



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/9540227233>*

Questions? Email - communications@BlaineMN.gov

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

6:30 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 6:40PM. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this hybrid 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; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; Human Resources Director Cassandra Tabor; Communications Technician Roark Haver; Parks and Recreation Manager Nate Monahan; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

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

3 New Business

3-1

CITY OF BLAINE 2020 COMMUNICATIONS ANNUAL REPORT

Attachments: [2020 Communications Annual Report](#)

Communications Manager Hayle stated the city of Blaine's communications team includes three full time employees. These

employees work with all city departments to plan and execute both internal and external communications activities. Over the last three years staff and council have put an emphasis on building a stronger communications strategy for the city. To continue this work into the future the city council has identified effective communication as one of the six strategic priorities in the recently adopted strategic plan. He commented further on the city's 2020 communications annual report by highlighting the city's COVID-19 response, website user data, newsletter content and reach recap, social media analytics, traditional media coverage and CivicReady emergency notification system use report. He noted staff would be focusing on digital accessibility, migration to Engage 6 and communication engagement activities for 2021.

Councilmember Hovland asked if there was cost to participate in Zoom meetings and CivicReady. Mr. Hayle reported the expense for the Zoom platform was covered by CARES Act dollars in 2020. He noted CivicReady was a module within the city's website and was paid for through the communications fund.

Councilmember Hovland questioned how many times the city newsletter was published each year. Mr. Hayle explained the city newsletter was published six times per year.

Councilmember Hovland discussed the cost to providing city newsletters and suggested the council discuss this further at a future workshop. He indicated he would like to see a breakdown on the expense of providing city newsletters and CivicReady to the public.

Councilmember Jeppson thanked Mr. Hayle for his detailed presentation and for the tremendous impact this small department had on the community. She inquired what could be learned from the website analytic data and if staff knew if people found what they were looking for. Mr. Hayle stated he could dive deeper into the analytics noting the majority of the website traffic was coming from a Google search and was being directed right to a website page. He explained this told him people were finding what they were looking for. He commented further on the web chat function that was available on the website and discussed how this assisted people in getting answers on the website.

Mayor Sanders indicated he appreciated the quality of the experience being provided on the city's website and thanked staff for their efforts in this area.

Councilmember Robertson thanked staff for all of their efforts to enhance and improve the city's communication efforts then requested further

information regarding results from the police survey. Mr. Hayle commented staff was still learning how to use the survey platform and noted staff was happy to see the city received twice as many results on the police survey than the COVID survey. He explained he received 168 pages of data from the police survey and that staff was reviewing the data in order to create actionable steps.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if future surveys would come at a cost to the city. Mr. Hayle explained the city had a one-year agreement for the software that would expire in October 2021 then indicated there were other options available to the city for future surveys.

Councilmember Robertson stated her only critique of the police survey was that it was quite long then thanked members of the public who took the time to provide the city with feedback.

Councilmember Paul thanked Mr. Hayle for all of his efforts on the city's website.

Mayor Sanders thanked Mr. Hayle for all of his efforts to communicate with the public.

Discussed

3-2

CONSIDER SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATION ALLOWING CITIES TO CHARGE INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT FEES

Attachments: [HF 527](#)
 [Model Resolution Infrastructure Accountability](#)

Finance Director Huss stated at the first meeting in 2021 council approved the city's 2021 Legislative Priorities. The establishment of the priorities serves to identify those legislative issues that are of the highest importance to Blaine as well as provide a guide for the city's lobbyist, Lockridge Grindal Nauen (LGN), as to where to focus their advocacy efforts.

Blaine's 2021 Legislative Priority 7 (of 9) is to "Oppose Efforts to Mandate Reduction in Development and Building Fees". With respect to this priority, bills have been introduced in both the House and Senate "Authorizing municipalities to charge a street impact fee".

Mr. Huss reported the impetus for this legislation is the 2018 Minnesota Supreme Court decision in *Harstad v. City of Woodbury* that cities do not have the statutory authority necessary to impose a fee for future street improvements when approving residential development. The League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) notes that "Cities need a clear and lawful path forward to support development while protecting the interest of current

taxpayers.” Typically, when a subdivision is proposed to the City, a primary consideration is how this new development will connect with the rest of the community through new city streets, or how the added capacity will impact existing streets. While the new development may create additional demand, legal interpretation of current law (as evidenced in the *Harstad* decision) does not allow for cities to collect fees from developers to help pay for future infrastructure investments.

City Manager Wolfe explained the LMC has drafted a model resolution supporting legislation that would allow cities to collect infrastructure development fees to fund municipal street improvements as a necessary component of growth. Per LMC, under current law, cities do not have authority to do this, and without legislative action, cities that want to grow must rely on property taxes to pay for development-related infrastructure. Staff commented further on this matter and requested feedback from the council on how to proceed with the model resolution.

Community Development Director Thorvig explained he believed this legislation was something the council should support. He noted the intent of this bill was not to provide funding for Highway 65 but rather support traffic signals necessary for local developments. He noted the fees collected would need to have a connection to the proposed infrastructure improvements.

Councilmember Hovland asked if fees would have to be charged by the city if this legislation were to pass. Ms. Wolfe reported the city would be able to make that determination and that fees were not required. Councilmember Hovland questioned if there would be limitations on how quickly the collected infrastructure funds would have to be spent. He inquired if these fees would raise the overall expense for housing in Blaine. Mr. Thorvig stated when new subdivisions are approved the developer pays for all new utilities and roads. He explained these new fees would cover other projects identified in the city’s transportation plan. He noted the fees would have to be placed in a special fund. He indicated he did not have details on how quickly these funds would have to be spent. He reported the city would have the burden of explaining these were reasonable fees for future developers.

Councilmember Robertson commented she would have a difficult time supporting this proposed legislation. She indicated developers have raised concerns regarding excessive fees being charged by cities and was is concerned these types of fees would make affordable housing even more difficult to achieve. She understood if the state passed this there was nothing the city could do but noted she would not offer her support of this locally.

Councilmember Paul explained this bill was supposed to be for the state and was introduced by the Metropolitan Council. He stated he did not want bills that would result in increased fees for residents and therefore would not be supporting the proposed legislation.

Councilmember Smith indicated he would support the legislation. He stated either way the city was going to have to pay for future infrastructure. He noted the proposed legislation would assist the city by assessing developers to assist with covering the expense. He supported not asking all of Blaine to cover specific infrastructure expenses but rather the developers that were developing in a specific area.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she agreed with Councilmember Robertson and understood that while some developers felt development fees were too expensive she did not want residents to pay for new signals that had to come in the future. She indicated she would support the legislation but recommended the city not actively support a resolution of support at this time.

Councilmember Hovland agreed with Councilmember Robertson noting he could not support this. He said he was concerned this legislation would bring about a dangerous course of action as he believed Blaine has done well in establishing its Pavement Management Program to assist with roadway expenditures and did not see how the additional legislation would be beneficial in the city. He recommended the city not place additional fees and costs on developers.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if this legislation was specific to residential developers. Mr. Huss commented this legislation was for any type of development.

Council consensus was to direct staff to continue to monitor legislation and not bring forward a resolution of support at this time.

ADJOURN

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:31PM.

Adjourned