

CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Monday, August 8, 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 Wes Hovland, Julie Jeppson, Chris Massoglia, Tom Newland, Richard Paul, and Jess Robertson.

ABSENT: None.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Safety Services Manager/Police Chief Brian Podany; Finance Director Joe Huss; Deputy Finance Director Alison Bong; City Engineer Dan Schluender; Stormwater Coordinator Megan Hedstrom; and Park & Recreation Senior Manager Jerome Krieger.

3.1 Council Requested Items for Discussion.

None.

3.2 Authorize Hiring of an Embedded Mental Health Professional.

Safety Services Manager/Police Chief Podany stated with the adoption of the 2021 General Fund Budget, the City Council approved appropriating \$12,500 for the shared services of an embedded mental health professional. Council renewed this appropriation in 2022. This position has proven to be extremely valuable and the individual currently providing the services under the contract has performed exceptionally well. Since 2018 the current professional has been a Licensed Graduate Social Worker (LGSW) and currently is a Licensed Social Worker (LCSW) who can diagnose, treat, and complete patient assessments. This is the highest licensure in Minnesota, and they can complete both clinical and non-clinical social work without supervision.

Chief Podany explained as the position is shared between two agencies, the needs of the department go beyond the time allocated to Blaine and the department has submitted a 2023 budget proposal to convert the contractual services into a full-time position that would not be shared with the other agencies. Opioid settlement funds have already begun to be dispersed in 2022 and the funds will be used to offset the cost of the proposed position. The current appropriated part time mental health professional position is coming to a close and the police department is interested in proposing an early start to this position in 2022 versus waiting for the 2023 budget approvals. He reported police and human resources staff have developed a job description for this potential position and have determined that it would fall into the C-41 classification with a mid-point salary of \$94,000. Including benefits, the total annual mid-point compensation for this position would be roughly \$112,000. If approved, staff anticipates filling the position on September 1, 2022. Total 2022 costs to bring this position on board at that date would be roughly \$40,000 including wages, benefits, and equipment. Funding for this position would come from the City's share of opioid settlement funds. As part of this settlement, Blaine will receive \$943,000 over the next 17 years, including \$106,000 to be distributed in 2022, enough to fully fund the addition of the position in 2022. Future years' distributions will range from \$42,600 to \$80,000 and help to offset the costs of the position.

Councilmember Hovland asked what hours the social worker worked. Chief Podany reported this position works normal business hours noting the current social worker has been available for phone consults and public events during evening hours.

Councilmember Hovland questioned how the City would address an issue that may occur on a weekend. Chief Podany reported an afterhours call could be made to the social worker or contact the 24-hour crisis line with Anoka County.

Councilmember Jeppson explained she fully supported this request and thanked Chief Podany for providing the Council with data on how effective this position has been. She appreciated how both the Blaine residents and police officers were benefiting from the embedded social worker.

Councilmember Robertson stated she supported the social worker position as well, especially given the growing need for mental health support in the community.

Councilmember Newland agreed and thanked Chief Podany for bringing this item forward.

Mayor Sanders asked if this was the highest and best use for the opioid funding for the City. Police Chief Podany stated he supported using these funds from the start and noted he would be pursuing grants to assist with funding the position in the future. Finance Director Huss reported the Attorney General hosted a seminar on the settlement funds and indicated this position would be a proper use for these funds.

Councilmember Hovland requested further information on the hiring process for this position. City Manager Wolfe indicated the City would work to retain the current individual.

Councilmember Jeppson asked if staff had spoken to the individual to see if they want to be hired full-time with the department. Chief Podany stated it was his understanding the individual enjoyed working with the Blaine Police Department and would be interested in a full-time position.

Councilmember Paul commented he supported the City hiring for the mental health position. He suggested the City have two part-time individuals to provide more coverage for the City. Chief Podany explained it may be difficult for the department to find the right skill sets if there were multiple social workers working with the department. He reported the department always had the 24-hour crisis line to call for events that occurred in the evening/weekend hours.

Council consensus was to support the Blaine Police Department hiring an embedded mental health professional.

3.3 Discuss Potential Pioneer Park Preservation Project.

Stormwater Coordinator Hedstrom stated on August 2, 2018, staff brought the opportunity of conducting a wetland restoration project in Pioneer Park to a workshop and received direction to move forward with a consultant to assemble a draft plan for a wetland restoration project, including information on a potential wetland bank. This draft plan was presented at the November 8, 2018, Council workshop, and Council consensus directed staff to pursue a wetland bank at Pioneer Park. At the February 7, 2019, meeting, Council approved an agreement between the City and the watershed district to move the project forward, and at the February 21, 2019, meeting a contract with a consultant was approved authorizing the consultant to conduct a wetland delineation and complete a prospectus report, one of the first steps to begin a wetland bank. Work on the prospectus was conducted over 2019 and 2020. The prospectus report identified a preliminary extent of tree removal. At the April 6, 2020, Council meeting, Council indicated that the tree removals in the wetland and upland area were a primary concern and directed staff to reduce tree impacts wherever possible. The prospectus was approved with the recommendation that neighborhood meetings be held and tree removals be re-examined. After hearing many concerns regarding tree removals, the project was paused so that the tree removal and wetland impacts could be evaluated in more detail. A comprehensive tree survey was performed by the consultant. A wetland banking 101 workshop was held with Council on June 14, 2021. The potential project was brought back to Council on January 3 for further discussion. Specifics on tree removals were discussed. Staff commented further on the proposed plans for Pioneer Park and requested feedback from the Council on how to proceed with the wetland bank.

Mayor Sanders asked if the Council was in favor of removing trees within Pioneer Park.

Councilmember Newland stated he liked option 5, having dead trees removed to address safety concerns with the City then taking a phased approach for the wetland bank approach going forward. He indicated this would address concerns he had with how the aesthetics would be impacted for the surrounding neighbors while also giving the Council time to address funding options for the project.

Councilmember Hovland agreed to this approach noting he would only like the trees removed that pose a safety concern. He commented he was concerned about the number of diseased trees within the park, as well as invasive species. Ms. Hedstrom reported the buckthorn would be addressed as part of option 2. She noted the park had garlic mustard and this was being managed by volunteer groups at this time.

Councilmember Hovland questioned if the City has considered tree replacement within this park. Public Works Director Haukaas stated by removing the dead trees, the oaks and desirable native trees would have a better environment to thrive in.

Councilmember Massoglia indicated he agreed with Councilmember Newland's suggestion to remove the 572 dead ash trees within the trails. He did not believe it made sense to remove the ash trees that were in the middle of the wetland at this time.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she agreed with Councilmember Massoglia and Councilmember Newland that only the dead ash trees along the trails should be removed. She commented on how the park could be a fire hazard given the number of dead and dying trees within the park. She discussed how the Pioneer Park wetland bank was a tremendous project and supported the Council moving forward slowly, even if this meant spending more over time.

Councilmember Robertson supported the City removing the dead ash trees as suggested by Councilmember Massoglia and Councilmember Newland. She indicated the City would have to have a very clear communication plan in place if these trees were removed.

Councilmember Hovland questioned if the wetland bank was considered for Pioneer Park, how many additional trees would have to be removed. Ms. Hedstrom explained this would involve the removal of 1,300 ash trees and 800 invasive trees in the southwestern portion of Pioneer Park.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he could support the removal of the 572 trees but did not support any wetland banking within Pioneer Park.

Councilmember Jeppson indicated this was a massive project and further discussions would have to be held after the 572 trees are removed to see if any further work should be done in the park. She commented on how the Council could fund this project, noting the City had funding set aside for ash tree removal each year. Mr. Haukaas reported this was the case, but noted these funds were being used to remove dead and diseased ash trees from boulevards.

Councilmember Massoglia recalled that the Council set aside \$300,000 for ash tree removal in Pioneer Park from the open space fund for 2022. Ms. Hedstrom stated this was correct.

Mayor Sanders questioned what the Council's next step would be. Mr. Haukaas stated staff would need to advertise this project to find a contractor to complete the tree removal work in late January or early February. His hope would be to have a vendor selected by November.

Councilmember Hovland inquired if the City had looked into grant programs for this work. Deputy Finance Director Bong explained if this work was being completed next year, the funding could be included in the 2023 budget. She stated staff could investigate grants for the tree removal but noted this would take time.

Mayor Sanders suggested staff come back to the Council with an estimate for the proposed ash tree removal at a future worksession meeting.

Council consensus was to support the removal of the 572 ash trees along the trails within Pioneer Park, with future discussions held in the future.

3.4 General Budget Process Updates and Special Revenue Fund Budgets.

Deputy Finance Director Bong reviewed the general fund budget and special revenue funds preliminary budgets with the Council. Staff requested additional comments or questions from the Council that could be included in the question-and-answer preliminary budget document. Staff also requested feedback on how to manage the charitable gambling contributions.

Councilmember Jeppson stated the topic of charitable gambling contributions could lead to much discussion and suggested the Council provide clear direction for staff. Ms. Wolfe recommended the Council revisit the list of organizations that have been funded in the past. Mr. Huss stated this would be a good starting point noting the Council could then consider what type of funding levels should continue for these organizations. He reported all organizations have been notified that this funding was not to be considered ongoing.

Councilmember Hovland indicated the organizations on the list have had their funding cut in the past when charitable contributions were down. He explained the contributions were now on the rise and noted he could support offering addition funding to the food shelves in the community.

Councilmember Jeppson supported the City continuing to fund nonprofits and food shelves. She suggested a letter of interest be written by all non-profits each year that would like to be considered for charitable gambling funding from the City. She recommended these organizations be invited to a future workshop meeting to introduce themselves and to describe how the funding would be used by their organization.

Mayor Sanders supported this recommendation.

Councilmember Paul questioned how the City received requests from the public. Ms. Bong stated staff typically receives letters from local non-profits with the City Council being copied on these letters then noted Way of the Lord food shelf had submitted a new request. Mr. Huss reported all requests brought to staff have been reviewed and considered by the Council.

Councilmember Robertson supported the Council having a list of organizations that have a relationship in the City and recommended the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon organization be added to this list.

Councilmember Hovland suggested the benefits of each organization and how they are impacting the residents of Blaine be considered by the Council.

Councilmember Jeppson agreed Beyond the Yellow Ribbon should be supported but noted she would like each organization on the list to submit requests each year to receive funding from the City.

Mayor Sanders supported this recommendation and asked that these organizations also report on how they utilized the funding to benefit Blaine residents/youth.

Councilmember Hovland asked if the new food shelf request would be incorporated into the 2023 budget. Mr. Huss reported this would be the case. It was noted staff would bring this letter forward to the Council for formal consideration.

Mayor Sanders asked if the Council supported the communications fund budget as presented.

Councilmember Massoglia recommended the franchise fees cover the cost of all City meetings with the remainder in the fund being transferred to the general fund. He suggested all other communication fund items be a general fund line item. Councilmember Newland agreed.

Ms. Bong thanked the Council for their input on the general fund budget and special revenue fund budgets.

3.5 Long Term Water Treatment Plant Capacities.

Mr. Haukaas stated staff is scoping the extent of renovations at Water Treatment Plants 1-3. Recent investigations have highlighted that the long-term filter plant capacity can influence the design of these renovations. Staff will review the future projections and how various levels of filter improvement affect our ability to supply fully filtered versus needing to blend in an amount of unfiltered water during high demand at our projected build out population. Staff commented further on the City's long term water treatment plant capacities and asked for comments or questions from the Council.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she supported the City continuing to improve and protect its water quality. Mr. Haukaas discussed what the cost would be to remove and replace Water Treatment Plant 1.

Mayor Sanders questioned what the industry standard is for water filtration. Mr. Haukaas explained there is no standard because every community was different. He indicated there were communities around Blaine that offered no filtration.

Mayor Sanders appreciated the fact that Blaine had the highest water quality at the lowest cost.

Councilmember Hovland stated in the past the biggest complaints about the City's water were manganese. He discussed how the ice pigging helped clean the City's water lines and stated he was not in favor of moving backwards when it comes to the City's water quality.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he supported remodeling two of the water treatment plants with one being rebuilt.

Councilmember Robertson reported providing safe drinking water was one of the City's fundamental responsibilities and would fully support expenditures to maintain safe and reliable drinking water.

Councilmember Newland anticipated the oldest plant would have to be updated at some point in time. He supported the City having a timeframe and plan for the funding of this project. Mr. Haukaas thanked the Council for the feedback and support for high quality drinking water.

Other Business

Ms. Wolfe reported the Council would be holding a canvass meeting on Friday, August 12 at 9:00AM.

Ms. Wolfe stated after further discussion it was determined staff needed more time to plan for the upcoming Facebook live Town Hall and indicated the event would be moved to September.

Chief Podany commented on the number of complaints he has received regarding dogs at Lochness Park and explained dogs are to be leashed while at the park.

The Workshop was adjourned at 8:22PM.

Tim Sanders, Mayor

ATTEST:

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