



City of Blaine Anoka County, Minnesota Minutes

Blaine City Hall
10801 Town Sq Dr NE
Blaine MN 55449

City Council Workshop

While this is a public meeting where interested persons are welcome to attend, it is a work session for City Council and staff to discuss issues before them. It is not for the purpose of receiving public input.

*Members of the public can join the Zoom webinar at
<https://blainemn.zoom.us/j/95402277233>*

Questions? Email - communications@BlaineMN.gov

Monday, February 8, 2021

6:00 PM Council Chambers and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, city meetings will also be held as virtual meetings

NOTICE OF WORKSHOP MEETING

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:00PM. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this meeting was held both virtually and in-person.

2 Roll Call

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; City Planner Lori Johnson; Associate Planner Shawn Kaye; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Administrative Assistant Pat Robinson; Technician Elizabeth Showalter; Economic Development Specialist Ruth Tucker; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

Present: 7 - Councilmember Robertson, Councilmember Paul, Councilmember Hovland, Massoglia, Smith, Sanders, and Councilmember Jeppson

Councilmember Hovland shared that former Councilmember Mike Bourke expressed his tremendous gratitude to the City for the outpouring of support offered to the Bourke family after the passing of his wife.

3 New Business

3-2

CITY VISION DISCUSSION

Attachments: [Comp Plan Implementation Steps](#)
 [2020-2023 Strategic Plan Final](#)
 [PPT Slides](#)

Community Development Director Thorvig stated over the last month staff has had discussions with several individual councilmembers about the city's vision as we continue to grow and develop. The city has completed several initiatives within the last two years related to the general organizational and city mission and vision through the strategic plan. Within the strategic plan, there are priorities that are specific to different divisions of the city such as financial sustainability, infrastructure and growth management. Within those priorities are outcomes, targets and initiatives for the council and staff to work towards over the next 3-5 years.

City Manager Wolfe commented on the next steps for the city's vision. She explained after the strategic planning sessions in early 2019 work was done around the city's mission, values and vision. She stated the mission and values were further discussed by the council in the fall of 2019 and spring of 2020. It was agreed upon that the vision would be pushed off to the spring of 2021. She reviewed the proposed vision statement noting it was very present set versus aspirational.

Mr. Thorvig indicated the timing was perfect for the council to further consider the vision for the city. He reviewed the six strategic priorities for the City of Blaine. He explained the city recently adopted the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The comprehensive plan provides an opportunity to establish a vision for how the community will grow and develop over the coming decades. The plan provides goals and implementation steps to assist the council in making decisions related to development, land use, transportation, housing and parks. In general, the comprehensive plan is a high-level document and does not necessarily get into specific strategies for individual development sites with the exception of 13 different redevelopment areas that have been identified. These two resources provide the council and staff a framework for various decision making relating to the organization or physical development of the city. Based on conversations between staff and the council, there is a collective desire to talk more in-depth about the vision for the city as we continue to grow and redevelop over the next 30 years. To note, it is anticipated the city will achieve full build-out in the next 12-15 years and the city will continue to change through redevelopment afterwards. He commented further on the highlights the council was able to provide him prior to the meeting and requested the council further discuss the city's vision.

Mayor Sanders suggested each councilmember discuss their three strategies for the city.

Councilmember Robertson commented she took the approach of what she would like the city to look like 30 years from now and what the path would have to look like to achieve this goal. She explained 30 years from now the city would be completely built out, the transportation infrastructure would be next to none, the city would be drawing in an economic tax base with new businesses because the city has taken the time to lay a solid foundation and could thrive in 30 years. She believed there was no reason Blaine could not compete with other communities like Edina, Woodbury and Lakeville. In order to thrive in 30 years, she indicated it would be important for Blaine to create an identity. In addition, the city would have to consider redevelopment carefully and should work to create a quaint downtown area that was walkable. Lastly, she suggested the city work with the businesses are brought into the community as it was her hope the city could work creatively to meet the needs of the community without moving away from the vision of the comprehensive plan.

Councilmember Smith stated his three guidelines were creating a walkable city core around the 105th corridor from Central Avenue to Radisson Road as this was the center of the city. He recommended turning the existing buildings into restaurants and shops in an effort to build community as the National Sports Center (NSC) and Tournament Players Club (TPC) were close to this corridor. He said his second priority would be to showcase and connect parks and trails and third would be to make the NSC the city's community center. He indicated the NSC could be a premier sports destination but was falling behind.

Councilmember Jeppson indicated her first priority was that she didn't want the city to be Edina or Maple Grove but rather be Blaine. She recommended the city have its own unique identity that was a go-to center for sports, entertainment and restaurants. She commented she did not want to see the city becoming a patchwork quilt but rather brought together through rebuilding Highway 65. She wanted to see the city come together, east and west, in a connected way. She recommended the city's affordable housing be considered further to ensure Blaine was a city for all and not just a city for a few. In addition, she indicated the parks master plan should be incorporated into the city's vision to ensure parks were accessible to all. She suggested the city build on its sports theme to draw people to the community.

Councilmember Paul stated the sports center continues to attract people to the community. He recommended the city work on this to be a value

add and be supportive. He discussed the benefit of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) to the community and students. He wanted to see the city continuing to improve the BWS going forward. He suggested the city continue to address the need for affordable housing. He discussed the importance of having a balance of housing for low income and higher income earning families. He provided further comment on the importance of having working streets and roadways, stating he wanted to see CSAH 14 and Highway 65 expanded or changed.

Councilmember Massoglia stated he supported everything shared so far and indicated Blaine has a lot of positive potential. He said he envisioned Blaine as a safe and affordable suburb, great for raising families, and an enjoyable city to spend time in and to visit. He commented safety and affordability made cities great. His top community development priorities were Highway 65, a fire station in northeast Blaine, high-end organic grocer, and identifying a downtown area with greater connectivity. He recommended the city continue to build around being a sports destination and liked the idea of repurposing industrial spaces.

Councilmember Hovland discussed his history with the city and commented on the intent of Town Square. He commented on how previous visioning has led to the curling club and other amenities in the community. He stated he would like Blaine to find a way to draw together through World Fest. He suggested the city create a redevelopment plan for the industrial areas of the community. He indicated it would be important for the city to continue to maintain and upkeep its housing stock. He recommended a plan be put in place to address this matter. He supported the city focusing on hosting sporting events and suggested the city continue to partner with the NSC. He indicated the city should create areas where low income affordable housing be built. He explained he would like to see Blaine spearhead a project that addressed mental health, drug abuse, and alcoholism. He stated these issues were not going to go away and believed it would benefit the city to address these concerns directly on, then commented further on the success of the Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas.

Mayor Sanders thanked everyone for sharing their thoughts and comments. He indicated there were areas of overlap. He believed Blaine is and would continue to be one of the best places to live in the metro area. He indicated Blaine was somewhat of a destination city and should be embraced for sporting events. He supported an entertainment district being established around 105th Avenue then shared about amenities offered at the Frisco District in Dallas, Texas and Legacy Hall in Plano, Texas. He anticipated the city could recreate these types of

outdoor amenities and restaurants in order to draw people together and said he supported creating a downtown area. He indicated it would take innovation and creativity to create a unique city identity and cohesion in the community but that stated now was the time to put these plans in motion if the city would be fully developed in 12 to 15 years. He thanked the council for their suggestions and participation in this process.

Councilmember Paul stated it would be important for the council to consider how to address all of the interests.

Councilmember Jeppson said she understood previous councils have had these difficult discussions and had plans in place but discussed how the private sector impacted these plans and made dreams possible. She challenged the council to be open to new concepts and embrace the creativity of the community too. She indicated she liked the vision Mayor Sanders spoke about and encouraged the city to pursue some sort of outdoor food court with surrounding amenities. She indicated this would be a viable amenity for the city to pursue that would thrive even during a pandemic.

Mr. Thorvig thanked the council for the excellent discussion. He explained the city can make all the plans they wanted but private investment was necessary. He commented further on how the city approaches commercial development noting the majority of this development has been market driven. He stated businesses do their homework before coming into the community. He indicated the number of rooftops and income levels were key to driving market decisions then went on to describe how residential developments are brought to the city. He believed Blaine has done an excellent job bringing in a variety of housing options for the community. He discussed how redevelopment would be key going forward and noted this redevelopment would be made possible through land ownership. He provided further comment on the importance of master planning for specific areas of the city. He explained it took political will to see these master plans to fruition along with developers that were willing to bring dollars to the city.

Councilmember Robertson recommended the community vibe be considered through future redevelopment projects. Mr. Thorvig stated this was a good point and explained the city needs a solid plan for the area surrounding 105th Avenue and anticipated the city council participate in a master planning exercise in order to develop a plan for this area.

Councilmember Hovland discussed how master planning projects have been completed in the past. He commented it was very important to

gather all information in order to complete a vision for the project, adding this step takes a great deal of time.

Mr. Thorvig explained the vacant parcel in front of City Hall would be another property that could be master planned, along with Northtown Mall. He stated there was a need for investment surrounding Northtown in order to keep the area vibrant. He indicated the city could partner with the landowners in order to create a vision to ensure the area was a positive gathering space.

Mayor Sanders thanked staff for the thorough presentation.

Councilmember Robertson stated she has lived in Blaine for over 20 years and discussed how the city has developed organically over time. She indicated the challenge going forward would be to anticipate how businesses would need to adapt in the future, what type of hybrid businesses would be created, how businesses would need to address health concerns, etc. She said she did not want to see the city get pigeonholed into developments that did not work for the community and wanted to see the city to have plans in place while also allowing for development to occur organically.

Councilmember Hovland agreed then explained his support for pursuing a market square. He stated if the city had a vision in place this would allow staff and private investors to come together to work towards this vision.

Mayor Sanders stated the council would have to consider two questions: are the current approaches working and should the city look at master planning certain areas. He anticipated the previous plans got the city to where it was today. He asked if the council wanted to do something innovative and bold to finish off the city in the next 12 to 15 years in order to make Blaine a premier suburb in the metro area. He supported the council looking further into master planning and recommended the council consider what areas of Blaine should be master planned. He did not believe the entire city should be master planned but rather specific areas should be designed with purpose in mind. He indicated the council had the opportunity to do something really special with a small window of opportunity. He explained the city had a lot to be proud of and he wanted to further this through continued creative master planning for the community.

Councilmember Jeppson concurred with Mayor Sanders. She believed that Blaine was an amazing city and the decisions that have been made by staff and previous councils have gotten the city to a tremendous place.

However, in order to get to the next level, she believed additional master planning was necessary for the 105th Avenue and Radisson Road corridor. She wanted to see the city communicating with businesses in this area in order to plan for the future. She indicated her second priority for master planning would be for Northtown Mall.

Councilmember Robertson shared her frustrations with the master planning processes in relation to the parks master plan and commented on the overall expense to complete the parks master plan. She indicated she would like the city's master planning be targeted and realistic. She discussed the amphitheater the city was planning at Aquatore Park and suggested this be included in future development plans.

Councilmember Smith agreed the master planning process would have to be tight in order to become practical and doable. Mr. Thorvig discussed previous master planning processes that he was involved in and explained they can be very beneficial and required a great deal of public engagement. He commented on how master plans work to market the city's vision.

Councilmember Paul described how some areas of Blaine were in need of redevelopment more than other areas of Blaine and recommended any master planning that was completed take this into consideration. He stated it would be important for the master plan to attract developer interest.

Councilmember Hovland requested the City Manager share her thoughts. Ms. Wolfe commented it has been interesting to listen and said as a resident she had all kinds of ideas, some being difficult and others not as much. She wanted to take what was heard this evening to look for common themes and believed staff had the basis for a framework in order to create next steps. She explained it would be important for the council to understand how difficult it is to create a downtown area, however, gathering spaces can be created through innovation and creativity.

Mayor Sanders agreed stating this has been a productive conversation. He indicated there had been overlap in how the city creates a gathering space that is the heart of the community, the value of connectivity, and creating a purpose driven plan where businesses compliment one another for greater synergies. He explained the council was interested in further considering master plans for certain areas of Blaine.

Mr. Thorvig thanked the council for their feedback and direction. He noted this was the first step in creating a city vision and explained staff was excited to take on this challenge.

Discussed

2 Hour Discussion

3-1

**GUEST SPEAKER - PETER LINDSTROM, MET
COUNCIL**

Metropolitan Council Member Peter Lindstrom introduced himself and thanked the council for their time. He noted he was appointed to the Met Council in the spring of 2019 and explained he appreciated the conversation the Blaine City Council had regarding the city's vision and future planning. He discussed the role of the Met Council, which included the management of regional transit and the treatment of waste water. He commented on how the pandemic has impacted ridership as well as land use and affordable housing grants provided by the Met Council. He reported the region does not have enough affordable housing and this topic would continue to be a major area of concern for the Met Council. He discussed the 10 regional parks were operated by the Met Council and encouraged the council to contact him with any comments or questions they may have.

Mayor Sanders thanked Mr. Lindstrom for his time.

Postponed

30 Minute Discussion

3-3 OTHER BUSINESS

Councilmember Massoglia stated when he was running for city council he heard about the need for a high-end organic grocer and explained how there were different hybrid models for Cub Foods. He indicated he met with the regional manager for Cub Foods and reported their CEO would like to attend a future workshop meeting to further discuss this topic.

Mayor Sanders thanked Councilmember Massoglia for his efforts and encouraged him to be in touch with staff to set up this workshop.

Councilmember Robertson thanked staff for sending flowers to former Councilmember Bourke. Mayor Sanders thanked Councilmember Robertson for representing the city at the visitation.

Councilmember Paul discussed how quarantine time was impacting people who work in Blaine when employees have to stay home without pay. He questioned if the city could get involved to point these businesses to State economic subsidies to cover the pay for these

employees.

Councilmember Jeppson suggested staff not spend time writing letters to businesses on this topic. She indicated these businesses should understand how employees should be paid during COVID and reported there were appropriate channels for these employees to follow if they are not being paid. She understood that another round of rental assistance would be offered for residents who were experiencing a hardship during the pandemic.

Councilmember Paul commented further on how immigrants were struggling at this time and explained he was trying to bring these issues to light on behalf of immigrants.

Councilmember Jeppson explained there were county, state and federal resources in place to address these concerns and noted the city should not be stepping in. Ms. Wolfe discussed how COVID leave for city employees was addressed in 2020 and noted the federal requirement expired mid-December. She noted the city approved additional time for its employees because of the pandemic but there was nothing the city could do to require Blaine employers to pay employees for quarantine time. She commented further on the family and medical leave act.

ADJOURN

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:27PM.

Adjourned