

CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Monday, December 14, 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 hybrid meeting was held virtually.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Mayor Tom Ryan, Councilmembers Andy Garvais, Julie Jeppson (joined the meeting at 6:55 p.m.), Richard Paul, Jess Robertson, and Dick Swanson.

ABSENT: Councilmember Wes Hovland.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: NRCB Commission Members: Chair Chris Perkins, Dale Trippler, Gene Rafferty, Sam Villella, Mary Jo Truchon, Puneet Vedi, Dottie McKinley, Carolyn Panning, Kristen Genet and Nabeel Syed.

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Deputy Police Chief Dan Szykalski; Finance Director Joe Huss; Budget/Fiscal Analyst Ward Brown; Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Bob Therres; City Engineer Dan Schluender; City Planner Lori Johnson; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; Recreation Manager Nate Monahan; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Technician Roark Haver; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.1 City Council and Natural Resource Conservation Board Joint Meeting.

Recreation Manager Monahan reported the joint NRCB/City Council meeting was originally scheduled for April 8, 2020. He stated due to the pandemic this meeting was canceled. He thanked the Council and NRCB members for being present. He provided a presentation on the history of the NRCB, described previous open space purchases and commented on the five year capital plan. The goals of the NRCB were listed which included further development of the BWS, continue looking for sponsors for interpretive signs, propose building shelter design, expand programming, continue partnerships with schools, complete the southern portion restoration, trail development and design in open spaces, continue to sell wetland credits in the BWS northern portion, and continue the Main Street/Pioneer Park project. The 2014 BWS Master Plan was then discussed. Further discussion ensued regarding future proposed trails and the interpretive signs within the BWS. Staff noted they have received a great deal of positive feedback on the interpretive signs. The proposal for the BWS monument sign and shelter was then discussed.

Commissioner Trippler questioned what the cost was to sponsor an interpretive sign within the BWS. Mr. Monahan reported this cost was \$1,500. He noted the cost could be shared between two businesses.

Commissioner Truchon reported the 2014 BWS Master Plan would not fully come to fruition. She explained all of the proposed trails would devalue the price of the wetland credits.

Councilmember Swanson explained he was a member of the original Council that approved this concept and this group wanted a shelter at the BWS that rivaled Springbrook with meeting rooms.

Water Resources Manager Haug further discussed the benefits of having an interpretive nature center within the BWS. She updated the Council on the southern portion restoration project and noted the weather has not allowed work to begin. She noted letters were sent to all adjacent properties informing them that all dead and diseased Ash trees would be removed this winter. She commented on the city's wetland credit sales and noted staff was working through the Main Street/Pioneer Park wetland restoration project. She reported the next step for this project would be to hold neighborhood meetings with residents that live in this area of the city prior to submitting permits.

Mr. Monahan commented on the Sunrise Pond open space project and discussed the open space budget. Staff requested feedback from the Council on the five year plan.

Councilmember Swanson asked why trails had not been included in the budget in 2022, 2023, and 2024. Mr. Monahan explained this would be a future discussion and noted trails were being considered for the BWS in these years.

Councilmember Swanson encouraged the NRCB to consider connection trails because these were valuable to residents.

Councilmember Robertson stated her concern was that the Council had not had a discussion about how to proceed with Pioneer Park. Ms. Haug discussed the plans for Pioneer Park and understood this matter had to be further discussed by the Council. She reported the regulatory agencies view this park as a viable wetland bank. She explained staff would be bringing this matter back to the Council for further consideration.

Commissioner Trippler questioned who was currently managing the wetland mitigation process. Ms. Haug explained the city currently hired a consultant to assist and oversee this work. She reported the City had a seven year contract with a consultant to develop the BWS. She indicated the contract would end in 2021 and staff would be requesting an extension with this consultant until all wetland credits are released.

Mayor Ryan discussed his concerns regarding surface water and the extensive investment in a water treatment plant and encouraged the city to keep in mind the health of the water table.

Commissioner Truchon stated this was a legitimate concern the NRCB would work to address then thanked Mayor Ryan and Councilmember Swanson for all of their support in the past.

Mayor Ryan commented further on how valuable water was as a resource to the city and for Blaine residents.

Commissioner Trippler recommended the city have a hydrologist on staff. He discussed the work he does and encouraged the city to investigate any large water draw downs in neighboring cities because this could have an effect on Blaine aquifers.

City Manager Wolfe requested the Council bring forward any concerns they may have prior to considering the budget on Monday, December 21, 2020.

Councilmember Swanson stated he would like to see something in the 2022, 2023 and 2024 budget for trails.

Councilmember Paul thanked staff for the detailed report from the NRCB and said he appreciated the efforts of the NRCB then asked if the city had any private parks. Mr. Monahan reported there was a private park in The Lakes, Quail Creek Woods, and the Club West playground. He noted all private playgrounds were the responsibility of the neighborhood and not the city.

Commissioner McKinley thanked Mayor Ryan and Councilmember Swanson for their years of dedicated service to the city of Blaine. She discussed the Open Trail and Space Fund purpose and questioned why sidewalks and projects were being completed that were not in keeping with the purpose of this fund.

Councilmember Swanson stated the money from new developments was not just for open space but for trails throughout the city.

Further discussion ensued regarding the value of the interpretive signs and having sponsors for these signs.

Mayor Ryan thanked the NRCB members for their service and wished them all Happy Holidays.

Councilmember Garvais thanked the Boardmembers for their dedication to the city.

3.2 Update on City Hall/Police Department Improvements.

Public Services Manager/Assistant City Manager Therres stated at the September 14, 2020 City Council Workshop, staff gave an update on the City Hall/Police Department Improvements that have been authorized and financed. The requested discussion was on whether to proceed with these improvements or not. The Council direction was to proceed with the improvements. Also discussed at that meeting was bringing back a final design for the City Hall/Police Department improvements for the Council's review prior to submitting the design for bids in January. It was noted RJM Construction, the Construction Manager for the project, was preparing a final cost estimate that will be available to the Council. Staff commented further on the project and noted Joel Dunning with Wold Architects had a presentation for the Council.

Joel Dunning, Wold Architects, discussed the big picture objectives that were to be achieved through the City Hall remodeling. He reviewed these guiding principles with the Council and described the proposed plans for City Hall and Police Department improvements.

Mayor Ryan asked if the third floor of City Hall would have space set aside for election equipment. City Clerk Sorensen stated the third floor had sufficient space going forward.

Mayor Ryan explained he liked how the Police Department space has been reconfigured.

Councilmember Jeppson questioned if the Parks and Recreation space had designated offices on the plan. Mr. Dunning reported the end space would be the office space for the Parks Supervisor. He commented the remainder of the space would be used for open office work stations.

Councilmember Jeppson inquired how the Police Department renovations would be completed while maintaining security for the department. Mr. Therres reported this project would be done in phases and RJM would be addressing security issues throughout the phases for the city.

Councilmember Swanson suggested the supervisors within the Parks and Recreation Department be moved to the other end in order to open up the windows for all other employees. Mr. Dunning reported the front of the supervisor's office would be glass to allow light to come into that area. He commented to save construction costs the Park and Recreation Department would be utilizing the hallway space. He stated he understood the importance of all work stations having a view of daylight.

Councilmember Paul requested further information on the Police Department roll call room. Mr. Dunning described the layout, design and purpose of the roll call room for the Police Department. He explained this room did not have to be split up by genders.

Councilmember Paul inquired if the holding cell area would be modified. Mr. Dunning indicated this area of the Police Department was not being modified.

Mayor Ryan asked if Deputy Police Chief Szykalski saw the need for any changes in the proposed plans. Deputy Police Chief Szykalski reported he supported the plans for the Police Department as presented. He noted the growth of the Police Department had spurred the need to make renovations at City Hall.

Mayor Ryan questioned how many officers within the department were female. Deputy Police Chief Szykalski explained five percent to ten percent of the Police Department staff were female.

Councilmember Garvais thanked the Police Department and city staff members for their efforts on this plan.

Ms. Wolfe commented Police Chief Podany informed her that volunteer firefighters may be serving out of City Hall in the future. She explained the only fitness equipment available to first responders was several mats and a few pieces of equipment in the garage. She reported a separate fitness and wellness area would be needed in the future. Deputy Police Chief Szykalski discussed how the volunteers would function at the City Hall noting the existing fitness equipment was not up to par.

Ms. Wolfe reported she would have a cost estimate for the Council to review on December 21 and noted this item would come back to the Council for approval in February.

3.3 2021 Government Relations Contract with Lockridge Grindal Nauen.

Ms. 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 2018-2020 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. The same fee (\$3,000 per month) is proposed for 2021. City Council has discussed this topic at two recent workshops. Most recently, lobbying firm representatives presented to Council on November 16. The staff recommendation is for the City Manager to sign a letter of agreement for 2021, noting that a legislative priorities and work plan/expectations document will be prepared and approved by City Council in January 2021.

Councilmember Garvais said he believed staff had a good plan in place. He stated it would be important for the city to have a good work plan in place and recommended the lobbyists be required to check in with the city periodically as this may have been missing in the past.

Councilmember Robertson agreed this would be valuable for the City Council. She wanted to see the interactions with LGN more personalized and that LGN meet the City Council where they are at. She commented she wanted to be more engaged with LGN.

Mayor Ryan reported he has always believed LGN staff was very engaged and anticipated Mayor Elect Sanders would use his experience at the Capitol to assist.

Councilmember Jeppson thanked staff for the great plan. She appreciated the fact an intentional plan would be put in place with LGN. Ms. Wolfe reported both she and the lobbyists understood the need to be communicative with the city. She explained a meeting with the Commissioner of Transportation was in order to provide an update on Highway 65 and would be scheduled for a virtual meeting in early January.

Councilmember Paul stated he was pleased with the steps the city was taking with LGN and thanked Ms. Wolfe for her efforts.

Councilmember Swanson commented it may benefit the city to have the Police Chief and Fire Chief advocating or lobbying for the Public Safety Training Center on behalf of the city. He recommended the city also reach out to local representatives to ensure they were lobbying on behalf of the city as well.

3.4 COVID-19 Resident Survey Results.

Communications Manager Hayle stated in October 2020 the City of Blaine purchased the Polco survey platform. This expenditure was funded by the CARES Act and approved by the Blaine City Council as a part of the CARES Act spending plan. City staff worked with Polco staff to set up Blaine's engagement dashboard to prepare the first survey which was a COVID-19 resident survey. The survey was launched on November 23 and closed on December 13. It was noted the survey was promoted multiple times to residents through a variety of communication channels. The majority of the survey questions were developed by Polco and their partner agency the National Research Center. It was noted staff worked with Polco to tailor the survey for the Blaine community. The demographics of the respondents was reviewed with the Council, along with the number of contact points available to the city. Staff presented the preliminary survey results and noted the final results will be available in January 2021. The main thing learned from the preliminary survey results was to communicate with the public where COVID-19 testing was available and staff would continue sharing how to access mental health resources.

Mayor Ryan commented on how many people asked where the food would be distributed during the SBM Santa parade.

Councilmember Robertson indicated those being most impacted by COVID-19 were senior citizens and the results of this survey do not include a large voice from the senior population. She stated there was more work that could be done to ensure seniors were included in future surveys. Mr. Hayle thanked Councilmember Robertson for pointing this out to staff.

Councilmember Garvais stated the lower income population was another demographic and voice that the city needed to hear from. He thanked staff for all of their efforts on this survey and for the data that was collected and suggested shorter surveys be considered in the future.

3.5 COVID-19 Impacts/Other.

Ms. Wolfe reported there was nothing additional to present.

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

ATTEST:

Tom Ryan, Mayor

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