ROBBINSDALE

City Council Work Session
Tuesday, February 11, 2025

MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 8:29 PM.

ROLL CALL

Present: Mayor Sutton, Member Greenberg, Member Parisian, Member Wagner, Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge
Absent: None
Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Heather Rand, Community Development Director; Richard McCoy, City Engineer/Public Works Director; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

DISCUSSION

A. Discussion on Business Retention & Expansion in City of Robbinsdale

Rand shared that many cities have business retention and expansion programs, which are intentional programs for City staff to engage with businesses. She explained that the program would consist of annual visits to businesses to discuss their needs, concerns, wants, and future plans. She emphasized the need to build connections with Robbinsdale's businesses in a more structured way, and that these businesses need to hear that the City is here for them. She shared that she would love to bring members of Council along to some of these business intervention visits too.

Member Greenberg supported the idea and expressed that he would be happy to go along on visits. Mayor Sutton and Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge echoed the sentiment. Member Parisian shared that she is open to attending meetings too, and wondered if we should ask the Chamber of Commerce for feedback on the idea. Rand confirmed that she has been engaged with the Chamber.

Member Wagner asked about measurable action items from this program. Rand responded that she would recommend keeping check-ins very informal in the beginning so that business representatives feel comfortable, since these check-ins are primarily for relationship building. Member Wagner asked if the Chamber of Commerce would ever be able or willing to come to a City Council meeting, and Sandvik shared that they would likely be interested this spring or summer.

Rand concluded by discussing how Robbinsdale does not have many available business storefronts, but she emphasized that she always wants to hear ideas about what businesses are needed in the community. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge shared that he has heard a desire for a space where young people can hang out. Member Wagner added that he would like to reexamine how we use our residential zoning code in order to place more corner cafés or small businesses in residential neighborhoods. Mayor Sutton shared that many folks generally seem to be looking for more third spaces and places to gather within the community.

B. Water Tower 2 - Discussion of Need

McCoy shared that Water Tower 2 is the final link in the puzzle to finalize the new water infrastructure projects. McCoy explained that the water demand in the City is 1,000,000 gallons of water a day, but that demand peaks in the summer at over 2,000,000 gallons, and the City must have the capacity to handle demand. He shared that redundancy is important since the inside of towers have to be repainted every 20 years, so is it helpful to be able to take a tower offline if needed. He stated that the City wants to have two towers at both ends of the City in case of a fire event. He explained a second Water Tower would also provide more constant water pressure and volume all over town, as well as help operations at the Water Treatment Plant. McCoy updated Council that he has looked at multiple sites for Water Tower 2 and has outlined pros and cons of each of the sites.

McCoy shared that Site 1 is the existing site for the water tower, but it is difficult due to various constraints. He described how Site 2 is the old water treatment plant site and currently owned by the City. He explained that the width of the site is fairly narrow, so the bowl size would line up with property lines and cast shadows over a few properties. He explained that Site 3 is flat and open and would be the best site location for several reasons. He emphasized that it is not owned by the City. He shared that Site 4 would have to be demolished, and that Sites 4 and 5 are generally undesirable since they are in the helicopter route to the hospital. He emphasized concerns about light rail's impact on the helicopter route, so he doesn't want to add to those concerns. He added that Site 5 is a small site and would have similar constraint programs to Site 2. McCoy concluded that staff recommend Site 3. He expressed that he wants to gauge Council's opinions on the site, and if Council agrees with staff, then a proposal would be discussed in closed session at a future Council meeting.

Member Wagner asked what will happen to the current structure on Site 1 if the City goes with another site. McCoy shared that the existing tower would remain until the new tower is built, and then the antennas would be brought over to the new tower. Member Wagner agreed that he likes Site 3, but that he is also open to exploring Site 2 since the City owns it.

Mayor Sutton expressed support for Site 3 and asked if this infrastructure improvement would impact utility billing. Sandvik shared that this project has been in the works for a long time, and that there are plans in place for funding. Mayor Sutton asked what would happen if the City did not build another tower. McCoy answered that it would be problematic, since it would lead to some strains and increased costs at the Water Treatment Plant. Member Wagner added that bringing North Memorial onto the water system is another major reason to build this tower due to the added demand.

Member Parisian asked if there are any benefits or drawbacks with any of the sites regarding sustainability. McCoy shared that most of the sites are similar in terms of sustainability, and that a newer tower requires less maintenance, which is helpful for sustainability. He shared that runoff protections and landscaping could be added to the selected site, and that construction of the new tower will take sustainability considerations into account.

McCoy concluded that he will bring a formal report on proceeding with Site 3 to Council at an upcoming meeting.

C. Water Tower 1 - Lighting Discussion

McCoy explained that the new water tower on West Broadway is now operational, and that one of its design features is lights. He clarified that there are two sets of lights, with white lights for the bowl and colored lights for the column. He explained that when the lights were first put in, they were very bright and staff did not have any controls over them. He discussed how staff shut the lights off in order to get better controls to operate the lights more intentionally. He explained that staff can now control when lights come on and off, as well as the brightness of the lights. McCoy shared that he is seeking Council's opinion on a lighting schedule to follow. McCoy added that the residents who live in the area have submitted a petition to keep the lights permanently and fully off.

Sandvik clarified that staff would like Council to put together a policy to approve specifically how and when the lights are on and off. He continued that from staff's perspective, the lighting of the tower brings a value in welcoming folks to the City, but that it must be balanced with the lighting impacts on resident's homes nearby.

Mayor Sutton expressed that he would be fine with the lights staying off and chalking it up to a loss. Member Wagner shared that his lighting preference would be to meet FFA requirements with the small light on the top, and nothing more. Member Greenberg shared that he is generally in agreement and wondered if there was a way to recoup the cost of the lights, or if the lights could be turned on only for certain holidays or special events. Member Parisian considered that there would need to be seasonal lighting adjustments for the tower being lit at night when taking the sunset time into account. She shared that she would like to hear more about how dim the lights can be set.

A Robbinsdale resident, Miles, shared that the lights are hard on their neighborhood and that they would like to see the lights stay off. He expressed that it has decreased property values significantly. Another resident, Brian, shared his opinion that there is no reason for bright lights to be on the water tower at all, and that he does not want colored lights even for holidays or special occasions,

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge expressed that lighting the tower on special occasions would be really nice, but that he does not support the bright white lights being turned back on. He shared that he is interested in looking into dimming the lights.

Sandvik proposed holding a demonstration for Council and residents to see the dimmed lights in action before making a firm decision. McCoy agreed to hold a demonstration and argued that having the lights on at 25% would be reasonable. Miles expressed that if those lights are turned on for a demonstration, then he would like people to see what it looks like from the direct backyards as well. Member Greenberg agreed and shared that he loved the lights from afar until he realized the impact that they were having on the neighborhood below the tower.

Mayor Sutton stated that he would like to generally discuss lighting in the City on a higher level in the future. Member Wagner agreed since he is very wary of having additional light pollution in the City in any capacity.

The Council agreed to see a demonstration of the lights and their capabilities before making a final decision.

D. Shoreline, Chowen, Drew, Sanborn Construction Updates

McCoy explained that paper plans for Shoreline Dr and Chowen Ave are hung on the wall along with the Sanborn Park proposal from the Parks Master Plan at tonight's meeting.

McCoy discussed how there are three projects in the area - the streets project, the parks project, and the stormwater infrastructure project going through the middle of Sanborn Park. He emphasized that it is difficult to tie all these projects together and work out the timing of which comes first. Therefore, McCoy shared that the Shoreline project likely will not start this year due to coordination difficulties. He explained that staff are applying for grant funding for the stormwater project in Sanborn, and that they will not be able to start until at least May or June of this year. He emphasized that a street project cannot be started after that.

Sandvik shared that much of the planning and preparation work could still be done this year, such as removing the park building and playground while staff work on coordinating the larger projects in upcoming years.

Member Greenberg asked if the Shoreline project will potentially be moved to 2026-2027. McCoy shared that the stormwater infrastructure will have to get done before anything else can happen, so staff are waiting to see what happens there. He explained that the stormwater pipeline must go in before the parking lot, which then impacts the street project. McCoy confirmed that the stormwater pipe might be able to happen this year, depending on the grant. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge agreed that people are primarily excited about starting work on Sanborn Park, so they might not be upset about delaying the streets project another year.

Member Parisian asked about the communications plan for letting folks know about these project delays. McCoy shared that residents directly neighboring the park will be notified. Staff and Council discussed hosting another potential information session down the line to inform residents on the updated timeline and plans.

McCoy shared that Engineering staff will potentially focus on projects like York Avenue and other work that they can get done this year instead.

STAFF UPDATES

Sandvik shared that the All-Staff Lunch is scheduled for April 24, 2025. He emphasized that it is nice when elected officials can attend and offer a quick word of thanks.

Sandvik updated Council on the recent snow event. He shared that the Police Department issued 191 citations, which are down from previous years, where 300 tickets are usually issued.

A. Staff Progress Update on the work of the Blue Line Extension (BLE) Anti-displacement Community Prosperity Program Board (ACPPB)

Rand shared an update on the BLE and ACPPB Board. She explained that there are 25 people on the board who have been meeting since summer, after the legislature allocated 10 million dollars to anti-displacement efforts as they relate to the blue line. She shared that the board mainly focuses on what needs to be delivered to the legislature by January, as well as discuss how the 10 million dollars can best meet the needs of those who will be displaced.

Rand shared that the composition of the board will change in the future, and that the board is primarily composed of Minneapolis community members who will be impacted. She discussed how the board created a selection committee which has strong Minneapolis representation, but that Robbinsdale is being represented by a resident, who has plans to leave in the upcoming months. Rand expressed that the group might request that the matching requirement for the funds be taken away, since it would be quite a challenge. Rand shared that she views the City's role as understanding how these funds can assist our residents and businesses.

Sandvik thanked Member Parisian for lobbying the legislature to support these funds as well.

Mayor Sutton asked for clarification on whether Robbinsdale residents, or the City, will have to pay for the matching funds. Sandvik shared that in other cities, community organizations have come together to match funds, so he is not worried about the dollars being matched.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked how the funds will be allocated proportionately and equitably, and Rand shared that those discussions are still ongoing. She emphasized that strong emotions are involved, and proportional discussions have not come yet. Member Greenberg emphasized that Robbinsdale's voice must be heard in these discussions.

B. Remote Meeting Attendance Policy - Updates

Sandvik reminded Council that the conversation about remote meetings started back in January due to the possibility of Councilmembers being absent from future meetings. Sandvik explained that there are four elements that must be addressed in a remote policy: notice, accessibility, regular meeting location, and ability to be seen and heard. He elaborated that there must be notice given in advance when a Councilmember plans to take a meeting remotely, meetings must be taken in a publicly accessible place, one member of the body must be present at the regular location, and all Councilmembers must be able to be seen and heard regardless of location. He explained that staff does not support the idea of residents attending remotely since there are other remote ways for residents to engage with Council, whether it be email, phone, or more.

Sandvik shared that this policy is for those who are frequently missing meetings, and that it is okay for Councilmembers to miss a meeting occasionally without tuning in remotely. Sandvik also proposed discussing moving all Council and EDA meetings to take place on two Tuesdays a month instead of three. He shared that this would lead to longer nights, but that it could be worth discussing in the future. He concluded that a remote policy could be ready for approval as early as March.

COUNCIL UPDATES

Member Greenberg shared that he went to a meeting at Lakeview Elementary School this week, and the school board announced that there are going to be some cuts made. He explained that Lakeview will be impacted by a cut to their IB program, which could have an impact on keeping Robbinsdale kids in the Robbinsdale district. He emphasized that Council should be aware of the change in case they receive any questions.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 10:23 PM.

Signed by:
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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:
Raymond Blackledge
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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem