

CITY OF BLAINE  
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA  
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP  
Monday, April 5, 2021

6:00PM  
Council Chambers  
10801 Town Square Drive

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:36PM. 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.

**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; Interim Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.1 Development Proposal for EDA Property on 109<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.

Community Development Director Thorvig stated the EDA owns 80 acres of land south of 109<sup>th</sup> Avenue, just east of The Sanctuary neighborhood. The EDA acquired this property in 2009 for \$1,950,000. The property has extensive wetlands which makes development challenging. The property hasn't been actively marketed however is a site that staff mentions for various site searches that may meet the unique criteria of the site. Several years ago, staff was approached by an architect representing Liberty Sports Group, Inc. (LSG) who was completing a site search for an independent league minor baseball stadium. Staff provided them several sites, including the subject property. In mid-2020, the same architect reached out to staff again regarding the baseball stadium concept. In addition to the baseball concept, the architect is working with Twin Cities Orthopedics (TCO) to locate a sports performance and physical therapy rehabilitation facility to expand their service offerings in Blaine and relieve pressure from their current facility on Highway 65. TCO also indicated that a

relationship with Blizzard Baseball would be a critical component to this new facility. Blizzard Baseball is a youth baseball development group. Blizzard Baseball and TCO would have a combined facility to capture the medical and athletic needs of each user.

Mr. Thorvig reported in November 2020, the EDA entered into a letter of intent with the three different entities to explore the feasibility of development on the property. At that time the development group wanted to keep their interests confidential until they were able to determine the development feasibility of the property. Since November, there has been due diligence completed by the development group including a wetland survey, soil testing, engineering review, property survey, and preliminary cost review. The development would consist of two different projects on the westerly 40 acres owned by the EDA. Phase I would include the TCO and Blizzard Baseball projects on the westerly portion of the 40 acre property. This phase would provide a 20,000 square foot sports performance building for TCO and a 30,000 square foot facility for Blizzard Baseball dedicated to youth baseball training and development. In addition to the buildings, Blizzard Baseball would construct two outdoor baseball fields for the purposes of training and game play. It was decided a larger stadium would not be a part of this project but could be located elsewhere in Blaine. Staff commented further on the site constraints and requested feedback from the Council on how to proceed.

Nick Sperides explained his partner, Liberty Sports Group, saw the Twin Cities as a viable and exciting market for professional baseball, similar to the St. Paul Saints. He indicated the market has since changed now that the Saints have become a AAA team for the Minnesota Twins. He discussed the homework that has been done for the site in partnership with TCO and Blizzard Baseball. He stated there were significant issues due to the wetlands and the corresponding costs to develop the site. However, he noted TCO was interested in developing the northwest corner of this site. He commented further on the proposed location of the baseball fields, along with the great relationship between TCO and Blizzard Baseball. He explained he had a conversation with the National Sports Center regarding land for the baseball stadium on behalf of Liberty Sports Group. He explained he did not have great detail regarding this matter, but noted the NSC was a viable site. He thanked staff for all of their assistance on this project.

Councilmember Hovland stated he was very excited about this proposal. He was pleased to have baseball amenities being added to the community. He recommended the developer take into consideration noise and lighting and how this would impact The Sanctuary neighborhood. Mr. Sperides explained these two fields would be used for training purposes and noted lighting has not been discussed.

Councilmember Jeppson commented she was a little nervous about hearing the term public/private partnership and explained she was against the city pursuing a referendum for this project. She also questioned what other communities were being considered for the TCO/Blizzard Baseball facility. Mr. Sperides reported he did not have firm direction on the

partnership but discussed how other projects had been completed in coordination between private organizations and cities. He agreed using taxpayer money would not be in the spirit of his client's direction. He reported his client was prepared to construct a building and the partnership would be for the fields and had yet to be determined. He explained Liberty Sports Group has not considered any other cities in the metro area. He indicated Blaine was a sports destination and this site was of great interest to Liberty Sports Group for their baseball stadium.

Councilmember Robertson stated this was a great project and she understood TCO was a great partner to the community. She commented it would have been nice to have high level plans for the council to consider. She inquired if traffic studies had been completed and asked if Anoka County would have to be contacted. She indicated overall she liked the concept, but anticipated more communication would have to occur. She stated she appreciated the sports synergies within this project.

Councilmember Hovland explained the city has had a public/private partnership with the NSC for ice time. He noted this could be a model that could be looked at.

Councilmember Paul commented this project would be huge for the community. He thanked the applicant for his detailed presentation on the proposed project.

Mayor Sanders stated he was in favor of Phase I of this project. He explained he believed this project was keeping in line with the city's vision of being both a sports and sports medicine hub in the metro area. He discussed how this project would add to the sports synergy within the community. He supported this project moving forward and would like to see Blaine associated with this project.

Mr. Sperides thanked the council for their kind words and stated he would have more information for the council on the baseball stadium the next time he comes before the city council.

Mayor Sanders discussed the creative way Allianz Field was developed and encouraged the city to be creative with the developer to work out the details.

Councilmember Robertson recommended a global view be taken into consideration for Phase II and how this amenity would impact the overall community. She believed if this project was done right, it would be a great draw for additional restaurants and lodging.

Mayor Sanders stated he would want a long-term commitment from the baseball team to ensure the stadium did not sit empty if completed in Blaine. Mr. Sperides explained Liberty Sports Group has a long standing history of long term commitments to their baseball teams. He noted the intent would be to have this ball park completed that included a sports bar,

suites and banquet facility. He commented on potential activities that could occur at the stadium outside of baseball games, noting the goal would be to have activities at the park most days of the year.

Council was supportive in working with TCO/Blizzard Baseball and a possible public/private relationship for the outdoor field component. Council recognizes the need to further discuss traffic/lighting impacts as the project develops along with a need for long-term commitment from team.

### 3.2 Monument Signs at the Lexington Athletic Complex, Blaine Wetland Sanctuary and Pheasant Ridge Business Park.

Interim Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Krieger stated the Lexington Athletic Complex was completed in 2015 and is a destination park for pickleball, tennis, basketball, lacrosse, football, baseball, ice skating and general play. It has hosted many practices, games, tournaments and recreational programs. Families from all over the state have used this destination park, however, it does not have an entrance sign. The same is true for the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) which opened in 2017. This open space is heavily visited for environmental education programming and recreational opportunities with the boardwalk and a parking lot to access the trail and has visitors from all over the nation. The BWS parking lot and trail head are tucked away in the trees and are easily missed. It was noted the Pheasant Ridge sign was taken down in 2019 due to the road construction at the entrance of the business park and is budgeted for replacement in 2021. This is a main entrance corridor for many of the city's local and future businesses. Staff commented further on the proposed monument signs, noting staff has been working with SRF, and requested feedback from the council on how to proceed.

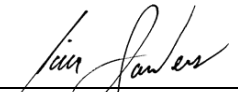
Councilmember Jeppson stated the sign designs look great and she appreciated the fact that the addresses would be placed on the monument signs. She explained she appreciated the dragonfly accents on the BWS sign.

Councilmember Robertson asked if these signs were going to be digital at one point in time. Mr. Krieger stated this was the case for the sign at the Lexington Athletic Complex, however after speaking with the consultant has been omitted.

Councilmember Robertson explained she appreciated the underlying theme within all of the monument signs in Blaine, yet each had unique characteristics. She questioned how the monument signs would be placed at the Lexington Athletic Complex and BWS. Mr. Krieger noted staff would be working with Anoka County. He reported the signs would be placed to the south side of the entrances and would not hinder sight lines.

Council consensus was to support the sign proposals as presented.

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:15PM.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Tim Sanders, Mayor

ATTEST:

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