

CITY OF BLAINE
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
Monday, May 10, 2021

6:00PM
Council Chambers
10801 Town Square Drive

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:00PM. 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; City Planner Lori Johnson; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Police Chief/Safety Services Manager Brian Podany; Captain Mark Boerboom; Deputy Fire Marshal Todd Miller; Finance Director Joe Huss; City Engineer Dan Schluender; Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Jerome Krieger; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.1 Southwest Corner of Main Street and Lexington Avenue Zoning Discussion.

Community Development Director Thorvig stated as part of the visioning discussion that occurred in early 2021, four priority development areas were identified by the city council. Those areas include the southwest corner of Main Street and Lexington Avenue, Northtown Area, 105th Avenue and Radisson Road, and the area west of Highway 65 north of 99th Avenue. The areas were identified because they are either larger vacant parcels of land that are available for development, or redevelopment efforts are required. The council identified the need to be more proactive in the future development of these areas to ensure what is developed is consistent with the vision of the community.

Mr. Thorvig explained the southwest corner of Main Street and Lexington Avenue (project area) has a 40-acre parcel that is currently being marketed for sale. South of the 40-acre

parcel is the City's new water treatment plant and three privately owned homes. Staff reviewed a map which showed the project area, the future Lakes Parkway road connection with signal at Lexington Avenue and 122nd Avenue, and future Low Density Residential (LDR) land use to the west. He identified different areas for discussion and said staff was looking for feedback on plans and types of uses being proposed for this area.

Councilmember Hovland stated he supported sit down restaurants, coffee shops and salons in this area. He indicated he did not believe the neighborhood was looking for fast food options.

Councilmember Robertson said she did not support putting housing or apartments in the proposed area as large portion of this land was wetlands. She explained she envisioned this area as becoming an amenity hub for the surrounding residents.

Councilmember Jeppson agreed that area should be businesses and did not believe housing would be ideal.

Councilmember Massoglia agreed as well. He said he was of the opinion the residents in this area were looking for restaurants and coffee shops. He commented further on the amount of traffic in this area and expressed concern that Lexington Avenue would become the next Highway 65.

Councilmember Paul discussed the traffic at this intersection and explained he did not support additional apartments in the identified area either but recommended retail or medical uses be considered.

Mayor Sanders summarized it did not appear the council supported residential, multi-family or medium density housing uses within the identified area then asked if council supported fast food restaurants.

Councilmember Paul commented this property would be valuable and if development occurs, the surrounding residents may support fast food in the area.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the city could write into code it did not want any more repetitive fast food restaurants. She believed that there was a place for fast food on this corner due to the close proximity to the Lexington Athletic Complex. Mr. Thorvig cautioned the council from moving forward in this direction.

Councilmember Jeppson understood fast food restaurants had a stigma but indicated they also served a group of people. She stated she did not want the city to exclude a stand-alone unique fast food restaurant and hoped the city could attract new businesses to this development.

Councilmember Hovland indicated he would want to avoid stand-alone fast food but could support a fast food restaurant within a strip mall, adding there were fast food options one-half mile down the road.

Councilmember Massoglia agreed the area should be targeted for sit down restaurants.

Mayor Sanders stated he did not want to see traditional stand alone fast food in this area but would support a Crispin Green or Portillo's. He recommended the city take a close look at food options for this development given the fact there were fast food options nearby.

Further discussion ensued and it was noted the council did not support pawn shops or industrial uses in this area.

Councilmember Hovland suggested the south half be allowed to have auto uses and the northern portion be used for retail or commercial uses.

Councilmember Jeppson explained she did not support auto sales or repair on this property. She reported this was a very residential area and she did not see car repair as part of this environment. She encouraged the city to be cautious about where a gas station could be located and discussed how many other gas stations the city had in close proximity.

Councilmember Robertson agreed stating she would like to see the city present some organic concepts for this area. She commented the only corner she could see a gas station would be on the north corner and indicated she did not want to see a car wash, auto repair or auto sales within this project area.

Mayor Sanders stated he understood Councilmember Hovland's comments but noted the southern section was very close to the Lexington Athletic Complex as well as residential housing. He was of the opinion this area was begging to be amenity driven and he wanted to see the city focusing on moving forward in this manner.

3.2 City Hall Clock Repair.

Deputy Fire Marshal Miller stated at the March 1, 2021, workshop staff presented two options for the nonfunctioning city clock. Council directed staff to move forward with the clock repair option however requested staff research ongoing maintenance costs and longevity of a new clock. Contrary to information provided by McGough, the city's property management company, who provided a single quote and indicated there is a lack of companies willing to do this work, staff was able to obtain two additional quotes for the desired repairs. Both quotes obtained by staff are considerably less than the original quote obtained through McGough of \$17,262.00. Based on council direction staff contacted Lumichron who was going to supply parts only in the initial quote and discovered they can supply clock parts as well as installation

and provided a quote with two options, one to rebuild the current clock at a cost of \$7,925.00 and the other to install a new clock mechanism at a cost of \$7,875.00. Mr. Miller commented as suggested by Councilmember Hovland, staff also contacted the city of Minneapolis to obtain a quote from their clock tower vendor, Lee Manufacturing. Lee Manufacturing's quote was \$8,300.00 which does not include upgrading to LED lighting or providing access to the clock face; those elements would be the responsibility of the city to provide at an additional cost. Staff commented further on the quotes and requested direction from the council on how to proceed.

Council consensus was to direct staff to proceed with installing a new clock mechanism.

3.3 Aquatore Park Shelter Replacements.

Senior Parks and Recreation Manager Krieger stated the Aquatore Park Shelters were constructed in 1988 by the Blaine Public Works department. The two shelters are rented approximately 40 to 45 days a year from May through September. The current fees charged to rent the Aquatore shelters was reviewed with the council. It was noted the shelters were identified in the parks master plan for replacement. The project consultant, WSB and Associates, has submitted plans, specifications, and cost estimate for the two shelters. The initial estimate for the project was \$240,000 and funding was appropriated in the 2021-25 Parks Capital Improvement Plan. However, costs have increased significantly (nearly 40%) since the initial estimate was prepared. WSB's updated estimate is \$333,700 for the shelters and reflects changes in both the cost of materials and the discovery that new concrete slabs will be required for the shelters. Originally, it was thought that the slabs currently in place could be reused. Upon further inspection, new slabs will be required, increasing the estimate by \$38,000.

Mr. Krieger explained this project was approved in the 2020 Parks Capital Improvement Plan budget. The Park Board voted to recommend the city council proceed with the shelters and amend the Parks Capital Improvement budget to \$350,000 for the cost of the shelters and the consulting fees. The project would be funded with park dedication fees from the Parks Development Fund. The fund has adequate reserves to finance the project, but the CIP will require an amendment. Staff commented further on the park shelter design and requested feedback from the council on how to proceed.

Councilmember Hovland stated after speaking with a contractor he understood the cost for building materials was becoming extremely high and he anticipated the rates for lumber and steel would continue to rise. He wondered if it would be prudent to put this project off for one more year in hopes the costs would come back down.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the majority of the rentals were coming from Blaine residents. Mr. Krieger reported there was a mixture of residents and people coming from outside of Blaine.

Councilmember Robertson commented she was the least likely to support spending money and she understood the price of building materials was on the rise, however, said this was an amenity that was used by the community that generated revenue. She said she did not believe it made sense to put this project off for one year then suggested staff consider increasing the non-resident rental rate.

Councilmember Jeppson reported the expense for this project increased 30% in one month and for this reason supported the council delaying this project back one year with the hope the price of lumber and steel would stabilize. She believed this was the best option while being respectful of taxpayer dollars. She commented if the shelters did move forward, she would like them to resemble MAYC. She questioned if staff had considered putting solar panels on the shelters. Mr. Krieger stated staff had not considered this but that costs could be investigated. He reported staff had planned to have the shelters resemble MAYC. City Manager Wolfe explained there has been interest in putting solar panels on MAYC and when this plan comes forward staff can include the shelters.

Councilmember Massoglia stated with the shelters being used so much this year in their current condition, he could support the work on shelters being pushed back until 2022. He commented he was not very supportive of charging residents to use park amenities and suggested the park east of Lexington Avenue and north of Main Street be completed in 2021 instead. He discussed where the city was spending money this year on parks and stated he would like to have a specific percentage of park dedication fees going towards neighborhood parks. Mr. Krieger reported staff has been working with the developer and a consultant on the size and location of the park near Lexington Avenue and Main Street but that the park could not move forward at this point until a development begins.

Mayor Sanders questioned how the park shelters would be funded. Mr. Krieger explained the shelters would be paid for through park dedication fees.

Councilmember Hovland stated there was a need to upgrade and improve these shelters. However, he recommended staff monitor the price of lumber and steel before moving forward. He indicated he supported the city continuing to rent out the shelters to both residents and non-residents.

Councilmember Smith reported he did not see the harm in sending the project out for bid. He stated the council could always reject the bids if they came in too high.

Councilmember Hovland asked if staff had an update on the bandshell. Mr. Krieger reported the Blaine Festival Committee was excited to meet discuss this further with the council in the near future.

Councilmember Massoglia requested the council consider lowering the rental rates for Blaine residents for the park shelters. Mr. Krieger stated this could be further considered. He explained it was nice to have some sort of fee in place to provide a resident with exclusive use of the space.

Councilmember Jeppson indicated she would not support lowering the fees for the park shelter rentals. She reported residents could always opt to not rent the space and then run the risk of losing it to another resident who has opted to rent the space.

Council consensus was to support the project moving forward.

3.4 2020 General Fund Financial Update and 2022 Budget Outlook.

Finance Director Huss provided the Council with a summarized, pre-audit 2020 financial review. The review focused on the financial performance of the General Fund. It was noted the 2020 financial review will lead into a preliminary discussion on the 2022 Budget with regard to property value trends and the tax levy outlook. The economic growth in Blaine was described along with how this would impact the city's tax rate. Staff reviewed the cost containment measures assumed by staff and how this positively impacted the financials in further detail with the council and asked for comments or questions.

Councilmember Jeppson asked if staff wanted the council to discuss what to do with the excess at this time. Mr. Huss reported he was not planning on a detailed discussion at this time but rather would be discussed at a future worksession meeting as the 2022 budget moves forward.

Councilmember Robertson asked if the 2022 budget would be a retreat item. Mr. Huss stated this was the case.

Councilmember Robertson requested staff forward the presentation to the council for further review. She stated her preliminary thoughts would be to place the excess funds into the pavement management fund.

Councilmember Paul commented on the budget and discussed how homeowners may be impacted by taxes in 2022. He anticipated the city would not be able to increase taxes for the next year or two due to the stress residents were under, however, was very pleased by the outlook of the city.

Mayor Sanders thanked Mr. Huss for his report. He stated he understood the city was very fortunate to be coming out of the pandemic in a strong financial position.

3.5 Community Connections Update.

Safety Services Director/Police Chief Podany stated historically the Blaine Police Department had a Crime Prevention Unit for decades. In the past, the Crime Prevention model focused on traditional approaches to make Blaine a safer place. Last year the Blaine Police Department did a reduction in force of our Crime Prevention Unit with the goal of re-inventing what police community relations looks like in the city in light of our changing society. The new effort was designed to assess the best ways our police department can connect with all members of the community based on resident, business, and other stakeholder feedback.

Police Chief Podany explained the Blaine Police Department gathered input from the community using several different avenues, including on-line surveys, focus groups, one-on-one meetings, face to face meetings, on-line discussion groups, etc. The goal was to reach as many community members as possible from all different backgrounds and affiliations. Data was collected, analyzed, and has provided new direction for Community Connections. The feedback the department received was further discussed, along with the numerous ways the department was working to connect with the community and recommendations that were made to management.

Mayor Sanders thanked Police Chief Podany for his detailed presentation.

Councilmember Paul thanked Police Chief Podany for the information that was presented. He discussed the outreach that was being done in the community and the training officers were receiving. He supported the department receiving more mental health assistance for its officers from the county and state. Police Chief Podany discussed how important it was for officers to engage with the public outside of their squad cars. He indicated the mental health of officers was a tremendous concern at this time. He reported the department was not large enough to have a 24/7 dedicated mental health worker then discussed how the Blaine Police Department shares an imbedded social worker with the Coon Rapids Police Department. He commented further on how the department was working to connect with underrepresented groups.

Councilmember Massoglia thanked Police Chief Podany for being proactive when it comes to positive police interactions and for wanting to connect with the community. He supported the department having a new community connection officer. He recommended more bike patrols be considered in the summer months to increase the interactions between the police department and the community. He discussed how important it was for the police department to have a presence in the city's schools. Police Chief Podany agreed the relationships created in schools were vital to the community.

Councilmember Jeppson thanked Police Chief Podany for the detailed and interesting presentation. She explained she appreciated the great work being done by the department and loved the idea of including youth in the game activities. She encouraged the department to look at how these youth were selected in order to reach underrepresented individuals. She discussed how the public was now videotaping police officers in chaotic scenarios showing the officers in stressful and vulnerable situations. She challenged the department to turn the tables by videotaping themselves in the public on a daily basis. She understood there was so much more that officers were doing that was not being caught on camera. Police Chief Podany thanked Councilmember Jeppson for her comments. He discussed how virtual ride alongs were becoming popular in order for the public to see real life police situations.

Mayor Sanders stated he was pleased by the amount of positive feedback the department received and to know that the public wants to interact with the police department. He reported these interactions would help officers build positive relationships in the community. He described how the police presence at the beach last summer changed the atmosphere at the beach for the better and he wanted to see this happening everywhere in the community.

Council consensus was to direct Police Chief Podany to pursue the new community connection position within the Blaine Police Department.

3.6 COVID-19 Impacts/Other/ARP Funds.

Ms. Wolfe stated staff was researching recent changes at the state level regarding COVID-19 and was working to adjust its staffing models. She reported staff was reviewing information about the ARP funds and would have further information for the council to consider next week.

Ms. Wolfe explained she sent an email to the council regarding potential dates for the fall retreat and requested council get back to her on alternatives.

The Workshop was adjourned at 9:20PM.

Tim Sanders, Mayor

ATTEST:

Catherine Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk

Submitted by Minute Maker Secretarial