



MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 7:13 PM.

ROLL CALL

Present: Member Parisian, Member Wagner, Mayor Sutton, Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge, Member Greenberg

Absent: None

Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Richard McCoy, City Engineer/Public Works Director; Heather Rand, Community Development Director; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

DISCUSSION

A. CCX Media - Funding and Policy Updates

Sandvik introduced the team from CCX Media, Shannon Slatton Schwartz and Dave Kiser, and explained that they are here to provide Council with some legislative updates and information about what CCX Media is currently facing.

Schwartz explained that CCX Media disseminates daily content on daily news, sports, and live events for nine member cities and 350,000 people. She explained that CCX works with cities closely, since staff manage the recording equipment at City Council meetings and work with Communications staff to plan Robbinsdale-specific stories. She stated that CCX stands out due to the daily content that is posted for free so that everyone can access content.

Kiser explained that CCX is funded by cable franchise fees and PEG fees, and that CCX has lost 35% of their revenue since 2017. He explained that they are now turning to the legislature to try and modernize their funding model, since this model of funding was set up in the 1980s when most folks had cable. They discussed the Equal Access to Broadband Act, and how it would grant broadband access to all, instead of allowing companies to cherry-pick where they go. They also highlighted ensuring adequate compensation for activity done by companies in the public right-of-way. Kiser and Schwartz explained that companies do not have to pay a franchise fee for streaming on their phones, even though it is the same content they get on TV. They expressed their appreciation for the Council's support.

Member Wagner asked about the appeal and popularity of online content. Schwartz shared that they have high viewership on sports content, especially girls' volleyball, since they make all sports content easily searchable. She shared that CCX does not do clickbait stories, so it is hard to make a ton of money on local stories. Member Blackledge echoed the importance of sports coverage in high schools.

Sandvik called out that the product that CCX Media delivers is top-notch and nationally recognized. He emphasized that they are great partners, and that City staff greatly appreciate the incredible storytelling that they help Robbinsdale bring to life.

B. Light Rail Transit - Blue Line Extension Updates

Sandvik introduced the topic and explained that multiple agencies are here tonight to share light rail updates.

Andrew Dresdner from Bolton and Menk explained that he is here to discuss stationary planning. Bolton and Menk previously did planning work with Council and staff, which culminated in a document for the City to use as a reference point. He shared that the document informed some of the light rail plan, but it also gave ideas of how the area can grow in general.

He explained that Bolton & Menk took a four-point approach: understanding that transit is not a panacea, knowing that you have to work at transit to get good things, noting that transit is just one component of a good downtown, and pushing to center Robbinsdale in the light rail discussion. He shared quotes on the importance of pedestrian infrastructure surrounding the station in Robbinsdale. He noted that Bolton & Menk tried to weave together the goals of the project, County, and City. He shared that these goals included growing diversity of experiences, transforming Bottineau into a front door to the community, ensuring light rail serves community long-term, and building an efficient public realm. He explained that these goals then informed recommendations related to connectivity, development, and place.

Mayor Sutton asked how we can be confident that development will come to Robbinsdale due to the light rail. Dresdner shared that they are seeing growth all over the region due to transit, and that it is already desirable to live near downtown Robbinsdale, so that desire would only grow with transit. Member Wagner highlighted that there has been demand for housing in Robbinsdale as exemplified by the three large apartment buildings that have been built in the past few years.

Member Greenberg asked how visions of redevelopment downtown are compatible with the park & ride structure at US Bank. Sandvik shared some context that the project office is looking to use the US Bank site as a park & ride, and that Council would like to use the site for redevelopment options. Member Greenberg wondered how some visions of redevelopment could happen sooner in Robbinsdale, and Dresdner and staff discussed how there might be more EDA opportunities going forward. Nick Landwer, Director of Engineering and Design for Light Rail, discussed how it was in the municipal consent resolution to plan for the park & ride site at US Bank. Mayor Sutton emphasized his preference of moving the park & ride site to another location.

Member Parisian thanked Mr. Dresdner and emphasized that she loves the Bolton & Menk vision for its focus on pedestrian infrastructure and connectivity across the City. Member Blackledge agreed and thanked Mr. Dresdner.

Landwer walked Council through a technical overview of the project using segmented maps. He highlighted the entire route, the 13 stations along the alignment, and the stops roughly every 0.75 miles. He discussed how the plans are currently nearing 60% design. He explained that construction will likely start in 2027-2028 and will take around 4 years to complete. He emphasized that Metro Transit will work with the selected contractor to assist with construction impacts throughout the project. He shared that the final 60% design for Robbinsdale is expected to be finished in July of 2025. He noted that the Lowry Station plans are currently underdeveloped due to recent changes in the nearby bridges. Brian Krasner, Metro Transit Assistant Designer, noted that cultural place making design work is currently in the works, which will take community input into account for station planning.

Landwer discussed the Lowry Avenue Station, and noted that they tried to preserve the existing infrastructure, but concerns arose with crossings at the Parkway and Lowry Ave, and well as hospital concerns on ambulance access. He shared that these reasons led to a selection of a grade-separated station, where the station will be at-grade, but the Parkway will be separated by grade. Member Greenberg asked if there will be a new municipal consent vote due to the change in the Lowry Avenue station design. Landwer explained that since the station is in the same place and the roads are the same, there will not be another municipal consent vote. He added that at 90% design, the City will get to provide additional feedback.

Landwer continued the technical overview and shared that in previous designs, there was construction along

Lakeland that would remove trees and heavy reconstruction, which is no longer the case. He also noted that the Three Rivers trail will not be touched. He highlighted that the project office commits to relocating the downtown Robbinsdale station from south of 40th to north of 40th avenue. He also noted their commitment to improving pedestrian and bike connections on 40th avenue. Parisian highlighted the importance of using wayfinding to direct cyclists to take the safer routes when crossing Bottineau Blvd. McCoy added that there will be a proposal coming to Council as a part of Shoreline project to add in a trail that connects the Parkway to the other side of Shoreline.

Member Wagner asked when lighting and visibility discussions would be incorporated into the design plans. Landwer shared that those topics be discussed at the 60% - 90% design plan mark once the lines and lanes are finalized. Krasner shared that Metro Transit's designs are dark sky compliant. Member Wagner asked if lights would use copper or aluminum wires, and Metro Transit said that they will keep theft in mind when making lighting choices.

Mayor Sutton asked about federal funding. Dan Soler from Hennepin County shared that the Blue Line project is a part of a federal program that is still ongoing. He explained that previously, Hennepin County was planning to pay 51% based on the cost estimate, and 49% would be paid by the federal government. He shared that when the cost estimate is redone, the County is anticipating picking up the difference between the estimates. He explained that an issue arises if the federal government will not hold up their previous commitment, and then a funding gap would need to be fulfilled by another source. He discussed that the County will know more later this year after the environmental impact work is completed.

The project office highlighted their community engagement work, and emphasized that there are still looking for folks along the project corridor to participate in each city's cultural place making group.

Project office staff and City staff discussed the loss of tax capacity that would come from not redeveloping the US Bank site. Dan Soler explained that there could be taxable parts of the site incorporated into the park & ride plan, such as multi-unit housing. He highlighted that there is other property in the downtown area that could also be redeveloped into taxable income, and that the project will generally bring the City's tax base up due to spurred development. Mayor Sutton emphasized that his heart is with the immediate tax revenue opportunity for the City.

C. Water Tower 1 - Lighting Policy

Sandvik provided background that when Tower 1 was initially lit, they received immediate feedback that the lights were too bright, and staff turned the lights back off. He explained that staff worked to refit new lights on the tower with various colors and capabilities to dim lights. He shared that there was recently a demonstration of the new lights, which highlighted the dimmable features and color schemes. Council also met with some of the residents in the immediate area about the impact on their homes. He explained that staff is looking for explicit direction from Council on how they would like to go forward with a lighting schedule.

Member Parisian thanked staff for the demonstration of the new lighting system. She proposed that once a month, youth in Robbinsdale should vote and pick what color the lights turn on a certain day. She shared that communications could go out asking kids what color they want the water tower lights to be and why, and the City could select 12 of those submissions for each month of the year. She stated that she is okay with having the lights off for the rest of the month. Member Greenberg showed support for the idea.

Mayor Sutton shared that he is hesitant to light the tower at all, and that he would like to hear residents' perspective on the idea. A resident discussed how the City has been focused on improving sustainability initiatives, but he feels that these lights increase light pollution in Robbinsdale. He is wondering why nobody talked to the neighbors about putting lights on the towers in the first place. He discussed how if we light up the

tower occasionally, other residents may want to light it up more frequently, since they look great from afar. Mayor Sutton stated that he cannot get behind lighting the tower at all due to the light pollution and impacts on the neighborhood. Member Wagner agreed.

Member Greenberg shared that he is looking for creative ways to utilize the lights in any way, so they don't go to waste. He wondered if there was a way to just light up the side of the tower facing highway 100 instead of the side facing the neighborhood. He concluded that it is important to listen to the residents, and he thinks the lights should stay off, even though he would like to find some purpose for the lights. Member Parisian added that her idea strikes a balance between keeping the lights primarily off, while also encouraging community engagement. She hoped that the neighborhood could get behind having the colored column lights on for a few hours per month at a low brightness setting. She recalled that community engagement and communications are a high priority in Robbinsdale, and this would be a great way to tell a story.

Member Greenberg asked if the lights on the water tower could be repurposed or sold to another City to recoup some funds. McCoy and Sandvik shared that you would get next to nothing for selling the lights. He wondered if we could ever reuse those lights on another building in the City in the future, and McCoy said that could be an option.

Sandvik asked for confirmation that three of the five Council members support completely turning off the lights, and Council confirmed.

STAFF UPDATES

Leen shared that CCX Media works frequently with staff on City stories, and that there will be more opportunities for Council members to get involved with those stories in the future.

COUNCIL UPDATES

Mayor Sutton shared that he is not going to be at the City Council meeting on March 18, so Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge will lead the meeting.

Member Greenberg discussed how the IB program in the Robbinsdale School District will be kept for now, which is exciting news.

The Council and Sandvik discussed options for testing out technology for remote Council meetings in the future.

A. Humane Pet Store Ordinance - Mayor Sutton

Sandvik shared information on a potential ordinance idea brought forward by Mayor Sutton, which works towards prevention of the puppy mill industry in Robbinsdale. He added that this ordinance would encourage people to support the Humane Society instead of puppy mills. Sandvik asked whether there was support from other Council members for staff to draft language to bring to an upcoming meeting. Council confirmed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 10:00 PM.

Signed by:



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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:



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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem