



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

Monday, April 12, 2021

6:00 PM
Tonight's City Council workshop will take place remotely. The Governor has put the curfew in place in Anoka, Hennepin, and Ramsey Counties starting at 7PM.

NOTICE OF WORKSHOP MEETING

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:00PM. Due to a 7PM curfew this meeting was held virtually.

2 Roll Call

Adjunct Member Drew Brown.

Quorum Present.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; City Planner Lori Johnson; Community Development Specialist Elizabeth Showalter; Associate Planner Shawn Kaye; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Fire Chief Charlie Smith; Finance Director Joe Huss; City Engineer Dan Schluender; Water Resources Manager Rebecca Haug; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

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

3 New Business

3-1

Attachments: [Narrative](#)
[Concept Site Plan](#)

Community Development Director Thorvig stated the State of Minnesota identified the need for a new State Emergency Operation Center (SEOC) as part of a bonding request for the 2020 Legislative Session. The current SEOC facility is located in downtown St. Paul and does not adequately serve the operations. Approximately \$30M was approved in the 2020 state bonding bill to construct a new facility. The timeline is to identify and design a site in 2021 and begin construction in 2022. The state of Minnesota proposes to construct a new, approximately 50,000 square foot, two-level facility in the north metro. The proposed facility would house two main functions - the main offices for the 60 to 80 employees of the State's Department of Public Safety, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) and the State of Minnesota Emergency Operations Center. The HSEM offices would serve as a headquarters for staff to plan and prepare for emergencies in the state as well as to respond and recover from those emergencies. HSEM staff have connectivity to emergency managers in counties and cities across the state and frequently bring outside agencies to the facility for disaster planning.

Mr. Thorvig explained the EDA purchased the site in the mid-1980s. Portions of the site were sold for various light industrial developments. The remaining site is approximately 20 acres however has significant wetlands. A wetland delineation was completed in 2017 and identified approximately 7.59 acres of upland scattered throughout the site. In order to develop the site, wetland credits will be needed. Until a site plan is prepared it is difficult to determine the amount of credits needed. Staff had a concept plan prepared showing a 70,000-square foot light industrial building that would have required approximately 4.10 acres of wetland credits at a cost of \$446,000 if purchased from the EDA at a price of \$2.50/sf.

Mr. Thorvig commented the site has additional development challenges mainly related to the need to import fill to bring the property to an elevation where a building could be constructed and correct poor soil conditions. Construction estimates were completed in 2018 by an interested developer that showed approximately \$1.25M in site improvements needed to bring the site to a shovel ready condition, which included the wetland credit costs. Therefore, the EDA would need to sell the land at a drastic discount in order for the site to make financial sense for a developer since the site is not shovel ready. It was noted staff has marketed the site for approximately three years for industrial development. There have been several interested parties, however no developer has proceeded, mainly due to the challenges related to the site. At this time, the state is seeking feedback from the EDA whether there is interest in pursuing a potential sale of the property for the SEOC

facility. Additionally, they have asked whether there would be interest in the EDA reducing the cost or granting wetland credits to assist in making the project financially feasible. City staff has indicated to the state that it is likely too premature at this point to determine whether there would be interest in reducing or granting wetland credits as the costs to the develop the site for the SEOC have not yet been determined.

Joe Kelly, Director of Homeland Security, thanked the council for considering this project. He explained the SEOC was a one of a kind facility that allows state emergency personnel to gather, support, respond to and recover from disasters. He reported this facility would be the state's equivalent to FEMA. He described the building schematic in further detail and described how SEOC staff would work to coordinate disaster situations. He indicated he has been working on this project for the past 10 years and he was happy to see the project receive support from the governor. He stated he was very excited about working with the city of Blaine on this initiative.

Joel Dunning, Wold Architects, commented he was in the predesign phase. He explained he was designing a two-story facility that was roughly 50,000 square feet in size. He reported this would be a one-of-a-kind building that would have to remain operational during a disaster.

Councilmember Smith asked why this site was selected or were other sites being considered. Mr. Dunning explained the natural wetlands were a positive feature for the site and he was working to design an attractive building that would serve as a beacon of calmness during a crisis. He indicated other sites may be more developable, but there would be more competition with the private sector.

Wayne Wisloski, Senior Director for Real Estate Services with the Department of Administration, agreed this site has both advantages and disadvantages. He reported he has looked at eight sites in Blaine, but noted this was the preferred site in Blaine at this time.

Mr. Kelly commented the proximity to 35W was important for the SEOC facility.

Councilmember Robertson questioned who the city was competing with for this facility. Mr. Wisloski explained Blaine was the state's first choice.

Councilmember Jeppson asked what other financial concessions the state was hoping to receive, noting she understood wetland credits were important. Mr. Wisloski commented the overall cost for the project was

being looked at which included soil corrections, site development, and wetland remediation. He indicated this was being compared to alternatives. He stated some of the privately owned sites were quite costly to develop as well, which was being taken into consideration. He discussed the importance of the site's location to a major freeway along with access to the state IT network.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she supported the city continuing conversations with the state for the SEOC facility with the understanding there will be an ask to assist with the cost for this project.

Councilmember Robertson agreed stating she appreciated the transparency of this conversation. She explained she had a number of questions regarding the financials but she was excited about the opportunity of this project coming to the city of Blaine.

Councilmember Paul thanked Mr. Thorvig for bringing this project to the city council. He noted he supported the project but questioned if it could move forward without wetland credits. Mr. Thorvig reported one of the advantages for this project was the city owned the land and noted the land price could be adjusted. He explained staff had estimated the cost to make the site shovel ready and indicated the land would be sold for tens of thousands of dollars. He noted wetland credits also make sense and these would be conversations that would be held as staff learns more about the project.

Mayor Sanders thanked staff for bringing this item forward. He commented overall there was support to move this project forward.

30 Minute Discussion

3-2

Review Anoka County Cost-Share Policy

Attachments: [Metro County Cost Comparison Study - Final 03-19-21](#)
[Street CIP 5 year project summary 2021-2025](#)

City Engineer Schluender stated last year, council had expressed a desire to review/amend the Anoka County signal installation portion of the county's cost share policy. As such, staff has discussed the policy with the Anoka County Engineer to review their current cost share policy. He reviewed the study that the Anoka County Highway Department had prepared that compares their current policy, in its entirety with other metro county policies.

Mr. Schluender reported staff is bringing this discussion forward at this time as the 125th Avenue project is currently being designed and is generating resident concerns and discussion specifically at the

intersection of Zest Street and 125th Avenue. Staff will discuss the intersection design options, potential costs, and funding sources available. Also during the design process the county prepares a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) that will outline the cost and maintenance responsibilities of the county and city for the different elements of the project. Staff reviewed this information with council along with the current five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that the city has for street rehabilitations and possible impacts.

Anoka County Commissioner Jeff Reinert thanked the council for their time. He stated he spoke with former Mayor Ryan about the number of projects the city would be completing in the coming years and understood the city had concerns with the current cost-share policy. He reported a meeting was held last fall and the fairness of the cost-share policy was assessed.

Anoka County Engineer Joe MacPherson commented on the results of the county's cost participation study. He noted this study led him to speak with neighboring counties on how they structure their cost share policies. He reviewed how Anoka County conducted their cost-share projects compared to neighboring counties. He believed Anoka County was fair in how costs were distributed. He discussed a summary table that compared where Anoka County was to the other four metro counties. He indicated there were a lot of areas where Anoka County was asking cities to pay less. The complexities for traffic signals and warrants were described in further detail. He explained for traffic signals the county pays for half of its legs and the city pays for 100% of their legs. He commented further on how this compared to other counties.

Councilmember Robertson thanked Mr. MacPherson for completing this study then requested further information on how costs were shared for Woodland Parkway and Lexington Avenue as it was her understanding the county paid 25% and the city paid 75% for this warranted intersection. Mr. MacPherson explained this project was completed in 2019 and met warrants. He stated this intersection had two county legs, one city leg and one private leg. He noted the private leg was viewed as a city leg. He reported the cost share for this intersection was 25% county and 75% city. He discussed the turn lanes and median changes that were added at this intersection noting the county incurred these expenses. He reported the overall cost share for the project was 61% city and 39% county.

Councilmember Robertson stated the city has 10 intersections that have been identified for signals in the coming years and that Blaine was seeing tremendous growth at this time. She commented she was having

a difficult time with the 75/25 signal split when 50% of the intersection was the county's responsibility, especially considering the city had 10 more intersections to complete. She reported she would like to see the cost share for traffic signals be split 50/50 in the future.

Mr. MacPherson stated he appreciated the candor then commented on the other costs that go into the 75/25 split for traffic signals. He noted county roads and city roads play very different roles in the community. He discussed how the county works to limit major intersections in order to keep traffic moving. He reported the county picks up the long-term maintenance costs for traffic signals, which included the painting and wiring. He was of the opinion the county had a fair and reasonable approach to traffic signals.

Councilmember Jeppson thanked staff for the presentation. She commented her concern was with the fact someone had to die and numerous accidents had to happen at the intersection of Radisson Road and Xylite Street before the county would consider a traffic signal. She reported the city was responsible for 95% of the cost for this intersection when this was a four lane highway. While she appreciated all of the data from the county, she had a hard time understanding how the Radisson Road/Xylite Street intersection was fair. She wished Blaine had the same opportunity as the City of Anoka to negotiate the final price for an intersection.

Further discussion ensued regarding the longevity and maintenance costs for traffic signals.

Councilmember Smith thanked the county for all of the information. He stated the special case intersections were the more difficult ones and requested the county be willing to have a discussion with the city in the future if warranted. Mr. MacPherson discussed the great partnership the county had with city staff and stated this would continue going into the future and noted conversations could be held.

Councilmember Robertson appreciated the fact that this conversation was being held and that the county was open to having conversations in the future.

Councilmember Hovland commented at some times the city may have to install intersections even when they don't meet warrants given how quickly Blaine was growing at this time and encouraged the county to take this into consideration.

Mr. MacPherson thanked Councilmember Hovland for his comment stating this was a great point. He reported the county was considering

both the current and future needs for intersections as the city continues to develop.

Mayor Sanders requested the conversation now turn to the Zest Street/125th Avenue intersection. Mr. Schluender discussed the proposed plans for this intersection noting the original plan was for a three-fourths access intersection. He explained the neighbors have requested a full access intersection. He reported a traffic signal would not be warranted at this time. Mr. MacPherson reported the intersection was not close to meeting warrants for a traffic signal. He stated now was not the time, but noted accommodations could be installed to assist with transitioning the intersection in the future. He indicated the county could support a full access intersection and noted a future developer at this intersection could assist the city with defraying the costs.

Mayor Sanders discussed how the residents in this neighborhood would be impacted by having to complete u-turns when leaving the development in order to access the freeway. Mr. Schluender stated this was the main concern voiced by the residents and noted the county has created an intersection that addresses all of the issues that were brought up by the neighborhood. Mr. MacPherson explained creating a full access intersection at this time accommodates and addresses all of the issues that have been raised by the residents.

Councilmember Hovland stated in the northeast area ghost platting was completed which meant the council had a good idea of the vision for this area. He indicated it was just a matter of when it will happen.

Councilmember Smith believed this was the right solution for Zest Street. He commented his only concern was where the intersection was located and that if a full access intersection were created now, this would be locked in. Mr. Schluender reported this was the case and noted he has had conversations with the county about access points and traffic signal spacing. It was staff and the county's belief that Zest Street should be a full access signalized intersection at some point in the future.

Councilmember Paul recommended staff sit down with the county and negotiate or balance the costs for this intersection. Mr. Schluender reported staff would be drafting a joint powers agreement for the county and this would be reviewed by the council prior to construction.

Mayor Sanders thanked staff and the county for their presentations. He urged the county to make the intersection of 109th and TH65 a priority.

Council consensus was to direct staff to move forward with the full access intersection for Zest Street and 125th Avenue.

60 Minute Discussion**3-3****SBM Fire Quarterly Update**

Fire Chief Smith provided the council with a quarterly update. He reported the police and fire departments have been working together to keep the community safe should any potential civil unrest occur this week or in the future. He commented further on the communications he has been having with local police chiefs noting he their teams were on standby.

Fire Chief Smith discussed the private hydrant inspection ordinance the city approved and noted he had been working with staff to create an inspection process. He anticipated inspections would begin in June and hoped to have the inspections completed by the end of summer. He described how he was working to shift firefighters in order to fill a new response area. He discussed the MN FIRE virtual training the department received several weeks ago. He commented on a recent wild land fire Station 5 responded to and how the gear needed for these fires differed from structure fires.

Councilmember Hovland asked if the hydrant inspections were being completed internally. Chief Smith reported the private fire hydrant inspections would be completed internally. Public Works Director Haukaas explained all public hydrants were completed internally as well and work orders were created if maintenance was necessary.

Councilmember Robertson questioned if staff had an update on the new fire station location. Fire Chief Smith reported this project was at the appraisal process.

Councilmember Paul inquired how residents would know if their fire hydrant had been inspected. Chief Smith stated the only way a resident would know is if firefighters were actively inspecting the hydrant. He reported notifications would be sent to neighbors to let them know when their hydrant would be inspected. Mr. Haukaas explained the city would be mapping the hydrants in the GIS system in order to keep track of which hydrants had been inspected. He stated his goal would be to inspect hydrants every other year.

Councilmember Hovland asked if the new water treatment plants had an effect on the amount of manganese in the water lines. Mr. Haukaas commented there would be an impact once the system was fully operational. He noted the majority of these particles were flushed out of the system each spring. He anticipated there would be a significant

improvement in a year or so.

Mayor Sanders thanked Chief Smith for his report and for his dedicated service to the city of Blaine.

15 Minute Discussion

3-4

Affordable Housing Discussion

Attachments: [Affordable Housing Slides](#)

Community Development Specialist Showalter stated this is the first of two workshop sessions on affordable housing. Affordable housing has been a topic of interest for the city council for specific development proposals and as a general topic in the community and region. Staff also regularly receive inquiries from developers who are considering building new affordable housing in Blaine and would like to be able to provide better guidance on the willingness of the city to provide financial assistance. Lastly, staff is looking to ensure there is common understanding on affordable housing goals and implementation strategies among the members of the city council.

Ms. Showalter reported public financial assistance is a critical component to any affordable housing project based on the revenue and financing structures of these types of developments. The ultimate goal of the workshops is to provide a policy direction of what type of financial support the city is willing to provide, under what circumstances it is appropriate, and to determine what housing programs, if any, the city should pursue to achieve its housing goals. The various levels of affordable housing and the percentage of people who are house burdened was described in detail. Staff discussed affordable housing in further detail, along with the history of Blaine's recent involvement in affordable housing projects, provided a summary of assets and deficits in Blaine's housing market and provided an overview of the housing goals adopted in the comprehensive plan.

Councilmember Hovland commented on the ratings the Metropolitan Council completed for cities based on the amount of affordable housing each city had. He reported at that time, Blaine had one of the highest amounts of affordable housing, primarily due to the mobile home parks in the community. He questioned where the city stood currently with the respect to its level of affordable housing. Ms. Showalter explained the city does typically score well due to the level of affordable housing in the community. She noted in 2020 the city received a score of 96 out of 100.

Councilmember Smith stated he looked forward to discussing the city's

affordability strategy at an upcoming retreat, particularly for the rental community. Ms. Showalter reported a menu of approaches from other communities will be discussed in the future. She noted the city would need to have a variety of approaches when considering affordable housing in Blaine.

Councilmember Jeppson thanked staff for the thorough report. She explained she appreciated how well Blaine was doing when compared to other communities. However, she wanted to encourage the city council to consider the growing need for affordable housing. She appreciated the new projects that were coming to Blaine but reminded the council to consider the needs of all Blaine residents and not just those who would shop at the new high end grocer. She reported affordable housing was a massive problem that would have to be addressed intentionally or there would be more people panhandling in the community. She indicated the city also needs to look at the diversity of the community. She reported 91% of those that own homes in Anoka County were white and only 9% were of color. She encouraged the council to make decisions going forward that represent all members of the community.

Councilmember Hovland commented part of the problem was that as long as the affordable housing system was based on income, it was difficult to be all inclusive. He questioned if there were any guidelines from the state for developers on the percentage of homes that have to fall into the category of affordable housing. He believed this was one of the missing components when addressing the need for affordable housing. He did not want to see the city paying for all affordable housing but rather some of the burden should be placed on developers. Ms. Showalter stated this was something that would be discussed in more detail at the next affordable housing worksession.

Councilmember Robertson explained she did not have the depth or background knowledge that Councilmember Jeppson had regarding affordable housing. She indicated she saw room for a city partnership with some private invested projects. She questioned what was driving the need for more affordable housing, was it lack of jobs, lack of transportation or mental health issues. She was concerned that just seeking affordable housing the city was solving only a small portion of a larger problem. She stated she hated to see people struggling, however she did not want to see local government working outside its confines.

Councilmember Jeppson agreed, stating she understood this issue was complex and involved mental health, mental illness, drug abuse, substance abuse, better job opportunities, etc. She understood the city could not solve all of these large problems, however, there was one piece

the city could control, which was its level of affordable housing.

Councilmember Hovland agreed then explained the pressure was being put on municipalities to provide housing and there was no question there was a need for it. However, it was a much broader issue that had to be addressed by the state and federal government. He was concerned things would only get worse before they got better. He asked where it was best for the city to spend its money or working to solve the deeper issue.

Councilmember Paul stated when it comes to affordable housing, he appreciated Councilmember Jeppson's comments. He understood the Met Council was struggling with how to provide enough affordable housing. He indicated Blaine had affordable housing, but it was on the higher end of the spectrum. He stated for residents who were struggling or had a lower income, affordable housing had to be available. He believed the public affairs system needed to be changed, along with employment opportunities. He discussed how other countries were addressing the issue of affordable housing. He thanked Ms. Showalter for all of the information she provided to the council. He recommended that as the city pursued more affordable housing, he suggested it not be all in the same area.

Mayor Sanders thanked everyone for their comments and stated he looked forward to having future conversations regarding affordable housing.

60 Minute Discussion

3-5

Stormwater Pond Encroachment and Violations - Outreach and Enforcement Process

Attachments: [Code Section](#)
 [Council Minutes 08-12-2019](#)

Water Resources Manager Haug stated the stormwater program was developed to reduce the pollution and damage caused by runoff from construction sites, industrial facilities and urbanized areas Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s). In Minnesota, where water contributes to a high quality of life, extra attention has been directed toward cleaner water. The city has had a permitted program to address polluted stormwater runoff since March 10, 2003. The program is intended to reduce pollution from entering the storm sewer system and degrading water quality in Blaine and the cities and waters downstream. She explained one of the requirements of the permit is for the city to inspect and maintain its storm sewer system. The city has a complex

stormwater treatment system in which runoff is collected and discharged into one of the more than 700 man-made ponds throughout the city. These man-made ponds mimic natural systems but are designed to collect, store and treat stormwater by slowing the volume of flow, preventing flooding and allowing any suspended material and pollutants to drop out and settle to the bottom of the pond.

Ms. Haug reported during inspections and communications from residents about the city's stormwater ponds, there has been an increase in the number of buffers removed and the installation of docks and recreational uses around the city's stormwater ponds. Stormwater ponds can pose safety hazards including strong currents during storm events, steep side slopes and drop-offs, unsafe winter ice and contaminated water and sediment. Ms. Haug explained the ponds along with the buffers, slow and reduce surface water runoff from adjacent land use and are effective at filtering pollutants such as fertilizers, pesticides, oils, pet waste, grass clippings and leaves. The installation of structures such as docks is a safety hazard because ponds are designed to fluctuate during rain events and docks can become unanchored and plug outlets of ponds increasing the chance of properties flooding. Staff presented to the city council on August 12, 2019 about the issues with docks and buffer removals on stormwater ponds. Council felt strongly about a program of education prior to any enforcement action. Council also supported initiating enforcement action in 2021 to have the buffers restored and docks removed if the issues were not resolved by the residents in a timely manner. Staff is recommending a continued effort to work with direct communication and homeowner associations on outreach and communication to decrease the number of encroachments and violations around stormwater ponds. Enforcement will only be used after extensive communication throughout the spring and early summer. No notices of violations will be issued before July of this year.

Councilmember Hovland asked if any of this information was related to the drainage ditches. He noted when he was campaigning, he found several drainage ditches that had soils added to them. He recommended the drainage ditches be addressed along with the stormwater ponds. He noted the city's ordinances require removal of items in private ditches, swales and stormwater ponds. Ms. Haug reported this was a big part of the city's education campaign. She noted she has encountered and dealt with several residents that have encroached onto ditches.

Councilmember Jeppson commented she did not have a strong opinion about this matter up until several weeks ago. She thanked staff for all of their efforts to properly communicating and educating the public. She understood some residents just made honest mistakes when it came to

the form and function of stormwater ponds. She indicated there were also residents who were educated and were blatantly ignoring city ordinances. She believed that if ordinances were in place they had to be enforced.

Councilmember Robertson noted education would be important for the city but added she would have a difficult time ticketing people for skating on ponds with their children.

Councilmember Massoglia agreed with Councilmember Jeppson that the city should not have ordinances if they were not going to be enforced. He indicated the ordinance could be amended if there were portions that didn't make sense anymore.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she did not support people changing the function or purpose of the pond. She did not believe residents should be mowing, or installing a dock on a stormwater pond. She indicated skating on a pond that was already a sheet of ice was not a concern to her.

Councilmember Hovland agreed and noted he has experienced loss after someone fell through the ice and wanted to see ordinances in place to keep people safe in the winter. Mr. Haukaas stated there was a lot of focus on the lakes and noted these lakes had a great deal of water flowing through them. He noted the stormwater pond adjacent to Councilmember Robertson was a single pond that was fully encapsulated on her property. He reported staff wanted to focus more heavily on the large areas that have water flowing through them.

Mayor Sanders supported staff proceeding in this matter because residents may not understand the dangers of the stormwater ponds that have water flowing through them in the winter months. He commented further on the number of people that were using the stormwater ponds for hockey games and skating this past winter. Ms. Haug stated city ordinance discourages recreational activities on stormwater ponds due to the flow going through the larger stormwater ponds. She described how the make up of the stormwater ponds makes them unsafe for skating. She noted that the word "prohibited" had been removed from the ordinance and was replaced with "discouraged".

Councilmember Robertson reported there was not a one size fits all with respect to this ordinance. She noted her pond was not like other ponds because it was fully on her property. She stated she understood she was in a position of leadership and wanted to follow the rules.

Councilmember Jeppson agreed there was no one way to address this situation and understood there were exceptions but that she still wanted to see the ordinance enforced. She explained there was a stormwater pond program residents could participate in and for information on this residents could contact Ms. Haug.

Councilmember Paul appreciated the education efforts of staff and anticipated there would be improvement in this situation as staff continues to educate residents living around stormwater ponds. Ms. Haug commented on how some residents voluntarily remove items from the stormwater ponds while others need to have contact from the city.

Councilmember Massoglia indicated people read tickets more so than letters or newsletters from the city.

Mayor Sanders supported the city working to educate the public but understood there would be a need for enforcement.

City Manager Wolfe provided the council with an update from Police Chief Podany on the events occurring in Brooklyn Center with civil unrest and noted Northtown would be boarding up their entrances as a precaution.

15 Minute Discussion

ADJOURN

The Workshop was adjourned at 9:42PM.