

MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner called the meeting to order at 7:42 PM.

ROLL CALL

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

Absent: Member Parisian

Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Heather Rand, Community Development Director; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Human Rights Commissioners: Julie Ralston-Aoki, Jonathan Hansen

DISCUSSION

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner invited members of the community to introduce themselves and share comments.

Commissioner Jeffrey Lunde shared that he is here to listen and support the City, as well as provide any additional information needed about the Light Rail project.

Jonathan Hansen, Robbinsdale resident, reserved his comments until after the discussion.

Julia Ralston-Aoki shared that as a member of the Human Rights Commission and as a citizen of Robbinsdale, she supports having the Blue Line in the community.

Gerri Cox, Robbinsdale resident, reserved her comments until after the discussion.

Greg Salyers, Robbinsdale resident, expressed that he does not agree with the current alignment, but if the project must happen, he wants what is best for the people of Robbinsdale.

Bob Papousek, Robbinsdale resident, shared that the proposed light rail route would pass very closely to his front yard. He asked that the station be placed north of 40th Avenue and that the station is closed so that people need tickets to get onto the platform.

Pat Backen, Robbinsdale resident, explained that he is here to listen.

A. LRT Municipal Consent

Sandvik introduced the topic by providing a recap of Light Rail municipal consent discussions thus far. Sandvik suggested that Council stick to the plan to vote on municipal consent at the September 17 Council meeting. He reminded Council that they have three options: to take no action which defaults to a yes, vote yes, or vote no, which then requires Council to provide a list of plan amendments. Sandvik reminded Council that the final deadline for a municipal consent vote is October 10.

Sandvik expressed that if council is planning to vote no, then staff is seeking specific feedback on the "whereas" clauses in the resolution. He explained that the second half of the provided document shows a list of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) that address concerns that are not covered in the 30% engineered plans.

Sandvik also walked through the project office's response to Council's request for an elevated light rail. Member Greenberg asked if the Council can still entertain the idea of elevation even though the project office does not support it. Sandvik stressed that continuing to push elevation is a decision that Council will have to make. He highlighted that the report shows that elevation is possible, but that it may create accessibility and pedestrian-safety issues.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked if any of the materials provided by the project office changed the minds of any councilmembers. Greenberg emphasized that he does not feel like concerns about East West traffic have been addressed yet, and that he is still curious about elevation. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner explained that elevation is less of a concern to him after the project office's response. Member Murphy explained he is basing his vote on the concerns from the Police and Fire Department, as well as the Engineering and Utilities departments. Member Murphy stated that he is still in favor of elevation since the project office memo did not address public safety concerns with at-grade plans. Mayor Blonigan agreed with prioritizing Police and Fire department concerns.

Member Greenberg asked if the track could be moved north of 40th Avenue if it is not elevated. Sandvik provided background that Bolton & Menk previously worked with Council and staff on a stationary plan that showed that placing the station south of 40th Avenue would decrease the need for property taking. He further explained that placing the station south of 40th Avenue would better serve high-density housing and residents in the area. Member Murphy asked if Council could ask for flexibility for the station location to change based on where the parking ramp structure is placed. Mayor Blonigan echoed that he would also like flexibility with the exact location of the Lowry Station. Sandvik summarized that he will write a "whereas" clause that captures Council's desire for flexibility on station location.

Member Murphy asked if noise and vibration impacts should be included in the resolution. Member Greenberg shared that he is most concerned with the frequency of noise based on the studies from the Community Advisory Committee for the Blue Line. Mayor Blonigan and Member Murphy supported adding language to the resolution specific to noise concerns. Sandvik expressed that noise-specific language should go into an MOU.

Mayor Blonigan expressed concern about Minneapolis and the Park Board wanting to move the Lowry Station further into Minneapolis without consulting Robbinsdale. The Council discussed the best course of action to address this concern. Sandvik and Mayor Pro Tem Wagner expressed that there may be recourse in state statute that would allow the City to request another municipal consent vote if a station location is changed. Commissioner Lunde emphasized that the best course of action may be to hand-deliver a letter to the CMC asking for the City of Robbinsdale to be included in all station location conversations.

Mayor Blonigan shared that he wants to add to the section of the resolution on anti-displacement funds for Robbinsdale. Sandvik explained that specifics on the fund are still in the works, but he will add language in about getting a proportionate share. Commissioner Lunde expressed that he is fighting for his district to get a fair share of funds as well, and he urged Robbinsdale to be aggressive.

Member Greenberg urged Council to ask for Metro Transit police officers to be stationed in Robbinsdale through a MOU. Sandvik explained that the MOUs were purposefully left with some vague terms since much of the light rail extension plan still needs to be built out. Member Murphy suggested adding in general language regarding commitment to substation staffing. Mayor Blonigan emphasized that the City's main concern and resident's main concerns seem to be related to public safety.

Sandvik summarized that City staff will narrow down language in order to have resolutions prepared for September 17.

Pat Backen shared that he is concerned about the intersection of 42nd Avenue and 81st Avenue due to the loss of a turn lane on 81st Avenue and loss of a traffic lane on 42nd Avenue. He asked that Lowry Station be at the same height as the bridges if the station ends up elevated.

Bob Papousek shared that Council should take residential concerns into account and move the station north of 40th Avenue. He expressed concerns about how this project will impact Elim Lutheran Church.

Greg Salyers shared that he appreciates Council's work, and he agreed that the station should be moved closer to 41st Avenue, especially if it is not elevated.

Jenn Salyers echoed her fellow residents' concerns, and thanked Member Greenberg for bringing up noise concerns.

A Robbinsdale resident expressed that she has many reservations about the light rail, especially in regard to the crime level in the City.

Julie Ralston-Aoki thanked the Council for their consideration on the matter, and stated that she is excited for the Blue Line to come to Robbinsdale.

Jonathan Hansen expressed his appreciation for Council's work, but shared that he has heard community feedback that the rail should not be elevated and that the station should be moved north of 40th Avenue. He agreed with adding language about noise concerns and substation staffing into the resolution. He shared concerns with turnstiles at stations since they are not ADA compliant.

Commissioner Lunde thanked everyone for their work. He explained that safety issues at Metro Transit stations typically reflect the current state of neighborhoods instead of bringing crime into neighborhoods. He reassured Council that Metro Transit works closely with City Police Departments to determine best staffing strategies. He shared an idea that visitors to North Memorial should get a free ticket into downtown Robbinsdale, since the project office provides that service for other entities.

B. 2025 Preliminary Budget

Sandvik provided a recap of the Council's initial budget conversation at the August Work Session and reminded Council that the City is required to set a preliminary budget by the end of September and a final budget in December. He explained that many of the increases to the budget are related to Council's top priority goals, which include addressing staffing security, completing facility studies such as the Parks Master Plan, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, recruiting and hiring for the Police Department, developing housing plans based around light rail transit, and continuing city-wide sustainability efforts. Sandvik stated that staff recommend setting the preliminary budget at a 10% increase. Sandvik also provided Council with information on what our neighbors are doing: New Hope is considering a 6.75% increase, Golden Valley is considering a 5% increase, and Crystal is considering a 16% increase.

Sandvik explained that Council will have the opportunity to reduce the percentage increase in December. Mayor Blonigan asked for a reminder of which positions the City wants to add, and Sandvik explained that the City is proposing a Parks Maintenance position, a GIS position, and a Public Safety Administrative position. Sandvik emphasized the importance of the GIS position in relation to mapping upcoming utilities projects.

Member Greenberg emphasized a need to better communicate why new positions are needed to residents. Sandvik shared that a one-page statement explaining the property levy changes will be sent out to the community. The Council agreed to set a 10% increase as a maximum but shared a desire to lower the percentage in December. Sandvik explained that staff will move forward with a 10% proposal for the September 17th Council meeting.

C. Parks and Facilities Naming Proposals (2)

Sandvik provided history of how the Parks Naming Policy was created and explained that the formal policy was approved in April of 2024. He highlighted that the policy requires a formal response from the City to each submission within 90 days. He explained that the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Commission also needs to approve name submissions. Sandvik shared that there will be a public hearing at the September 17th Council meeting to reconsider the name of Sanborn Park. He explained that Council must accept public testimony on the name submissions, but next steps are up to Council to determine.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked if the submission of two applications limits additional applications. Sandvik discussed that Council has the option to continue considering these two submissions as well as open the door for more applications. He also shared that Council could decide on a name on the night of the public hearing.

Mayor Blonigan expressed that he would like to wait to discuss the two proposed names until after he hears the public's feedback. Member Greenberg agreed and expressed excitement that the community appears to be onboard with changing the name. He shared that he would like to move away from naming parks after people and thinks that there are other ways to recognize individuals. Sandvik explained programs that could be further built out to honor individuals including the City's Parks Donation Policy and the City's memorial bench program.

Sandvik shared that an HRC member asked whether the Parks Commission could act as one of the five members on the naming committee on an application. He explained that the answer was no, since the naming committee must consist of five individual Robbinsdale residents.

Sandvik shared that he will introduce the Public Hearing next week, but reminded Council that the rest of the process will be up to them.

D. Citizen Advisory Group - Nuisance Calls

Sandvik explained that the conversation of creating an ad-hoc committee to address nuisance call concerns began in the fall of 2023. He recalled a number of ordinance changes in recent years that progressed the goal of addressing nuisance calls through an equity lens. He shared that the Human Rights Commission (HRC) has provided a list of recommendations for the committee, and staff added on to those recommendations with more explicit direction. He explained that the recommendations include taking time to learn current code language and practices with the assistance of City staff members, reviewing recent history and data, inviting neighbors to meetings who have experienced quality of life issues related to nuisance violations, and eventually sharing findings with the City Manager and Council after five to six months. He expressed that staff are seeking feedback to determine if the listed recommendations align with Council's expectations for the committee.

Ralston-Aoki shared that the HRC became concerned with the previous nuisance law back in 2020 since landlords were required to evict folks who had too many calls to police or emergency services. She explained that the HRC was concerned with a disparate impact on renters, folks of color, or lower income people. She stated that the City then modified portions of the law that required landlords to evict folks with too many calls. Ralston-Aoki expressed that there are still concerns about treating renters and homeowners differently under the current law, so the HRC recommended a Citizen Advisory Committee on Nuisance Calls to continue to evaluate the process.

Ralston-Aoki suggested that some of the staff's recommendations in the memo may be too structured for a true community engagement process. She also suggested that there be representatives from Legal Aid or HOME Line present for the initial review phases of the committee. Jonathan Hansen explained that the HRC is hoping for this committee to lead to a win- win scenario for all, where there are fewer nuisances and fewer instances where landlords need to evict residents overall.

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked for clarification from the HRC on what changes should be made to staff's recommendations. Ralston-Aoki expressed that including a Legal Aid attorney and HOME Line in discussions would be beneficial for a policy perspective. Sandvik clarified that the intent of staff's recommendations were to provide structure for information-sharing. He recommended that folks from Legal Aid or HOME Line be members of the group throughout the entire process, whereas City staff just serve as liaisons. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner and Mayor Blonigan agreed with getting as many perspectives involved in the conversation as possible.

Council concluded that they would be supportive of the committee after a few small language changes. Mayor Blonigan suggested that the HRC should review the language changes to the committee recommendations before they go to Council. Member Greenberg asked for clarification on whether this is a short-term or permanent committee. Sandvik explained that this committee could continue after six months if there are more actionable items to address. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner thanked everyone for their collaborative efforts on these recommendations.

STAFF UPDATES

None.

COUNCIL UPDATES

Mayor Blonigan shared that he has had at least four developers directly tell him that they enjoy working with Heather Rand, Community Development Director.

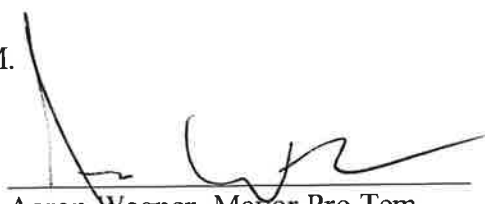
A. Proclamation Designating October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month (Blonigan)

Mayor Blonigan shared that he received a request to declare the month of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. He expressed his support since domestic violence is a universal issue that can impact anyone no matter where they live. Mayor Pro Tem Wagner asked if the City has a partnership with any organizations that work on this issue so that they might be highlighted in a proclamation. Sandvik confirmed that we could highlight some organizations that the Police Department typically work with. Council confirmed their support.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Wagner adjourned the meeting at 10:04 PM.


Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator


Aaron Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem