

CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Monday, September 14, 2020

6:00 p.m.
Council Chambers
10801 Town Square Drive

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ryan at 6:00 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, and Jess Robertson.

ABSENT: Councilmember Dick Swanson.

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; Captain Matt Carlson; Finance Director Joe Huss; Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Bob Therres; City Engineer Dan Schluender; City Planner Lori Johnson; City Attorney Patrick Sweeney; Communications Technician Roark Haver; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Budget/Fiscal Analyst Ward Brown; GIS Coordinator Cory Richter; Executive Assistant Cara Rand; Accountant Dalton Larson; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.1 Police Department-Patrol Division Staffing Study.

Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Podany stated the Patrol Division of the Police Department conducted a staffing analysis to evaluate staffing allocation, current shifts, call distribution and patrol districts to determine if we are providing the most efficient law enforcement services to our community and stakeholders. The primary purpose was also to assess staffing levels within the police department patrol division so current and future staffing needs can be evaluated and said the study was conducted by Captain Matt Carlson with support from GIS Coordinator Cory Richter and Executive Assistant Cara Rand.

Captain Carlson commented further on the staffing study that was completed for the Blaine Police Department. He reported the study reviewed three years of staffing levels and calls for service from 2017 to 2019. He described the analysis that was completed on the data. He discussed the different staffing models that were used by police departments based on the size of the city and call volume. He indicated the authorized level model provided incremental staffing increases based on calls for service. He commented on the number of calls for service in the City per area and noted the times of day when call volumes were high and low. He explained calls for service were generally higher during the summer months than the winter months. He proposed adjusting the border between areas 6 and 8 to make calls for service more equitable. He described the calculations that were made based on the City's call volumes and reported 32 patrol officers were needed within the department to respond to calls. He indicated the department was very close to where it was supposed to be. He stated at this time 60% of officers time was allocated to calls for service and

ideally the department would like to get this performance objective down to 40%, which was an industry standard. He reported based on the findings within the report the incremental staffing increases have been justified and appropriate to maintain the calls for service. He explained the data supports the decisions that have been made by the command staff. He recommended a power shift be created from 12:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. to assist with call volumes in the late evening. Due to the lower call volume on Sundays, he noted staffing could be adjusted to provide more time off on the weekends. He then discussed how the department was responding to serious medical calls in the community.

Mayor Ryan commented on the tremendous amount of time officers can spend on medical calls in the community.

Councilmember Hovland stated officers can make a difference between life and death for those facing an emergency situation and questioned if it was the right move to have officers working 12 hours shifts. Police Chief Podany explained there were a lot of analytics on the number of hours people can work. He indicated with 12 hour shifts, officers were given more time off in between to rest and re-charge.

Councilmember Jeppson indicated she was surprised by the amount of aid the Blaine Police Department provided to other agencies and asked if the agencies reciprocated when Blaine had an emergency. Police Chief Podany reported the City received a great deal of assistance from Anoka County and other agencies, adding Spring Lake Park assisted with calls at Northtown Mall on a daily basis.

Councilmember Jeppson discussed the amount of time an officer spends on a DWI call. Captain Carlson explained DWIs were a very time consuming call because an officer has to conduct a field sobriety test, make an arrest if failed, return to the police station, and allow time for the person to speak with an attorney. He stated sometimes these stops require a warrant if a blood draw is required. Police Chief Podany indicated these were the most difficult and time consuming calls officers can take. He explained time was also needed to drive these individuals to jail, wait in the sallyport, and for detailed report writing.

City Manager Wolfe explained staff was seeking direction from the Council on how to allocate officer time and if the department should get down to 40%. She stated if this was the direction from the Council, staff would then begin working this into the staffing plan for the next five years.

Councilmember Garvais indicated it would be interesting to learn how much aid other communities provided to the City of Blaine. He commended the department for taking an in depth approach with the staffing study. He stated his two big take aways from the study was that the work of the Police Chief and command staff has brought the department to 32 patrol officers and he understood positions would have to be added as the City grows. He supported the City moving to the 40% active number.

Mayor Ryan agreed stating he wanted to see officers having time to reach out to the community in between calls.

Councilmember Garvais reported Blaine was a safe community and has great officers. He commented on the benefits of having the active number reduced to 40%. Captain Carlson stated if this percentage were reduced from 60% to 40%, officers would be able to spend more time on calls or in the community, instead of having to go from call to call. He explained the department was very close, staffing-wise, and would need two more officers in order for the department to reach the 40% level.

Councilmember Robertson reported there were a lot of moving pieces within the police department and explained there were a great number of things police officers were called to do. She believed community

policing was important and was of the opinion the Blaine Police Department was top notch. She supported shifting the active time to 40% to allow for more community policing and requested staff explain how many police officers were currently working for the department. Police Chief Podany explained the department was authorized to have 71 sworn officers. He noted the patrol division had 32 officers, which was down four from where it should be. He indicated the remaining officers worked in special operations or administration.

Councilmember Robertson thanked Police Chief Podany for the clarification and said she appreciated all of the officers within the Blaine Police Department.

Councilmember Hovland commented on how the police department allocated its resources. He understood several officers were dedicated to traffic control. He indicated the City Council and Police Administration may need to consider how to better balance the existing police staff in order to meet the needs of the community. He questioned how overtime hours would be affected if additional officers were brought on. Police Chief Podany stated some overtime was due to special events and these hours were funded externally. He indicated there was also overtime that occurred due to the department being understaffed and if the City were to hire additional officers, these overtime hours would go away. He discussed the differences of having 12 hours shifts versus 8 hour shifts. He commented on the importance of having a good working environment for his staff.

Councilmember Paul thanked Chief Podany and Captain Carlson for all of their work on the staffing study. He appreciated the information that was presented to the City Council and said he supported police officers still responding to medical calls.

Mayor Ryan stated he appreciated all of the great community outreach that was conducted each year by officers at the Night to Unite events.

Councilmember Jeppson asked if the police department had a five to ten year strategy for the new staffing model. Police Chief Podany stated he would like to see if the Council supports the 40% threshold prior to adjusting the staffing model.

Councilmember Garvais indicated he wanted to see the department get to the 40% threshold. In addition, he supported the department looking at staffing trends in order to prepare a proper staffing model. He recommended more analysis be completed on the proposed power shifts. He explained once the Council has this information the Council can discuss when to implement the new staffing model.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she wasn't so concerned about the number of police officers on staff but rather she was concerned about the 60% threshold that officers were at currently. She discussed what was being lost because officers did not have the time within their shifts to initiate contact with the community. She recommended staff work out an initiation plan and how this plan could be implemented in the next five to ten years.

Councilmember Robertson commented on the number of mental health and suicide calls police officers have to respond to. She questioned if an officer or social advocate should be dedicated specifically to mental health. Police Chief Podany explained he has requested \$12,500 for the next two years for a collaborative project with Coon Rapids and Anoka County to hire a social worker that would be co-located between Blaine and Coon Rapids. He reported this embedded social worker would not be responding to calls alone, but would respond with police officers in order to provide assistance to people facing a mental health crisis.

Councilmember Robertson inquired if the department had one trained crisis intervention officer that could serve on each shift. Police Chief Podany stated he has between 8 and 12 officers who have received crisis intervention training (CIT) then discussed the proactive work that was completed by officers who have CIT training.

Mayor Ryan commented there may be a tremendous shift to more and more people working from home, alongside their college and high school students, due to COVID-19. He indicated this may create more concerns for people in the home. Police Chief Podany stated mental health needs were a growing concern for the community in 2020.

Mayor Ryan thanked Chief Podany and Captain Carlson for their thorough report.

3.2 Values Statement.

Ms. Wolfe reported the City Council reached consensus on a stated Mission Statement at the February 19 Workshop, which was to: "Deliver exceptional public services with the highest degree of professionalism and accountability." She commented the final step in being able to move forward with approving the Blaine Strategic Plan is to finalize a Values Statement. Staff received comments the last time this was discussed at workshop (also in February), and developed some new options. This item was on the agenda for the March 9 workshop and was discussed. Those in attendance reacted favorably to the proposal from staff, however, some Council members were absent. Therefore, the item was scheduled for March 16 but was removed from the agenda to allow for discussion on the pandemic. It is important to consider that values are not an action or a goal. They are underlying everything we do as an organization. Therefore one option is to eliminate any kind of opening statement at all and simply list the values as Transparency and Openness, Fairness and Impartiality, Respect and Professionalism, Creativity and Innovation, Accountability and Efficiency. Ms. Wolfe requested feedback from the Council in order to move the value statement and strategic plan forward.

Councilmember Jeppson thanked staff for their efforts on the value statement. She suggested in Alternate A the value statement be amended to add the word "through" at the beginning and that the words professionalism and accountability be removed, because they were already stated in the City's mission statement. She recommended the line with respect be finished with efficiency.

Mayor Ryan stated he supported the proposed changes.

Councilmember Garvais stated he supported Alternate C.

Councilmember Robertson commented she would support the consensus of the Council. She explained she would like to see the value statement remain simple then asked how the City would display or use this statement. Ms. Wolfe indicated she would be working with Communications Manager Hayle to discuss the ways in which the mission and value statement can be shared with the community.

Councilmember Paul stated he was pleased to see the City had developed a mission and value statement. He believed these statements would assist with moving the City forward in a positive direction.

Ms. Wolfe thanked the Council for their feedback and stated she would be bringing the strategic plan back to for approval.

3.3 Update on City Hall Improvements and Next Steps.

Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Therres stated the current City Hall/Police Department facility was finished in March of 2002, and with rapid increase in our commercial and industrial businesses, population, demand of community space and an additional 33 staff, discussions on City Hall needs started to take place. In the fall of 2017, the City Council authorized a space needs study of City Hall to look at making efficient use of our existing space as well as to develop a plan for occupying the third floor.

Mr. Therres reported in the spring of 2019, after reviewing the space needs study, the City Council authorized the hiring of an architect and a construction manager to design improvements that would allow for the expansion of the Police Department including the finishing of a portion of the third 3rd floor. With that, the City contracted with Wold Architects and RJM Construction Management to start design improvements for City Hall and authorized the selling of \$4.2 million in capital improvement bonds. As the final drawings were nearing completion, the pandemic hit and these improvements were put on hold. However, with the receipt of bond proceeds in August 2019, the clock to complete the project began and at a June workshop meeting the City Council discussed the need to proceed with the project. Treasury and IRS regulations require that proceeds from the bonds be substantially spent within three years of receipt. If the City does not comply with this timeline, the bonds would convert from tax exempt bonds to taxable bonds and would negatively affect bondholders as well as severely compromising the City's bond rating.

Ms. Wolfe commented on how City Hall was used by the community. She stated in 2019 the conference rooms were used between 14 and 29 different groups each month, along with up to 18 Parks and Recreation events. She indicated this meant City Hall was being used for 16 to 47 events each month as a meeting or gathering space for the community.

Mr. Therres reviewed the preliminary designs for the City Hall improvements. He explained an additional community room would be created behind the Parks and Recreation space. He noted the Police Department would have a lobby, men's and women's locker rooms, increased space in the evidence room and roll call room. He reported the building inspection department would increase in size.

Mayor Ryan stated he supported the Police Department having a lobby that was secure.

Councilmember Jeppson agreed. She questioned how the space behind the lobby desk would be used. Police Chief Podany reported this space would be used for file storage and additional desks.

Ms. Wolfe explained the goal with the proposed renovations would be to limit the number of offices in order to create more collaborative working spaces. She reported some of these areas would have cubicles or open work areas.

Mr. Therres commented on the next steps and timeline for the City Hall improvement project. He indicated staff was hoping to bid this project in December or January with Council approval. He anticipated construction would begin in March and would continue through July. He stated staff had the understanding there was a good bidding environment which was why staff had brought this project forward for Council consideration.

Councilmember Robertson stated she appreciated the communication process being proposed by the City. She believed it would be important for the City to communicate with the public in order to provide the right optics regarding the improvements that would occur at City Hall. She recommended the City enforce the importance of having a AAA bond rating.

Councilmember Jeppson commented she was having a tough time supporting the City spending \$4.2 million at this time, however, if the City did not move forward with this project, the ramifications would be detrimental to the City. She indicated the timing was unfortunate, but she appreciated the communication efforts being proposed by staff. She thanked Mayor Ryan, Councilmember Swanson and Councilmember Hovland for their forethought in building a third story onto City Hall as it would have cost the City a great deal more if land and an addition had to be constructed onto City Hall.

Councilmember Garvais stated he agreed with Councilmember Robertson and Councilmember Jeppson that now was a difficult time to be spending \$4.2 million in taxpayer funds. However, this decision was made a year ago, before COVID had occurred. He explained he did not support the City jeopardizing its credit rating and for this reason he recommended the project move forward.

Ms. Wolfe indicated the growth within the Police Department was driving the expansion to the third floor at City Hall.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she has heard concerns from the public regarding the frivolousness of the City offering a fitness center on the first floor for its employees and requested staff address this concern. Ms. Wolfe commented she had proposed this amenity into the plans because she believes strongly that the wellness of employees was integral to the City's service provision and financial health. She stated healthy employees have less leave time and injuries. She reported police officers and firefighters complete a large number of lift assists and other physical activities in their work and that a wellness center would assist in keeping health insurance premiums down.

Councilmember Robertson encouraged the City to keep in mind the optics of this amenity. Ms. Wolfe stated staff would keep this in mind as the project moves forward. She encouraged the Council to keep in mind that in this time of economic downturn this project would provide private sector jobs and the City would have a better bidding environment.

Mayor Ryan indicated there was no perfect time to complete this project. He commented on how the public disapproved of the move from old City Hall along Highway 65 to the new location.

Councilmember Paul explained the City was growing and City Hall would need to expand to meet the needs of the community. He commented on how the cost for this project would increase over the next two or three years. For this reason, he supported the proposed improvements being completed at this time.

3.4 2021 Proposed Capital Fund Budget.

Finance Director Huss presented the Council with a first draft of the Proposed 2021 Capital Budget. It was noted capital requests have been submitted and the City Manager is reviewing the requests and integrating them into a recommended 2021 Capital Budget. He discussed how CARES Act funding would be used to cover 2020 City expenses. Staff shared further information regarding the requests with Council and requested feedback on how to proceed.

Councilmember Jeppson supported the City looking into a fleet schedule for vehicle purchases. Ms. Wolfe stated it would benefit the City to complete a fleet study. She anticipated the recommendations from a study of this type could save the City the expense paid for the study.

Mayor Ryan explained Councilmember Swanson was interested in the City putting funds aside for the bandshell in 2021, even if this was a small portion over the next few years. Mr. Huss stated he had spoken to Councilmember Swanson regarding this matter.

Councilmember Paul requested further information regarding the two new programs in the 2021 budget. Mr. Huss explained these two programs would allow the City to invest in disaster recovery efforts, iPads, a roadside fingerprint scanner, and a vehicle maintenance computer.

Mayor Ryan questioned when the Council would be reviewing the budget next. Mr. Huss explained the budget would be coming back to the Council in mid-October.

3.5 CARES Funding/COVID Impacts/Other.

Ms. Huss reported the City has filed with the Office of Management and Budget with the State of Minnesota over \$300,000 in qualified COVID-19 expenses. He discussed the City expenses that were included in this filing. He explained staff had updated these expenditures with Baker Tilly.

Community Development Director Thorvig discussed the small business assistance grant program with the Council. He indicated round one closed on Friday, September 11 and the City received 36 applications. Of these applications, 25 were qualified for the loan program. He stated additional requests have trickled in after the deadline and staff would recommend the City fund five additional applications. He explained this would mean the City was funding 30 grants for \$300,000. He commented on the applications that were denied and encouraged the Council to consider offering grants to sole proprietors who own a barber shop or salon as these business owners have expenses and rent to pay. He reported round two would open September 21 and include sole proprietors and non-profits to apply. It was noted tobacco based businesses or e-cigarette type businesses were not eligible for these grant dollars.

Councilmember Garvais stated he supported the five barber shop/salon type businesses not having to reapply for the grant dollars.

Councilmember Jeppson indicated she supported sole proprietors and non-profits being able to apply for the grant dollars as well. She explained there were a lot of grant dollars available at this time for businesses that were struggling, however these dollars did not apply to non-profits. She encouraged the City to review its program in order to make CARES Act dollars available to non-profits. Mr. Thorvig stated he has had a conversation with Ms. Wolfe regarding this matter and the question has been raised if non-profits should be made to fit into this program or if a separate program should be created. He recommended a separate program be considered. He noted non-profits would be allowed to apply for grant funds through round two of the existing program.

Councilmember Robertson stated she would like to see the City helping as many businesses as possible within the confines of the CARES Act requirements. She explained the beauty industry has been hit really hard due to COVID-19. She supported the City helping non-profits through a separate program.

Mayor Ryan commented these grant funds may assist in getting these businesses through the pandemic.

Councilmember Paul stated he supported the City offering grants to local non-profits. He encouraged staff to contact Comcast and other internet providers to request their bills be lowered in order to allow students to educate themselves from home this fall.

Ms. Wolfe requested guidance from the Council on how to address grant requests from tobacco-based businesses. Council consensus was to allow these businesses into the grant program.

Councilmember Robertson asked if larger community partners, like Fogerty, could be granted CARES Act funding. Ms. Wolfe stated there was a desire to create a separate program for non-profit organizations.

Mr. Thorvig discussed the Business Appreciation Day golf/luncheon event that would be held September 21.

Councilmember Hovland stated he would like the City to consider setting a time limit for the large, unsightly refuse bags or dumpsters residents have sitting in their yards. Mr. Thorvig reported residents are allowed to have these bags or dumpsters in place if they have an open building permit with the City.

Councilmember Hovland expressed concern with the speed of traffic using residential roads in order to bypass the traffic along Highway 65 and recommended the Traffic Commission investigate this concern further.

The Workshop was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Tom Ryan, Mayor

ATTEST:

Catherine Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk

Submitted by Minute Maker Secretarial