



City Council Work Session
Wednesday, August 12, 2026

MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 7:28 PM.

ROLL CALL

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

Absent: None

Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Patrick Foley, Police Chief; John Elder, Police Captain; Christopher Banks, Public Safety Support Technician; Diaa Tahoun, Finance Director; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

DISCUSSION

A. Discussion with Eckberg Lammers, Prosecution Service

Sandvik introduced Joe Van Thomme and Annalise McCahery of Eckberg Lammers, the City's prosecutors, who were present to discuss recent Robbinsdale case trends and data. Van Thomme explained that the firm's scope covers petty misdemeanors, misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors, but not juvenile offenses, felonies or low-level drug crimes, which are prosecuted by the County Attorney. Cases are typically initiated by citation, arrest or criminal complaint. Prosecutors first check for conflicts before reviewing reports and primarily digital evidence. He said their primary responsibilities are protecting defendants' constitutional rights and ensuring victims' voices are heard.

Van Thomme noted that the team includes six full-time prosecutors, two backup prosecutors and eight legal assistants, five of whom serve as victim-witness coordinators to help victims participate effectively in court and access needed resources. Van Thomme said the firm's work extends beyond prosecution to community engagement and leadership, including gun violence prevention and domestic violence advocacy. He noted that prosecutors are often among the first points of contact community members have with the justice system, making those relationships important.

Van Thomme presented five years of Robbinsdale case data. Petty misdemeanors increased significantly from 2024 to 2025, primarily due to increased parking enforcement, while gross misdemeanors and domestic assaults remained relatively consistent. Traffic and drug offenses have also increased since the pandemic. He said the overall increase in cases does not indicate a drastic increase in criminal behavior, as much of the growth is related to traffic offenses and petty misdemeanors. Van Thomme noted that Hennepin County's treatment and trauma-related courts have an 86% graduation rate but limited capacity, accepting only a few cases from individual cities. He said the programs can be highly effective for those accepted, although they require significant participation and probationary time.

Van Thomme said the firm will continue investing in staff and technology to move cases more efficiently and help victims through the system more quickly. He emphasized balancing accountability with appropriate resources and rehabilitation, particularly for individuals experiencing mental illness or poverty. The firm also maintains relationships with police departments to build trust and encourage open communication. Sandvik noted that the prosecutors were invited because they are attorneys hired by Council, and a contract renewal will come before Council in the coming weeks.

Member Caceres Aranda thanked the prosecutors for their work in prosecution and community leadership. He

emphasized the importance of alternatives to incarceration and appreciated the firm's focus on rehabilitation and other resources for individuals facing substance use or other challenges. Van Thomme said the firm shares the Police Department's goal of avoiding incarceration when unnecessary and instead looks for ways to connect individuals with appropriate resources. Mayor Sutton noted that the Robbinsdale Police Department, particularly Chief Foley and Captain Elder, approaches police work with care, which he has seen firsthand. Council thanked the prosecutors for their presentation and expressed appreciation for Eckberg Lammers.

Sandvik noted that a formal contract will come before Council in the coming weeks.

B. Discussion on Flock

Sandvik noted that the Chief, Captain and Chris Banks from the Police Department were present to answer questions about Flock, as the City has received many questions in recent weeks.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge noted that Flock is an issue affecting communities beyond Robbinsdale. Member Greenberg noted that he has heard concerns from residents about what the system captures and whether it is necessary. He noted that some municipalities have removed Flock cameras and said he wanted to better understand Robbinsdale's use of Flock, its policies, when data can be accessed for a crime, and whether other agencies can access Robbinsdale's data through the Flock system.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked who can access the system. Member Caceres Aranda asked how data is shared when a license plate is captured and whether other agencies must request it from the City or can access it directly. Captain Elder explained that Flock is a license plate reader that captures an image of each passing vehicle and flags vehicles associated with certain crimes. Officers receive an alert and photo and verify the information in the field. Banks said the images are stored in Flock's secure database and can only be accessed by Robbinsdale officers unless the City shares the data with other agencies. Robbinsdale recently revoked its data-sharing permissions with other cities, so access is currently limited to 30 Robbinsdale officers and two police staff members.

Banks noted that three administrators manage the system. It uses two-factor authentication, and administrators must add users. Mayor Sutton asked how Flock's security compares with online banking. Banks said it is similarly secure and uses SSL technology. Chief Foley noted that Robbinsdale has two Flock cameras, which are the City's only license plate readers. Member Parisian asked about recent changes to data sharing. Chief Foley said that Mille Lacs County had accessed the system for federal purposes, but its search produced no hits in Robbinsdale.

Member Greenberg asked whether the City can choose which municipalities it shares data with. Chief Foley said sharing can be enabled or disabled by municipality. He noted that immigration searches are one of several categories that can be turned on or off and are now disabled in Robbinsdale. The City also previously participated in a statewide information-sharing pool but no longer shares its data through that system. Banks noted that Robbinsdale can still access other networks unless those municipalities have also disabled sharing.

Member Greenberg asked whether the cameras operate continuously. Chief Foley said the cameras capture license plates and photographs but do not provide a live feed. Banks clarified that the cameras do not record continuous video and instead capture individual images. Member Caceres Aranda asked about the software's artificial intelligence capabilities and the cost of the system. Chief Foley said operating the two cameras, including data retention, costs approximately \$6,000 annually.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked how long Flock retains the data. Banks answered that data is stored for two years and searches are conducted in 30-day increments. Member Greenberg asked whether the City can track who accesses its data. Captain Elder said users must enter a department case number when conducting a search. Chief Foley described a three-step audit process in which Banks reviews searches, an administrative sergeant

randomly checks cases for a valid reason, and the information is submitted to the Chief and Captain. RPD also conducts a biannual audit through an outside vendor.

Member Caceres Aranda asked whether Mille Lacs County could conduct another search. Banks said it would no longer have access to Robbinsdale's data because the sharing privileges have been removed. Member Parisian asked about safeguards against civil immigration enforcement under the separation ordinance. Banks said other municipalities may search Flock's database, but none can currently access Robbinsdale's data. He also noted that federal agencies cannot access Robbinsdale's data.

Mayor Sutton asked whether not sharing data with other agencies, including Crystal, limits Flock camera's effectiveness. Captain Elder said it can, because crime crosses municipal boundaries and data sharing can make the system more effective. Chief Foley said RPD may eventually consider sharing data with municipalities individually, provided the agencies sign an agreement prohibiting immigration-related use. Mayor Sutton supported formalizing those expectations. Sandvik said staff intend to work with neighboring communities and peers, and any policy developed would come back to Council for further input.

A resident asked what types of incidents trigger Flock alerts, who conducts the outside audit, and what categories can be toggled on or off. Staff identified the Minnesota Security Consortium as the external auditor. Banks said immigration and minor cases are two categories that can be universally enabled or disabled. Other alert categories include missing adults and children, felony warrants, gross misdemeanors and certain violent crimes. Member Greenberg clarified that alerts are based on license plates and vehicle registrations, not individuals.

A resident asked whether data from vehicles that were not initially flagged can be searched later. Captain Elder said it can be searched for up to two years because the images are retained. Another resident asked whether the cameras have facial recognition capabilities. Captain Elder said they do not and that the hardware does not support facial recognition. The resident also asked whether Flock data could be accessed outside RPD after the department is finished using it and whether other camera systems have been considered. Chief Foley said the department would need to research how Flock handles data after RPD's use and acknowledged that other systems could be researched. He said Flock reports that data is deleted after two years and has created a transparency page with information and FAQs about its cameras.

A resident referenced a case in which a Flock employee reportedly reviewed indoor video and noted that contracts vary regarding data ownership. Banks said Flock offers different types of cameras, but Robbinsdale does not have video cameras, and staff would need to review the City's contract language regarding data ownership. Another resident asked how an outside agency would obtain Flock data if it had a warrant. Chief Foley said the agency would need to submit a data request. He said this has not occurred in Robbinsdale but has occurred in other cities.

Captain Elder expressed concern that Mille Lacs County was able to search the system without RPD's knowledge and that the system allows information to be gathered quickly with limited guidance on how agencies should handle the data. He noted that police departments must establish their own policies and protections. Chief Foley said those concerns were a primary reason RPD stopped sharing data with other agencies.

Captain Elder shared two examples of Flock assisting with public safety. In one case, an alert helped police locate a vehicle involved in the kidnapping of a seven-year-old in Zimmerman, leading to the child's rescue. During Whiz Bang Days, an alert helped RPD locate a stolen vehicle and a person with dementia who had taken it from a neighboring city, allowing officers to return the person to safety and the vehicle to its owner. He said these examples demonstrate that the system can produce positive outcomes and that he appreciates the opportunity to pause and ensure the City understands how the system works. Banks said he shares some of the

concerns raised as a citizen but noted that successful uses of the system often do not receive media attention.

A resident expressed mixed feelings about the system, noting that while it can be helpful, there are concerns about Flock and data ownership. She said the discussion raised broader questions about surveillance, what society is willing to monitor, and where the line should be drawn.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge summarized that the next step should be hearing about the Police Department's plans and what it learns through additional research and discussions with neighboring cities. Member Parisian thanked staff for addressing the questions and asked RPD to keep Council informed about operational and policy next steps. She noted that building community trust is a Council priority and said much of the information discussed should be shared publicly through communications, FAQs, and other transparent resources. Chief Foley noted that Flock has community engagement teams that can attend Council meetings. Council supported inviting them, although Member Greenberg said there is significant distrust of Flock and that hearing directly from the company would be helpful but would not resolve all concerns. Member Caceres Aranda noted that protecting residents from federal immigration enforcement is also a Council goal and expressed appreciation for RPD's efforts to strengthen those protections.

Sandvik summarized that the City will continue working on technology, policy, and communication next steps.

C. 2027 Budget Discussion

Sandvik started the presentation by recalling that Council had asked for more information about the budget process and opportunities for public engagement, so a graphic and webpage outlining the City's year-round budget process is now available on the City website. The City established its goals and priorities earlier in the year, reviewed departmental requests, and began more detailed discussions of budget rates in June. Council priorities discussed in July included maintaining high service levels and focusing on needs and infrastructure.

Sandvik explained that in June and July, staff met with each department head to develop the 2027 budget. There are no major changes across departments and no new staff positions are proposed. Notable items include COLA and insurance costs in Finance; the Building Official transition and proposed Fire Marshal transition to Rum River in Community Development; increased business inspection efforts; additional GIS training in Engineering; a Fire Relief Association funding request and new records system in the Fire Department; continued discussion of a potential full-time Fire Department position, although none is recommended for 2027; a proposed transition of a Police Captain to an Assistant Chief position; and continuation of the Recreation Department's 2026 staffing model.

Sandvik highlighted grants and special revenue secured by City staff over the past 18 months, totaling more than \$9 million annually. He said the City has become more proactive in pursuing grant opportunities, but securing these funds requires significant staff time across departments.

Sandvik shared the recommendation of a 6% increase to the General Fund levy for 2027. For a median-value home, this would be approximately \$200 annually, or \$17 per month. The estimated Robbinsdale tax rate would be 67.05%. Local Government Aid (LGA) funding is expected to remain roughly flat.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge appreciated the information on special revenue and asked Council to discuss the proposed Police Department leadership position and 6% levy increase. Mayor Sutton asked whether Robbinsdale's staffing model is comparable to similarly sized cities. Sandvik noted that Crystal has more full-time employees, while Robbinsdale has more part-time employees due to its Fire Department. He said staffing levels are not necessarily best measured by population alone, as staffing also reflects Council priorities, such as Sustainability and Communications in Robbinsdale. Mayor Sutton asked whether an Assistant Police Chief is typically seen in similarly sized cities. Sandvik said having a second-in-command provides additional capacity and ensures a command structure when the Chief is unavailable. He noted that the City has seen similar

benefits from the Assistant City Manager position.

Member Caceres Aranda asked whether the Assistant Police Chief position would involve a salary increase. Sandvik confirmed that it would and said the position would be advertised externally. Mayor Sutton said he would like to see leadership positions filled internally when possible, noting that officers and Sergeants may prefer remaining in the field. Member Greenberg said the position would provide an opportunity to retain talent and create additional advancement opportunities in the department. Sandvik noted that Captain Stensrud left in June, creating an opportunity to restructure the vacant position. Council expressed support for the elevated position.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked for Council's thoughts on the 6% increase. Mayor Sutton said he was comfortable with the lower increase compared with previous years but wanted to ensure the City continues addressing necessary maintenance and long-term needs. Sandvik said he was comfortable with 6% and asked Council to be fairly committed to the preliminary budget in September. He said this would allow staff to focus on longer-term planning and establish a sustainable number going forward while using the additional time to work on larger needs.

Mayor Sutton expressed confidence in staff's guidance and said he would like to understand what sacrifices were made to reach 6% and what the increase will allow the City to accomplish in the coming year. Member Caceres Aranda said property taxes are difficult for residents and expressed support for 6%, noting that it is an improvement from last year's 7.5% increase. He said he hears from residents who feel priced out of Robbinsdale and appreciates efforts to maintain the City's affordability. Member Parisian supported the 6% increase and thanked staff for their work. She said she was proud that Council has avoided a significant spike in the levy and noted that the increase may be viewed favorably given that recent increases have been closer to 8%. Member Greenberg supported the proposal. He asked that Council also discuss utility rates, noting that residents will face increased utility costs in addition to property taxes. He appreciated the focus on avoiding future financial struggles and emphasized that 6% should not become the City's new normal if circumstances change.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked how utility rates relate to the 6% levy increase. Sandvik said the City is working with a consultant to determine future utility rates and is analyzing needed underground utility work. He said that discussion will begin as early as October. Tahoun noted that Council previously discussed issuing bonds every other year because annual bonding increases the levy. The City plans to issue a bond next year but hopes the approach will provide some financial breathing room. He noted that utility billing rates are not expected to decrease until the Water Treatment Plant is paid off in 2040. He also noted that investment income has increased significantly since he began his role.

Mayor Sutton asked whether the City could communicate its successes in saving money and securing funds. Member Greenberg asked about Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and whether the City will capture additional property tax revenue when TIF districts expire. Sandvik noted that the City previously did not establish a savings fund for a new water treatment plant, contributing to its current financial situation, and said the City is now taking a more long-term approach to planning. Council expressed overall support for the proposed budget and felt good about moving forward.

STAFF UPDATES

Sandvik noted that the Sustainability Committee recommended pursuing grant funding for a native planting project. Although the City did not receive the grant, staff have reallocated funds to support a smaller pilot project around City Hall. The project will begin this fall.

Blue Line Light Rail Extension: Sandvik noted that the funding gap has been widely reported, and the Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County are working to identify funding to close the gap. The 90% plans

have been completed and reviewed by City engineers. Future discussions with the project office may focus on the City's role in the project.

COUNCIL UPDATES

Member Greenberg praised National Night Out, noting how great the neighborhood events were and how nice it was to see everyone. He noted that the welcoming atmosphere reflected the character of Robbinsdale. Member Caceres Aranda echoed that National Night Out was amazing.

Member Parisian shared that she had a great experience voting early at City Hall, while her husband voted on Election Day. She thanked staff for their work to make the process run smoothly.

Resident Greg Salyers noted that Robbinsdale is special because of its City Council and that when Council members attend community events, their energy is contagious.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge thanked Mayor Sutton and Sandvik for attending Monday's event and noted that a follow-up will be held Wednesday at 6:00 p.m.

A. Discuss Recognition of Gordy Lindenfelter

Mayor Sutton raised the idea of formally recognizing Gordy, noting his integral role in the City, and brought the idea to Council for discussion.

Member Greenberg suggested adding a plaque downtown in Gordy's honor, similar to existing plaques on historic buildings, like the one already on Hackenmueller's. He noted that it would be a tasteful way to honor Gordy's memory and complement existing downtown plaques. Sandvik said this would likely be within the City's ability. Member Greenberg also suggested holding a dedication ceremony and including a photo of Gordy on the plaque.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 10:06 PM.

Signed by:



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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:



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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem