



MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 7:21 PM.

ROLL CALL

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

Absent: None

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

DISCUSSION

STAFF UPDATES

A. Annual Communications Update

Leen presented the annual communications report, highlighting successes and challenges from the past year. Successes included growth and engagement across social media accounts, a strong partnership with CCX Media, website improvements such as expanded online forms, and creative public outreach efforts. Challenges included digital accessibility requirements, particularly for PDFs, inconsistent engagement across social media platforms, and capacity limitations as communications efforts continue to grow.

Council expressed support for and appreciation of the City's communications efforts. Members specifically supported bringing back a welcome packet for new residents and developing a day-in-the-life video series featuring City staff. Staff and Council also discussed potential uses of AI to assist with PDF accessibility remediation and options for moving forward.

B. Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP) updates

Sandvik noted that strengthening partnerships between the community and Police Department remains a top priority. He highlighted the Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP) and the work of Phillip Gray, who has been providing updates and tracking metrics related to the program. He also noted that the Robbinsdale Police Department continues to conduct community outreach, with JCPP serving as a liaison and providing additional opportunities for residents to connect with the department.

Council members expressed support for Gray's work and the programs he has developed, as well as seeing quantitative data from outreach efforts. Member Greenberg said he would like to see more consistent communication and opportunities for Council to receive updates from JCPP. Sandvik suggested that Council members connect with Gray directly at upcoming community events as an additional way to stay informed and engaged.

C. Organization Assessment - Preview

Sandvik provided an update on the organizational assessment, which was identified as a top City goal and priority in 2025. The assessment is nearly complete, and staff is working with a facilitator to develop final recommendations. Sandvik noted that the assessment did not reveal any major surprises but provided useful reminders about organizational structure, including the need to reduce silos, build redundancy within positions, and ensure adequate backup during staff absences or emergencies. The assessment also identified some structural gaps within the Finance Department. Staff has been working to create more consistency among

administrative roles across departments and has established an internal group focused on ideas to strengthen staff retention and workplace culture. The consultant is expected to return in the coming weeks to present additional findings.

Mayor Sutton asked whether the assessment is expected to result in recommendations related to organizational structure. He noted that the City has identified some gaps related to departmental silos and anticipated some adjustments, but not a full reorganization. Sandvik explained that the assessment was brought forward ahead of the budget process, but there are currently no new positions proposed for 2027. He noted that future adjustments to roles and responsibilities could result in changes to positions and, over time, corresponding salary adjustments.

Sandvik emphasized that staff approached the assessment with an openness to identifying areas for improvement. All staff had opportunities to participate and provide feedback, with the goal of using the findings to guide future organizational improvements.

D. Traffic Study Results

Sandvik noted that the discussion on traffic speeds was prompted by a special request made during the Town Hall. These included concerns about traffic and speeding in the 4500 blocks of Halifax and Grimes with vehicles bypassing the France/Lake Drive intersection. Engineering reviewed the issue and based on the available data, they did not identify any immediate concerns or recommend long-term changes. Staff can continue short-term measures such as deploying speed trailers.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge noted that he shared the findings with residents, who understood the results, but said they would appreciate monitoring conditions as the school year begins. Member Greenberg added that having Public Safety engaged as the school year begins would be helpful due to increased traffic and improperly parked vehicles.

COUNCIL UPDATES

Mayor Sutton noted that he will be absent next week. He shared that the Mayor of New Hope takes the month of July off because it tends to be a slower month, giving staff additional time to prepare and work on items for the upcoming months. Sandvik noted that, operationally, it is a possibility if the City knows far enough in advance. For example, if there are payments requiring Council approval, staff could plan accordingly in order to not delay those items. From a staff perspective, a month off from meetings would allow for additional time to prepare and complete work without having to prepare for weekly Council meetings.

A. Budget Priorities

Sandvik noted that from May through August, staff meet with department heads to develop operational budget requests. Staff have been instructed that this is a belt-tightening year, with personnel and operational necessities as the top priorities. Major revenues, including Local Government Aid (LGA), come in late August, which is why staff are working on the budget now. The goal is to have a budget draft presented to Council in August. Sandvik noted that staff spent significant time reducing the budget by 0.5% from September through December last year. He asked Council to be as confident as possible when adopting the preliminary, not-to-exceed budget in September, noting that it took significant staff resources last year to reduce the budget slightly further later in the year. He emphasized that he wants Council to be comfortable with the budget they adopt and able to defend it.

Mayor Sutton reiterated that his philosophy going into the process is to distinguish between needs and wants. He wants staff to clearly identify what is needed for the coming year and what is desired, particularly what must be done to prevent the City from falling behind or experiencing significant deterioration in areas such as infrastructure and public safety in the future. Member Greenberg noted that he wants to find ways to lower the levy, while recognizing that certain factors, such as service levels and personnel costs, are relatively fixed costs.

He suggested that if Council could agree early on a target percentage, staff could address that target sooner and avoid additional work later in the process. He believes there are opportunities to improve efficiency through more cost-effective purchases, such as less expensive Police Department squad cars or extending replacement timelines. He said he gets the sense that some residents believe the City spends money too freely and suggested making smaller reductions across purchases wherever possible. He noted that in recent years, the City has started with a higher preliminary budget and reduced it before adopting the final budget, and he would like to approach the process differently to save staff time this year.

Member Parisian said she is aligned with the priorities outlined in the memo. While maintaining high service levels is important, she emphasized that consistency is key and she does not want residents to notice a decline in services due to belt tightening. She wants to find the right balance if the goal is to tighten the budget and cautioned against making reductions that could create greater costs or problems in future years. Member Greenberg agreed.

Member Caceres Aranda noted that he would support limited use of reserves and said it would be helpful to have enough information to explain and defend any decision to dip into reserves. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge agreed with the memo and supported maintaining service levels and consistency. He highlighted the importance of infrastructure planning and echoed the distinction between needs and nice-to-have items. He also agreed that dialing in the budget as much as possible early in the process would help staff manage their time.

Sandvik reiterated that staff are approaching this year with a belt-tightening perspective. He acknowledged that other jurisdictions, including the County and School District, are facing difficult financial circumstances, but said it would be to the City's detriment to base its budget decisions on the financial situations of other jurisdictions. He noted that the City applied for state and federal funding but received little, putting staff back at the drawing board to determine how to fund major projects that still need to be completed. He cautioned that belt-tightening now can put off issues and create additional financial strain for future Councils and staff.

Mayor Sutton said it would be helpful to educate residents about how the City develops its budget and utility rates, noting that residents do not always understand how the work gets done. Member Greenberg said residents can become discouraged during budget season and feel that their feedback does not matter. He supported more communication about opportunities for residents to participate in the budget process and emphasized that residents need to get involved earlier in the year, as December is not the best time to engage when decisions are more difficult to change.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge suggested that recording the Work Session could help residents understand the process. Member Greenberg suggested focusing on communication that encourages residents to participate earlier and clearly explains the budget timeline. Sandvik noted that residents generally do not begin thinking about the budget until they receive their Truth in Taxation (TNT) notices in the mail. He emphasized that the budget process occurs year-round and could be highlighted at additional Council meetings. Mayor Sutton agreed that the City can continue reminding residents about Council meetings and explaining what is on the agenda at those meetings. Council discussed holding a town hall or public forum specifically focused on the budget. Leen added that the City could include budget information in the Birdtown Brief and on social media.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 9:33 PM.

Signed by:



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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:



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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem