of how many COVID-19 cases have occurred in the City of Blaine. Ms. Wolfe reported this could be addressed at the morning briefing but stated her understanding

was that Hennepin County and Anoka County had the highest number of cases with Blaine having the second highest number of cases in the County.

Mr. Haukaas provided the Council with an update on TH65. He noted the County had received funding to complete an environmental review and design for the 105th Avenue interchange and explained this same work would be completed on the 99th Avenue interchange. He discussed the amount of funding that was in place for this project and noted the City had \$19 million of the \$29 million needed to complete this project.

Councilmember Hovland questioned when work would begin on the frontage road. Mr. Haukaas reported work on the frontage road was slated for 2022. He described how the environmental work being completed at this time would be the catalyst for this project.

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

Tom Ryan, Mayor

ATTEST:

Catherine Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk

Submitted by Minute Maker Secretarial