



MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM.

ROLL CALL

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

Absent: Member Parisian

Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; John Elder, Police Captain; Heather Rand, Community Development Director; Matt Bazyk, Recreation Services Manager; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator; Members of the Robbinsdale Fire Relief Association - Darren Olson, Jesse Hoekstra, Neil Dressel

DISCUSSION

A. Robbinsdale Fire Relief Association - Retirement fund, City Contribution

Olson, President of the Robbinsdale Fire Relief Association, provided background that members of the Fire Relief Association attended the Work session in October 2024 to discuss bringing firefighter pensions up to \$15,000, as per the state maximum. He shared that they are now returning with the same ask to get prepared in advance of this year's budgeting process.

Olson discussed the purpose of the Fire Relief Association and introduced the two Treasurers in attendance - Jesse Hoekstra and Neil Dressel. Olson highlighted the significant training hours required to become a firefighter and discussed all the public education events that are made possible by the Fire Relief Association. He also noted that yearly fire calls continue to steadily increase, leading to more demand of the crew.

Olson reminded Council of their pension increase request, which is to increase the current pension of \$12,500 per year of service to \$15,000. Olson walked through two options to reach \$15,000. Option 1 is directly increasing pensions to \$15,000. Option 2 is to increase pensions by \$1,250 per year over two years to reach \$15,000.

Olson walked through pension funding details, and highlighted that pensions are 75% vested at 10 years, and fully vested at 15 years of service with a minimum age of 50 to collect. He also noted that the actual City contribution in 2024 was much lower than the estimated contribution. He emphasized that increasing pensions would reduce turnover and incentivize good hires.

Member Greenberg asked what staff's preference would be between option 1 and option 2. Sandvik responded that Council will need to decide on the pension amount by the time the preliminary budget is set. He clarified that a decision does not need to be made now. Member Wagner indicated that he is leaning towards option 2 due to a potentially bad state budget year. Sandvik clarified that a decision did not need to be made tonight.

B. Regulation of Camping on City Property

Sandvik explained that the City's response to unhoused individuals is to offer support and connect them with the needed resources. In recent instances of individuals camping on City property, the primary focus has been safety and connection to services. Last year's Supreme Court guidance outlined what authority jurisdictions have in these situations. He explained that the City is not looking to remove people forcefully but to address

safety concerns. He noted that the goal is to gather Council feedback and begin developing ordinance language, along with internal protocols for staff.

Mayor Sutton noted the recent online outpouring of compassion but expressed concern for public safety, both for residents and those camping outside. He supports creating an ordinance prohibiting camping on public property while ensuring efforts are made to connect individuals to services.

Captain Elder described the standard process of connecting with unhoused individuals. He noted that safety is the first concern, followed by assessing why the person is unhoused. He shared that the embedded RPD social worker makes initial contact, with police nearby but out of sight. He emphasized that some individuals accept help, while others decline all services. Police do not aim to arrest, but to offer safety and support. For individuals who refuse services, it is difficult to move forward without a specific ordinance.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge invited Human Rights Commission members to weigh in. Kirkeeng argued that more time and resources are needed to connect with unhoused folks. Ralston-Aoki recommended involving a reputable homeless service organization in drafting the ordinance. Member Greenberg acknowledged the complexity of the issue and suggested using clear, non-targeting language like “no camping on City property” to give the City enforcement tools while keeping people a priority.

Mayor Sutton asked about the qualifications of RPD's embedded social worker. Elder explained that they are licensed Hennepin County employees with over five years of experience and extensive knowledge of municipal and housing systems.

Member Wagner questioned whether a new ordinance would be more effective than current trespass laws. He supported the ordinance only if it includes strong language about prioritizing care and possibly mitigating trespassing charges. Ralston-Aoki asked whether the ordinance might shift priorities from supporting folks to removing them from property. Elder assured everyone that compassion remains a foundation of RPD and that the ordinance would not be used to criminalize homelessness.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked if staff had enough input to begin drafting language. Sandvik said he heard broad agreement around prioritizing safety and dignity. He will develop a framework starting with lighter-touch language, such as prohibiting overnight camping on City property, and incorporate legitimate concerns like fire hazards and threats of violence. Rand noted existing zoning language prohibits using City property as a residence, but it only allows ticketing, which isn't appropriate for unhoused individuals.

C. Yard Waste Collection

Sandvik explained that concerns were raised about yard waste collection following the transition to Republic Services. Sandvik provided background that in summer 2022, the previous hauler abruptly stopped collecting yard waste due to staffing shortages, tight alley access, and the unlimited yard waste service that was in place. He discussed how service later improved, but the hauler continued to struggle with high volumes. During negotiations with Republic, it was decided that since they don't collect unlimited trash, they also wouldn't collect unlimited yard waste. He stated that under the new agreement, Republic picks up the yard waste bin contents, plus five-yard waste bags per week.

