



## MINUTES

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### CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

### ROLL CALL

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

Absent: None

Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator; Darren Olson, Robbinsdale Firefighter and Fire Relief Association President; Neil Dressel, Robbinsdale Firefighter and Fire Relief Association Treasurer; Jesse Hoekstra, Robbinsdale Firefighter and Fire Relief Association Vice President

### DISCUSSION

#### A. Robbinsdale Fire Department Relief Association (RFDRA) - Pension Contribution Request

Olson introduced himself as Fire Relief Association President, Hoekstra as Vice President, and Dressel as Treasurer. Olson explained that the Robbinsdale Fire Department is a fully paid-on-call department that responds to fires, medical calls, hazmat incidents, spill responses, and other emergencies. He noted an increase in call volume in recent years and said the department is currently in a hiring process. Due to response time requirements, firefighters must live within a two-mile radius of Robbinsdale, creating a limited recruitment pool. Olson said the City has been supportive in providing quality equipment and that the department aims to remain competitive in attracting recruits.

Olson explained that the department does not operate under a duty-crew model, meaning firefighters carry pagers and respond from wherever they are when calls occur. He noted the department has worked over time to increase pension benefits toward the state maximum, which is increasing to \$20,000 per year of service in 2026. The current annual benefit is \$13,750, and the department is requesting an increase to \$15,000.

Sandvik clarified that the discussion related specifically to the retirement fund, not wages. He noted the City and department have pursued incremental increases over several years rather than a single large adjustment. No formal action was requested that evening; the item was presented in advance of the 2027 budget process.

Mayor Sutton asked about training and call requirements. Olson explained that firefighters must meet minimum response percentages and attend at least 50% of drill nights, along with other training requirements. He added that firefighters must respond to 30% of all calls (or maintain the required response percentage threshold) to remain in good standing. He noted that most members exceed minimum expectations and that attendance issues are uncommon. Mayor Sutton asked about retirement age. Olson said there is no mandatory retirement age as long as members continue meeting training and physical requirements, and emphasized the value of long-term experience. Mayor Sutton also asked about recruitment for upcoming retirements. Hoekstra said six applicants had recently interviewed, with one firefighter being welcomed that evening and two more expected to be added to the eligibility list later this year.

Member Parisian asked about trends in call volume. Olson said the department has expanded EMT-level capability and now includes nine EMTs or paramedics. He noted increasing medical calls, including lift assists, CPR calls, and overdoses. Member Caceres Aranda asked about North Memorial's role; Olson said the Fire Department responds to CPR calls while North Memorial responds to other medical situations. Hoekstra added

that medical calls are expected to continue increasing.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked about department members' professions. Hoekstra noted a wide range, including pilots, IT professionals, City staff, military members, and trades such as plumbing and mechanics.

Dressel explained that pension funds are largely invested through State Board of Investment (SBI) accounts and noted that City contribution estimates may vary based on investment performance. Sandvik noted that Council members are welcome to tour the fire station.

Hoekstra highlighted the Public Safety Open House on August 8 and Turkey Bingo on November 2. Mayor Sutton suggested a future chili cook-off or softball game between Police and Fire. Olson said the department is open to youth engagement opportunities at events, noting liability considerations.

Member Greenberg thanked the department for bringing the pension discussion forward early in the budget process, and Olson thanked Council for its continued support.

## B. Golf Cart Ordinance Request

Sandvik shared that a golf cart ordinance had been brought to Council earlier in the year for initial discussion. He noted that state statute and examples from Forest Lake, Prior Lake, and White Bear Lake were reviewed, covering elements such as permitting, inspection, and enforcement. Sandvik explained that cities generally have jurisdiction to designate specific roadways as suitable for golf cart use. He noted that public safety was a key consideration, as comparable suburbs that allow golf carts often have road networks farther removed from high-traffic corridors, while Robbinsdale's infrastructure is closer to busy roads. Staff does not currently recommend moving forward due to infrastructure constraints and public safety and enforcement concerns.

Mayor Sutton noted he did not want to overcomplicate the issue and suggested that guidance for golf carts could align with existing approaches used for e-bikes. He added that enforcement could remain discretionary with the Robbinsdale Police Department (RPD), particularly in cases where vehicles may not meet street-legal requirements based on weight, capacity, lighting, or other statutory criteria. Member Greenberg referenced permitting systems such as fire pit permits and noted that while some residents do not comply, overall use appears limited. He said golf cart use in the City is currently minimal and suggested the City could continue its current approach unless usage increases in the future. He added that permitting can be beneficial but may not be necessary unless a broader public safety issue emerges.

Member Greenberg asked how RPD would respond if a golf cart were operating on the roadway or bike path. Sandvik responded that this is not currently a chronic issue requiring formal parameters and that enforcement is handled at RPD's discretion under existing authority. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge stated he was not seeing sufficient demand from residents to justify developing new signage or infrastructure for a small number of users. Member Caceres Aranda noted increasing use of electric scooters on roadways, suggesting it could be a future policy discussion. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge also raised whether similar questions could arise regarding ATV use on streets.

Mayor Sutton clarified that his intent was to address limited, neighborhood-level use rather than operation on major corridors such as Highway 81 or Highway 100. Member Greenberg suggested that, rather than a formal ordinance, the City could consider issuing general guidance if needed. Mayor Sutton asked whether the item could be set aside for now. Sandvik confirmed that the City currently handles these situations through existing police discretion and that no formal ordinance is in place.

A resident, Greg Salyers, noted interest in using a golf cart for short trips within the community, particularly as nearby developments such as the light rail project progress. He suggested that limited local use may increase

slightly over time.

## **STAFF UPDATES**

### A. Popcorn Topics!

#### **Sustainability Committee Considerations:**

Sandvik shared that the Sustainability Committee is approaching two years of existence. He noted that the committee initially operated with a flexible, organic structure to gather community input on sustainability priorities. Staff is now recommending refining and formalizing certain processes, including membership structure and geographic representation, while keeping the group as a committee rather than elevating it to a commission. Sandvik noted a recent committee recommendation related to potential code changes intended to make solar installations more accessible. Staff does not recommend the proposed change as written due to concerns that it could create overly permissive standards and complicate regulation.

Member Greenberg asked whether Council's review was prompted by the recent code change request. Sandvik responded that the review is part of a broader two-year evaluation of the committee's structure and how recommendations are brought forward to Council. Member Parisian suggested a mid-year update from the committee to consolidate ideas and clarify expectations, and also recommended adjusting membership terms to better manage turnover. Sandvik noted the committee functions as an advisory body that also helps implement Council priorities through engagement and events, and said staff is focused on ensuring clearer structure and consistency in how recommendations are developed and submitted.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked about the difference between committees and commissions. Sandvik explained that commissions are established in City code and are more formal, while committees are advisory and topic-specific. He noted that adding a commission would increase staff responsibilities, and staff currently believes the committee structure is working effectively. Member Parisian and Member Caceres Aranda expressed interest in receiving additional staff input on the potential transition to a commission. Mayor Sutton asked about staff impact if that change were made, and Sandvik noted it would increase workload and formal requirements.

Member Greenberg noted the committee provides an accessible entry point for residents and cautioned that additional structure of a commission could create barriers to participation. He also emphasized the importance of ensuring that the decision not to move forward with certain recommendations is not perceived negatively. A resident asked about opportunities for more open public engagement sessions. Another resident emphasized transparency and clear communication around the committee's role and recommendations.

Sandvik summarized that staff does not recommend advancing the solar code change and is focusing on refining committee structure and processes.

#### **2027 Budget Process:**

Sandvik introduced the budget calendar, noting Council previously approved it, including a preliminary not-to-exceed budget in September. He highlighted positive factors such as completed labor contracts and potential insurance savings next year. He also noted challenges, including flat Local Government Aid (LGA) forecasts for 2027 and tighter external funding from state, county, and federal sources.

Sandvik emphasized that the 2027 budget process will likely require prioritization and tradeoffs and encouraged Council to begin identifying priorities and questions early. He noted that Council will need to consider the balance between maintaining service levels and limiting levy increases.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge thanked staff for bringing the discussion forward early. Member Greenberg asked about state bonding and local option sales tax efforts. Sandvik provided a legislative update, noting both remain under consideration as the session concludes, and that any local sales tax would still require referendum approval.

**Additional Updates:**

Sandvik noted that North Memorial is expected to provide a presentation to Council in the coming weeks. He also shared that Captain Stensrud has accepted the Orono Chief of Police position, and the City will begin the Captain recruitment process. He added that the recently proposed program from our JCCP member was not feasible at this time, but may be revisited in the future.

Sandvik noted that the City Manager performance review will be provided to Council for their review.

**COUNCIL UPDATES**

**North Memorial Merger Forum:**

Member Caceres Aranda shared that North Memorial is potentially merging with Sanford Health. He noted that the Attorney General’s office has reached out to explore hosting a community forum at Elim Lutheran Church, tentatively scheduled for June 8 from 6:00–8:00 PM.

He explained that there may be potential benefits to the merger in helping stabilize North Memorial due to funding challenges and uncertainty around future state support. However, he also noted concerns based on Sanford’s prior merger history and mixed outcomes in other communities. He encouraged strong community participation in the forum, which is expected to include perspectives from North Memorial representatives, practitioners, and other stakeholders. He added that the Attorney General’s office is distributing information and anticipates up to 200 attendees. Sandvik noted that the City will help share information through its communication channels to encourage community awareness and participation.


**Zoning Notice:**


Member Greenberg asked for clarification about a mailed notice sent to residents regarding a zoning change involving park properties being rezoned from R1 to a park zoning designation. Sandvik noted that residents within approximately 250–500 feet of affected parks received the letter.

Mayor Sutton said it would be helpful if future notices were written in more accessible, plain-language terms so that residents can more easily understand them and Council can better explain them when asked. Sandvik acknowledged the importance of clear communication while noting that the City must meet formal statutory notification requirements, and said staff can continue working to improve clarity in mailed materials.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 8:45 PM.

Signed by:  
  
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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:  
  
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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem