



MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM.

ROLL CALL

Present: Mayor Sutton, Member Parisian, Member Caceres Aranda, Member Greenberg, Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge

Absent: None

Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

DISCUSSION

A. Consider a Separation Ordinance

Sandvik introduced the item and noted that a City attorney was present to provide legal perspective. The Council previously discussed a separation ordinance during the January 13 work session, modeled initially after language adopted in Minneapolis. Staff returned with additional information addressing three areas: current policies and state guidelines; enforcement and logistical considerations; and legal risk, including potential litigation and impacts on vulnerable community members.

Sandvik reviewed sections of the draft ordinance and highlighted questions regarding enforceability, particularly related to access to City property. He noted that Minneapolis and Saint Paul have adopted robust ordinances but have significantly greater resources, and Minneapolis is currently facing a lawsuit related to its ordinance language. Other cities such as Chicago have implemented executive orders from the Mayor, which would be difficult for Robbinsdale to replicate. Richfield and Golden Valley have also adopted ordinances, though questions remain about how they operationalize certain provisions. Sandvik also noted that communications has been a major focus. While the City is not creating new resources, staff are directing residents to external resources and clarifying the role of local law enforcement on the City website.

Alex Furich of Kennedy & Graven explained that there is inherent legal risk when a local ordinance attempts to regulate federal activity. This issue forms the basis of the current lawsuit against Minneapolis. He also noted that federal funding can sometimes be conditioned on cooperation, and jurisdictions perceived as uncooperative could potentially face reduced funding opportunities.

Member Parisian thanked legal counsel and staff and expressed support for adopting a separation ordinance. She stated that while the Minneapolis ordinance served as a starting point, the Robbinsdale draft appropriately reflects the City's unique circumstances. She emphasized that adopting the ordinance could strengthen community trust and public safety by clarifying how City resources may be used. She also stated that codifying expectations would provide clarity for staff and reduce liability risks. She expressed comfort moving forward with minor language amendments.

Mayor Sutton asked Member Parisian to elaborate on the fiscal responsibility piece. Parisian explained that clearly defined policies could reduce uncertainty and staff time spent navigating difficult situations. Member Greenberg asked whether additional staffing would be needed to manage training and reporting requirements. Sandvik estimated the ordinance could require the equivalent of approximately 1.5 additional staff positions to properly implement training and reporting functions. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge noted the importance of

adequate staffing and training if the ordinance were adopted.

Member Caceres Aranda asked whether Robbinsdale could coordinate staff training with neighboring cities. Sandvik said collaboration could be explored, though the ordinances may not align exactly. He also reminded Council that added workload could require additional staffing. Mayor Sutton asked about database or reporting system costs, which Sandvik said are still undetermined.

Member Greenberg asked about the Supremacy Clause and whether an ordinance could avoid triggering federal legal conflicts. Furcich explained that under the Supremacy Clause, local governments cannot regulate the federal government directly. Courts typically examine whether a law regulates federal actions or merely affects how duties are carried out. He stated that Robbinsdale's ordinance appears to address operational methods rather than directly regulating federal activity, though legal challenges could still occur. He noted that Minneapolis' ordinance existed since 2003 but was not challenged until 2025. Mayor Sutton asked what would happen if Robbinsdale were challenged. Furcich explained that outcomes would depend heavily on the specific facts of the case and whether either party pursued litigation aggressively. Member Parisian asked whether the federal government had successfully challenged similar ordinances; Furcich said it was unclear, as many ordinances and lawsuits have emerged only recently.

Mayor Sutton asked about potential legal costs. Sandvik noted that costs would vary and that some coverage may exist through League of Minnesota Cities insurance. He also emphasized that operational changes and staff time would carry direct costs regardless of litigation. Member Greenberg expressed concern about additional costs to residents, especially after hearing concerns about affordability during the recent budget cycle. Sandvik acknowledged those concerns and explained that while he serves Council, staff, and the community, there could be much broader impacts. He noted recent community reports of ICE activity and an incident at City Hall the previous week. He stated that federal retaliation or increased enforcement activity could potentially affect the community, regardless of Council action.

Council discussed neighboring cities' approaches. Member Caceres Aranda and Mayor Sutton noted that many cities are debating the issue but few have finalized ordinances. Furcich explained that ordinances carry more enforceability than resolutions because they become part of City Code.

Mayor Sutton asked how the ordinance would change current practice. Sandvik said the most significant difference involves provisions governing access to City property and staging activities, which could require permits or other enforcement mechanisms. Reporting requirements would also represent a major operational change. He estimated that implementation, including staffing and IT needs, could cost roughly \$100,000–\$200,000 annually. Member Parisian stated she was comfortable with both the risk and costs, arguing that codifying current practices protects staff by providing clear guidance. Member Caceres Aranda added that the ordinance could improve public safety by increasing community trust in local law enforcement.

Member Greenberg asked about the difference between City policy and ordinance language. Staff explained that policies are managed internally through departments such as HR, while ordinances are codified and enforced through City law. Parisian emphasized the importance of applying these policies to all City staff via an ordinance, not only the police department. Mayor Sutton asked whether other cities had seen improved trust in law enforcement after adopting similar ordinances. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge said he has heard from residents that such measures help people feel safer interacting with local police. Mayor Sutton noted that Robbinsdale has already publicly stated its immigration-related policies and questioned whether codifying them would change current practice enough to justify additional costs or litigation risks.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked whether the City could sue the federal government if federal agents violated the ordinance. Furcich said that would depend on the ordinance language and would again raise Supremacy Clause questions.

Member Caceres Aranda noted that public trust may have been affected by a recent Hy-Vee incident but may have improved following police actions during the City Hall ICE presence the previous week. He also questioned whether the federal government would prioritize litigation against a smaller city. Furcich also noted that the outcome of the Minneapolis lawsuit could potentially influence future legal arguments involving Robbinsdale.

Parisian asked whether members of the public wished to comment, noting that she had heard significant community support for the ordinance since January. Multiple residents spoke in support of the ordinance. Comments included:

- A Ward 4 resident described personal encounters with ICE enforcement activity and emphasized the urgency of adopting a separation ordinance.
- A Golden Valley resident and state House candidate described how Golden Valley has enforced similar provisions requiring ICE agents to leave City property and stated that staff training there was completed quickly without hiring additional staff.
- Residents emphasized that codifying policies in City Code increases transparency and public accountability compared to internal policies.
- Several residents shared concerns about increased ICE activity in the area, impacts on public safety, community trust, and economic effects on local businesses.
- Some residents argued that fear of federal retaliation should not prevent action and that the ordinance could improve trust in local government and law enforcement.
- Others stressed the importance of establishing lasting protections through law rather than policies that could easily change with future administrations.
- One resident asked the City to consider joining regional coalitions of cities focused on safety and immigrant protections.

Council thanked residents for their comments.

Member Parisian proceeded to proposed multiple amendments to consider in the ordinance language regarding:

1. Data Sharing: Adding language limiting the collection and sharing of sensitive data. Furcich indicated that the proposed language appeared reasonable.
2. Public Reporting: Requesting to expand Section 6 to require the City Manager to prepare an annual report to Council summarizing ordinance-related data. Staff indicated the concept was feasible.
3. Consent Clarification: Adding language stating that City employees cannot consent to federal access to non-public City property without a jurisdictional warrant. Furcich stated he had no immediate legal concerns with the language.

Council also discussed whether to pursue an emergency ordinance. Because emergency ordinances require unanimous Council approval, Parisian said she was uncertain whether sufficient support existed and instead supported moving forward through the standard ordinance process.

Parisian asked whether staff could prepare updated ordinance language with the proposed amendments for the next Council meeting. Sandvik said that would be the goal. Member Caceres Aranda indicated that his

suggested amendments were largely covered by Parisian's proposals and expressed support.

B. Council Outreach Efforts

Sandvik noted that several Council members asked about expanding community engagement after seeing that Golden Valley recently hosted a town hall. He explained that Robbinsdale held approximately a dozen formal meetings in January, in addition to partner meetings. While "town hall" language may feel more accessible to residents, staff capacity must also be considered to avoid burnout. He referenced former Council Member Webb's informal gatherings with residents at local businesses as another possible engagement approach.

Member Greenberg noted that Golden Valley had planned its town hall months in advance and involved multiple community organizations. Due to current events, much of that meeting focused on immigration issues. He initially considered smaller ward-based meetings but suggested a single larger meeting instead. Regardless of format, he emphasized the importance of Council members engaging directly with residents. Mayor Sutton expressed strong support for increased community engagement and suggested involving local businesses. He supported holding smaller engagement events throughout the year along with one larger annual event such as a "State of the City" or town hall.

Member Parisian also supported creating a dedicated annual space for community input. She shared an example from Richfield, where feedback from a town hall—both online and in-person—was aggregated by theme and used to produce a report highlighting key community priorities. Mayor Sutton expressed interest in a similar report summarizing feedback from public meetings to help inform City priorities. Member Greenberg said his priority was facilitating open dialogue rather than structured data collection. He felt the purpose of a town hall should be community conversation rather than formal reporting. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge suggested both conversation and data collection could occur simultaneously. Council members agreed it would be beneficial to begin engaging residents in the community while also planning a larger event in the future. Mayor Sutton expressed interest in hosting informal conversations with residents at local restaurants.

Julie Ralston-Aoki, a resident, supported the idea of additional engagement opportunities but emphasized the urgency of documenting community experiences related to ICE activity and hosting a town hall as soon as possible. She urged the City to collect and preserve testimony, stating that documenting residents' experiences is important during the current crisis. Council and staff discussed timing and logistics for a town hall or listening session and tentatively identified Monday, February 23 as a possible date.

A resident encouraged Council to consider safety concerns and avoid collecting unnecessary personal data so that residents feel comfortable attending a town hall. Member Greenberg suggested encouraging residents to share experiences during open public comment at Council meetings and communicating that invitation more widely. Sandvik noted that staff already record open comment in meeting minutes and could compile a look-back report summarizing previous testimony. He asked Council to clarify what type of information they would like staff to track if the current minutes are not sufficient.

Council returned to discussing the town hall. Member Parisian suggested also collecting comments online and allowing residents to indicate whether their comments should be included in the public record. Sandvik said staff could create a dedicated email inbox for public submissions. Ralston-Aoki added that given current circumstances, she would like future meeting minutes to include more detailed documentation of community testimony.

Member Parisian summarized the next steps: communicate in the upcoming Birdtown Brief that residents are encouraged to provide testimony at Council meetings, announce a town hall/listening session on February 23 at City Hall, and create a dedicated email inbox for public comments during a specified period. Sandvik added that comments received through the inbox could be included in weekly Council packets. Staff and Council

tentatively agreed on Monday, February 23 at 6:00 PM for a meeting time.

Courtney Kirkeeng, a resident, noted that the Human Rights Commission (HRC) could also assist with engagement efforts, as several commissioners are willing to help. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge suggested that other City commissions could also be involved.

STAFF UPDATES

A. Staff Updates

Light Rail Board CMC Appointment:

Council discussed making a formal appointment to the Light Rail Board CMC at the next meeting. The commitment involves quarterly meetings beginning in March, typically on Thursday afternoons. An alternate representative will also need to be appointed. Member Caceres Aranda volunteered to serve as the alternate.

Committee and Commission Appreciation Event:

Council discussed hosting a thank-you event for committee and commission members at Graeser Park, which would include brief remarks from Council and an opportunity for informal connection. Council expressed support for the idea and interest in participating.

COUNCIL UPDATES

Member Greenberg thanked Council for the evening's discussions and the thoughtful consideration of various risks.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked whether work sessions could be televised or recorded so residents who cannot attend in person could view them. Sandvik explained that work sessions have not historically been recorded because discussions are typically more informal and production quality would be lower, but it would be possible if Council chose to do so. He noted that it would likely need to be applied consistently to all work sessions. Mayor Sutton expressed concern that recording work sessions could make discussions feel more formal or limit candid conversation, which is often the benefit of work sessions. Council agreed the idea was worth exploring further.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 10:28 PM.

Signed by:

Rachel Leen

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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:

Raymond Blackledge

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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem