



City of Robbinsdale

City Council Work Session
Tuesday, July 9, 2024

MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner called the meeting to order at 7:24 PM.

ROLL CALL

Present: Member Murphy, Member Parisian, Mayor Blonigan, Mayor Pro Tem Wagner

Absent: None

Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Kayla Kirtz, Sustainability Coordinator; Heather Rand, Community Development Coordinator; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator; Richard McCoy, City Engineer/Public Works Director; Patrick Foley, Police Chief; Guy Dorholt, Fire Chief

DISCUSSION

A. Employee Handbook Updates

Sandvik explained that there is a need for Council to occasionally approve employee handbook updates. He explained that staff are proposing slight changes to safe and sick time, the take-home vehicle policy, volunteer time off, the city-issued shirt policy, and the tuition reimbursement policy. The Council supported the updates.

B. Three Rivers Classroom Update

Sandvik explained that Three Rivers has seen overages in price on their outdoor classroom project due to the need for a bigger parking lot, and they are asking Robbinsdale and Golden Valley to contribute \$100,000 each to the project. Sandvik described three options for funding: look to see what funding is available this year, split the cost between this year and next year, or put something into the budget for next year. He identified the goal to give formal feedback to Three Rivers by the end of the month.

Mayor Blonigan expressed that the value of the outdoor classroom would be worth the cost if the classroom is well-used. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner agreed that an outdoor classroom is worth the cost since it will add value to the park. Sandvik asked if Council wants staff to explore options left for funding this year, as well as build additional costs into next year's budget. Council confirmed.

C. 2025 Budget Updates

Sandvik explained there are not many budget updates tonight, since he is waiting for information on LGA and fiscal disparities. Sandvik noted that any big budget increases will likely be personnel related due to the addition of new positions and the ongoing class and compensation study.

D. Blue Line Light Rail - Municipal Consent Timeframe

Sandvik introduced the discussion by going through a recent handout from the project office that includes information on the SDEIS feedback process, the 31 impacted properties and 1 relocation property in Robbinsdale, hazardous materials impacts and mitigation, noise and vibration mitigation, environmental justice concerns, and station boarding projections.

Sandvik explained that the biggest update from the project office was on municipal consent options. Staff previously believed that City Council could say yes to municipal consent with conditions, but the project office did not provide that option. Sandvik walked through the flowchart in the handout, which showed three options: approve municipal consent, take no action, or disapprove municipal consent. He stated that if City Council disapproves, then they must provide a list of specific plan amendments for consideration. Sandvik added that the project office was supportive of waiting for a municipal consent decision until a September City Council meeting, since the Ward 2 seat will be filled then. Sandvik stated that tonight serves as a good opportunity to examine and edit the list of considerations.

Foley and Dorholt presented a list of public safety concerns which included increases in training and equipment for the Police and Fire departments, potential increases in response time, maneuverability concerns, and potential increases in service calls and crime rates.

Foley introduced the discussion on proper training and equipment. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked if Minneapolis and St Paul public safety officers have received any light-rail specific training. Foley explained that Robbinsdale's Police department responds to all calls, whereas Minneapolis responds to high-need calls, so it is hard to compare training needs. Dorholt stated that he spoke with the Hopkins Fire Department and learned that they experienced increases in time commitment to training during planning stages of the light rail. Dorholt emphasized that there has been a lack of communication between the Fire Department and the project office so far. Foley emphasized the need for light-rail specific equipment and training needed to respond to calls.

Mayor Blonigan inquired if Public Safety expects it to take longer to get across town from east to west due to the Light Rail. Dorholt explained that 50% of the Fire Department lives on the East side of town, and they are concerned that the light rail could increase the time it takes to cross town. Mayor Blonigan questioned if elevating portions of the rail track could help alleviate this issue. Dorholt also discussed how Bottineau Boulevard is the fastest and safest north to south route, so there are maneuverability concerns with narrowing the roadway.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked if there are going to be additional Metro Transit police stations along the route, and Foley answered that he does not believe so.

Dorholt circled back to the issue of proper training and equipment for the Fire department. He noted that an elevated light rail has benefits, but elevation creates the need for extremely specialized training.

Dorholt discussed a potential increase in calls by explaining that there are more accidents associated with the light rail. Foley explained that the Police Department does not know what the level of patrol will be from Metro Transit. Sandvik clarified that the project office is asking for municipal consent on a 30% plan, which means that there is going to be inherent uncertainty at this stage.

Foley explained that the light rail would provide more mobility for criminals to get around, but a light rail would also allow for more people to visit Robbinsdale. Foley stated that the Police Department is already short-staffed, so a potential increase in calls would be challenging.

Dorholt questioned if emergency traffic would continue to preempt east-west traffic with a light rail in place. McCoy explained that it has been implied that the train will operate with traffic as normal.

Sandvik asked for feedback from Council on public safety concerns. Member Parisian wondered how the list of considerations might be written to make specific requests that would alleviate some of these concerns. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner agreed. Member Murphy expressed discomfort with the project due to so many unknown elements.

Member Murphy asked if the municipal consent vote requires a majority of the Council, and Sandvik confirmed that there would need to be a majority by way of resolution. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked for clarification on how voting "disapprove" would work. Sandvik explained that disapproving municipal consent would pass a resolution stating that Council does not provide municipal consent. Sandvik reassured the Council that he continues to work with attorneys to decipher the options for municipal consent.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked that cycling and pedestrian safety considerations be added to the list.

Member Murphy stated that he does not support a parking ramp with 300 spots. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner expressed support and flexibility on the issues of a parking ramp and elevation. Member Parisian supported having more parking options available due to the growth that Robbinsdale will experience. Mayor Blonigan expressed a willingness for a 300-spot ramp if it is placed on one of the current proposed sites. Member Murphy remained opposed to a parking ramp of any size. Member Murphy questioned how disagreements on priorities will come into play on the night of the municipal consent vote, and Sandvik explained that it is ultimately up to the Council to come to a consensus.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked if City staff are still in support of elevating the light rail with the knowledge that the Police and Fire departments will need additional training. Sandvik expressed that City staff would support elevation if the Council does. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner clarified that elevating the light rail is a necessary consideration for him. Mayor Blonigan agreed. Member Parisian expressed that she is open to elevation, but it is not a necessary condition for her. The Council concluded that elevation is required for their consent.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner expressed that the Council does not have many additions to the list, and that the most pressing remaining consideration is the parking ramp. Sandvik reemphasized that the only way to provide a list of considerations is to disapprove municipal consent. Sandvik reminded the Council that a lack of a parking ramp might impact traffic downtown.

McCoy discussed other considerations for consent regarding City infrastructure and jurisdictional transfers. McCoy emphasized that City infrastructure in the ground should be maintained and replaced by the project office as needed. McCoy explained that Lowry Avenue/Oakdale Avenue should be re-designated as a County road from the south bound off ramp to the east City limit. He also stated that West Broadway from County Road 9 to the northern City limit should be transferred to the City, along with acceptable funding levels from Hennepin County. McCoy insisted that this transfer be done only once the Light Rail becomes operational. The Council supported adding McCoy's recommendations to the list. Councilmember Murphy suggested adding specifics about the Hubbard Marketplace property to the list.

Member Parisian identified that she feels most strongly about the anti-displacement items on the list, and she does not need to remove any items. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner agreed.

Member Parisian clarified that the August City Council Work Session is on August 14, and that the Light Rail Open House is on August 21 from 6:00-8:00 PM.

STAFF UPDATES

A. Department of Energy Communities Taking Charge Accelerator Grant - Letter of Support

Kirtz explained a grant opportunity to collaborate with the Hennepin County Climate and Resilience Department on an application for the Department of Energy Communities Taking Charge Accelerator Grant. Kirtz provided information on how the grant would build out HOURCar electric vehicle-sharing services, including more electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in underserved areas. Kirtz recommended adding Robbinsdale's name to the grant due to its alignment with sustainability and electric vehicle goals. Kirtz clarified

that the grant is currently accepting applications, so the County is just seeking a letter of support right now.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner inquired whether the EV chargers would be limited to placement at municipal sites. Kirtz explained that there will be more details to come, but she does not believe that charger sites are limited. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked if these services are available all year, and Kirtz confirmed. Kirtz also explained that there is no current cost associated with the project, but costs could be associated in the future.

Sandvik added that there is an equitable component to the project, since the City can help connect EV chargers to areas that need them. Sandvik explained that a draft of the letter will be brought to Council next week.

B. West Broadway Jurisdictional Transfer

Sandvik stated that the West Broadway Jurisdictional Transfer was discussed during the Light Rail conversation. McCoy highlighted that the agenda packet includes the letter from Hennepin County to McCoy and the City of Crystal's Director of Public Works. McCoy expressed that this transfer can be tied into the light rail considerations.

C. Community Development Code Enforcement

Rand updated the Council that there have been over 344 code violations since January of 2024. Rand explained that of those who received a 1st notice letter, 205 required a second letter, and only 50 required citations or fine letters. Rand highlighted that educating residents is impactful and prevents many fines.

Rand provided a breakdown of the 344 code violations: 101 violations were due to long grass, 53 violations were due to illegal rental homes, 58 violations dealt with zoning issues, 109 violations were due to garbage and refuse, 1 violation was for a vacant building, 2 violations were due to animal license issues, 11 violations dealt with a lack of snow and ice removal, 2 violations were due to utility sump pump discharge, 6 violations were due to container placements, and 5 violations dealt with parking.

Rand discussed that there have been 33 new rental licenses pulled this year that the City was not aware of. Rand explained that there was a backlog of inspections on rentals, and there were 324 suspended rental licenses due to having no inspection performed. Mayor Blonigan asked if that was the City's fault. Rand explained that the backlog was due to a lack of staff resources. She updated the Council that there are currently 49 licenses suspended, so staff have been working through the backlog.

Mayor Blonigan asked what percentage of the dwelling units are rental versus owner-occupied in Robbinsdale. Rand stated that she will gather that data.

Sandvik added that the backlog of inspections was partially on staff, but he commends the Council for adding personnel in the Community Development Department over the last year to help tackle the issue.

D. City Charter Amendments:

Sandvik provided background that on June 6, 2024, the Charter Commission met to discuss various amendments to the City Charter. Sandvik explained that since he started as City Manager, he has had two Councilmembers resign, and he has witnessed the slow process of special elections. He added that Secretary of State updates limited special elections to only occur on a handful of days throughout the year, which is what set us back this year. He walked through the changes proposed by the Charter Commission, with the main update eliminating the need for special elections and proposing that appointed officials serve until the next election. Sandvik clarified that City staff are not looking for language recommendations since the City attorney was present at the meeting, and that these amendments will go in front of Council as they are. He highlighted that a first ordinance reading could be held as soon as next week, and that charter amendments take 90 days to go into effect.

The Council expressed a desire to read through the changes more, but they agreed that changes can be brought to the next Council meeting. Sandvik clarified that the changes would need to pass with four votes. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner thanked the Charter Commission and staff for getting these changes written up.

COUNCIL UPDATES

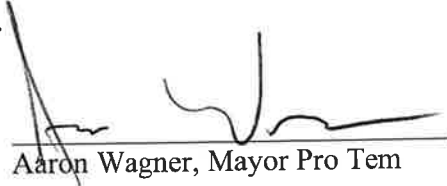
None.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner adjourned the meeting at 9:37 PM.



Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator



Aaron Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem