

CITY OF BLAINE  
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA  
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP  
Monday, November 9, 2020

6:30 p.m.  
Council Chambers  
10801 Town Square Drive

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ryan at 6:30 p.m. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this hybrid meeting was held both virtually and in person.

**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; Recreation Manager Nate Monahan; Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Bob Therres; City Engineer Dan t; City Planner Lori Johnson; City Attorney Patrick Sweeney; Communications Technician Roark Haver; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Human Resources Director Cassandra Tabor; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

City Manager Wolfe requested Item 3.4 be discussed first.

3.4 COVID-19 Impacts/Other.

Ms. Wolfe explained there has been a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases which was beginning to impact City services. She reported some changes have been made operationally to avoid service interruptions.

Human Resources Director Tabor further discussed the increase in COVID cases in Minnesota and how Blaine was seeing this same trend with staff. She discussed how a COVID exposure was now requiring employees to stay out of work for 10 to 14 days and anticipated schools would be moving to distance learning in the upcoming weeks.

Councilmember Hovland reported local restaurants had to close due to COVID and asked if there would be another shut down for restaurants and bars. Ms. Tabor explained she was uncertain what roll backs the Governor would be proposing in the next couple of days.

Councilmember Hovland stated it would be good for the City to be considering how to further help businesses if there were additional closures.

Councilmember Garvais questioned if there were employees that needed more time off to address COVID sick leave. Ms. Tabor commented there were only two employees that have used all of their COVID leave. She explained in other cases people have been able to work from home if they need to quarantine.

Councilmember Garvais stated one of his biggest concerns was what would happen if COVID were to run through the Public Works Department this winter. He encouraged staff to stay socially distanced.

Councilmember Paul commented there has been an influx of COVID in the City which was frightening to some people in the community and asked if there were volunteers available to begin testing residents in Blaine. He indicated he would like the City Council to write a letter to the local internet providers to ensure they continue to provide service to Blaine residents. Ms. Wolfe stated the City doesn't have control over testing sites as they were regulated by the State of Minnesota but indicated the City continues to monitor testing sites and makes this information available to the public. She explained staff has been investigating low cost internet opportunities and this information was available on the City's website. She reported the Police Department would be adjusting its schedule in order to keep the department fully staffed.

Ms. Tabor encouraged employees and residents to make good choices in order to protect themselves and others.

### 3.1 Draft Park Master Plan and Park Capital Budget Discussion.

Recreation Manager Monahan presented the Council with the draft Park Master Plan and Park Capital Budget. He explained this plan serves as a visioning document for the City and was intended to help in guiding future plans for park and trail facilities. He stated WSB Engineering was hired to review the City's park facilities and described the public engagement events held to gain resident feedback. Staff reviewed the upcoming park projects with the Council and asked for questions or comments.

Councilmember Jeppson questioned the direction from Council to add another splash pad. She reported the City did not have enough funds to fix the current splash pad.

Mayor Ryan and Councilmember Robertson shared the same concern. Mr. Monahan indicated the City had identified the additional splash pad based on feedback received from the Council and public but that this was a draft plan being presented for input and could be removed if Council directed. He explained Aquatore Park and Lexington Athletic Complex had been identified as potential locations for a future splash pad.

Councilmember Garvais asked if the proposed splash pad was included in the 2021 parks master plan. Ms. Wolfe clarified the Council provided direction to explore the possibility of an additional splash pad and explained this discussion would allow the Council to consider a future splash pad and provide staff with direction on how to proceed. She noted park dedication fees could be used toward the cost of any new splash pad.

Mayor Ryan said he did not support the City pursuing another splash pad at this time given the expense, high water use, and maintenance costs for this park feature.

Councilmember Robertson stated she recalled discussing the Happy Acres parking lot in the master plan along with the shelters at Aquatore Park and the replacement of parts within the current splash pad. She indicated \$400,000 was high for another splash pad and explained this has been a tough year and now was not the time to add this type of amenity. Mr. Monahan thanked the Council for this feedback.

Councilmember Swanson inquired about 2020 park budget and park dedication fees. Finance Director Huss discussed the 2020 park budget and noted there has been more development than was initially anticipated, even during the pandemic.

Mayor Ryan stated he appreciated the fact the City was considering updates to the Aquatore Park restrooms.

Councilmember Hovland commented he would rather see the City explore the bandshell with new bathrooms at Aquatore Park than a splash pad in the next year or two.

Mayor Ryan indicated he supported all of the projects listed except for the splash pad. He recommended some trees be planted at Peterson Park.

Councilmember Swanson agreed with the Mayor that there were little things that should be considered by the City and indicated a shelter could be added to Mary Elizabeth Park.

Councilmember Paul asked if the City had enough funding in reserves to complete the proposed projects. Mr. Huss reported the City had sufficient resources but noted the Council had the final decision as to what projects would be funded.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if a sign was being considered for the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BSW). Mr. Monahan stated a static sign was being considered.

Councilmember Paul stated he did not object to the signs at the Lexington Athletic Complex or the BWS.

Mayor Ryan recommended the splash pad be removed from the Park Master Plan. He believed this plan was very thoughtful and he supported all of the other items moving forward.

Councilmember Jeppson agreed this was a good plan to strive for. She anticipated not all projects would be completed but it was a great guiding document.

Councilmember Garvais recommended the splash pad be removed from the plan. He questioned how the Council would reallocate the \$400,000 in park dedication fees that were set aside for this project. He asked if an additional skating rink should be considered at the Lexington Athletic Complex. Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Therres discussed what would be involved to complete this ice rink, noting the parking lot would have to be removed, which could not be done this winter.

Mr. Monahan thanked the Council for their feedback.

### 3.2 2021 Proposed Tax Levy and General Fund Budget Review.

Mr. Huss stated following a number of 2021 budget discussions to this point, most recently at the Council's Fall Retreat held October 3, staff has prepared the 2021 recommended General Fund Budget. This will be Council's final review before the budget is presented at the December 14 Truth-In-Taxation public hearing. It was noted the final Tax Levy and General Fund Budget would be approved on December 21. Staff reviewed the tax levy and general fund budget in further detail with the Council, noting how the median value homeowner would be impacted and asked for comments or questions.

Mayor Ryan stated he was proud of the City's Pavement Management Plan and its efforts to improve streets.

Councilmember Swanson commented he was comfortable leaving the contribution to the bandshell somewhere between \$75,000 and \$150,000.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the capital fund can be used for the bandshell because this amenity would benefit the entire community. Mr. Huss explained this should be possible because this would be part of a redevelopment project. He reported the donated funds could then be directed to this capital fund for the project.

Councilmember Robertson stated she was interested in the City creating a “rainy day” fund while still finding ways to be responsible when spending taxpayer dollars.

Councilmember Jeppson recommended specific strategic parameters be put in place for this capital fund. She suggested this fund be used for essential expenditures such as roads and police.

Councilmember Paul thanked staff for the thorough report on the budget and tax levy. He appreciated the fact the City had received donations for the proposed bandshell. He was pleased the City’s tax rate was on the low end when compared to neighboring communities and hoped Blaine taxpayers were able to appreciate these efforts.

Councilmember Garvais agreed with Councilmember Jeppson on the parameters for how the capital (hospital) funds could be used should be better clarified. He reported the intent was to have a fund that advanced different action items within a strategic plan. He did not want these funds to be used just as “rainy day” money. He recommended these dollars be set aside in a levy relief fund for an interim period due to the unknowns regarding COVID. He anticipated the City could have shortfalls again in 2021.

Mayor Ryan agreed the funds did not have to be spent. He appreciated the \$100,000 break that was being proposed by staff. He stated he feared how COVID would impact businesses in 2021.

Councilmember Hovland asked if the bandshell project could be bonded. Mr. Huss explained this would not be allowed without a referendum.

Councilmember Swanson stated in previous years the crime analyst position has been turned down. He recommended the City consider sharing this position with a neighboring department. Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Podany reported the imbedded social worker would be a shared position. He explained the crime analyst position was being requested to focus efforts on Blaine.

Mayor Ryan asked if staff believed Emerald Ash Borer would become as bad as oak wilt and if the City Council should be setting aside funds to assist homeowners with tree removal. He stated the loss of trees with Emerald Ash Borer appears to be more gradual. Public Works Director Haukaas indicated this would be a policy decision that would have to be made by the Council and how much aid should be provided to residents. Ms. Wolfe commented the proposed funding for stump grinding would assist the City with catching up on the backlog of dead and diseased trees.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if the \$175,000 would cover staff time or contractor fees. Mr. Haukaas reported this would cover contractual fees for large Ash tree removal and stump grinding.

Councilmember Robertson inquired if the City applied for grants regarding EAB. Mr. Haukaas explained the City had applied for grants but noted these grants would provide tree replacement and would not fund tree removal.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the removal of Ash trees within the BWS was negatively impacting neighboring properties. Mr. Haukaas stated there was no conclusive evidence that the removal of Ash trees impacted neighboring properties.

Councilmember Paul hoped the residents of Blaine would appreciate the reduction in the tax levy.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if there would be a distinct difference in the adopted 2020 Budget and the actual 2020 Budget. Mr. Huss stated staff would be bringing forward an amended 2020 Budget noting the City has spent less than was proposed.

Councilmember Robertson inquired where the \$600,000 came from. Mr. Huss stated these dollars were from the preliminary levy based on the proposed tax rate. He explained the strategy would be to consider this amount but noted staff has reduced this amount slightly.

Council consensus was to direct staff to create a strategic plan and policy for the capital funds.

### 3.3 2021 Proposed Capital Equipment Budget.

Mr. Huss stated Council first reviewed the proposed 2021 Capital Fund Budget at the September 14 Workshop and then again at the Workshop of October 5, 2020. The budget has had a series of reviews. Staff summarized the process and development of the Proposed 2021 Capital Budget and reviewed the initial requests in further detail with the Council.

Mayor Ryan stated he appreciated the cost savings the City received for its proposed vehicles purchases. He asked what the City would be purchasing to replace the case loader. Mr. Haukaas reported the City would be working with Caterpillar on this purchase.

Councilmember Robertson thanked staff for all of their work on the Capital Equipment Budget. She commented she had a hard time with vehicle purchases. She questioned if the City was responsible for the maintenance, insurance and fuel for all new vehicles. Mr. Huss stated this was the case.

Councilmember Paul requested further information regarding the requested administration vehicle. Mr. Huss stated this purchase would replace one of the command staff vehicles.

Councilmember Robertson asked what a garbage tipper insert was. Mr. Haukaas explained this unit would reach out and lift a garbage can and drop its contents into the back of a truck. He reported this unit would be used in City parks, especially the dog park.

Mayor Ryan thanked Mr. Huss and his staff for all of their efforts on the Capital Equipment Budget.

The Council thanked City Clerk staff and all election judges for their efforts during the recent election. Ms. Sorensen thanked City staff and the election judges for their hard work then confirmed the election canvass meeting would be held Thursday, November 2.

The Workshop was adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

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Tom Ryan, Mayor

ATTEST:

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