Sandvik explained that residents have inquired about using the Maple Grove yard waste site, since surrounding communities use it. He shared that the cost for Robbinsdale to participate in the Maple Grove site is estimated at \$45,000. Currently, residents can access the site individually for a fee. He noted that City participation could begin by fall, but funding is a challenge that staff would need to explore.

Member Greenberg noted that excess yard waste is primarily a fall issue, and not all residents have large amounts of yard waste every week. He also raised concerns about accessibility, as the Maple Grove site is a far

drive for some. Member Wagner agreed, noting that yard waste spikes when leaves drop, making staggered bin usage impractical. He asked if Republic, or another provider, could be contracted for extra pickups during the short peak period.

Sandvik pointed out that fall weather is unpredictable and all yard waste sites close at the end of November, complicating planning. Mayor Sutton suggested sharing a list of local yard waste service providers on the website to give residents more options.

Member Greenberg asked if Republic had any ideas for managing higher yard waste volumes. Sandvik said Republic may be open to expanding service and that an à la carte option could be viable for fall 2025, with broader solutions possible by 2026. Bazyk recommended promoting mulching leaves as a way to reduce yard waste volume significantly and suggested an educational campaign to raise awareness. Sandvik concluded that staff will compile cost and service options and present them to the Council for consideration.

D. Human Rights Commission Annual Updates

Council continued a discussion that began in April after requesting changes to a pro-community resolution drafted by the Human Rights Commission (HRC). Ralston-Aoki emphasized that the HRC felt it was important to affirm the City's commitment to being a welcoming and inclusive community, with a specific focus on supporting people of various immigration statuses, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Mayor Sutton asked what problems HRC members had heard that prompted the resolution. Ralston-Aoki said concerns included residents who appear undocumented being questioned about citizenship, threats to the transgender community, and claims that DEI efforts are discriminatory.

Member Wagner urged Council to pass the resolution soon to demonstrate support for marginalized communities. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge said the resolution outlines how Council can consider these issues in ongoing work and shows continued efforts toward community inclusivity. Member Greenberg referenced earlier concerns about whether this resolution could make the City a federal target. He noted the consensus was that Robbinsdale already demonstrates these values, and the resolution reflects that history.

Mayor Sutton said his initial thought was that the resolution was too long and questioned whether people would read it. He asked whether the goal was for people to feel safer in Robbinsdale or to read the full resolution. He wondered if a broader, more concise resolution welcoming all people might reduce political risk. Mayor Sutton said he supports these values but doesn't like bringing national issues to a local level. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge said Robbinsdale's history hasn't always been inclusive, so calling out a shift toward equity is important. Member Wagner acknowledged hesitations about national politics but said the resolution effectively highlights how national decisions impact Robbinsdale.

Mayor Sutton preferred a shorter version, Member Parisian was not present but had supported multiple resolutions, and Member Wagner, Member Greenberg, and Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge supported the current version. Mayor Sutton agreed to support the current version if that was the consensus. Member Wagner suggested adding the resolution to next week's Council agenda for further discussion and a final decision where all Councilmembers are present.

STAFF UPDATES

A. Performance Measurement Annual Survey

Leen shared information about the Annual Performance Measurement survey and noted that a financial component is awarded when the City submits our results. An additional benefit is being able to compare benchmark data on City services from year to year. Leen asked Council if they have any changes that they would like to make to the survey this year.

Member Wagner mentioned that he would like to see 650 responses to the survey this year, in comparison to around 500 last year. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge noted appreciation for seeing resident's opinions and watching certain categories improve over the years. Member Greenberg asked that the questions remain consistent from year to year, so that we can easily compare.

B. Pet Store Ordinance

Mayor Sutton previously suggested an ordinance that would work towards prevention of the puppy mill industry in Robbinsdale. Staff proposed bringing a first ordinance reading to Council if there were not any changes Council would like to make. Council agreed to bring it to an upcoming meeting.

C. Utility Rates - Storm Water Fees

Sandvik shared that Jim Benshoof, a member of Robbinsdale Parkway United Church of Christ, conducted detailed research comparing stormwater fees across neighboring communities. He aimed to examine the fees charged to his church and compare them with churches in five surrounding cities. He found that Robbinsdale's fees were about 2.5 times higher than any of them. He acknowledged that lowering fees for churches might require shifting the cost burden to others, but he argued that it wouldn't significantly impact other users if evenly distributed. He asked that Council recognize this as a serious issue and direct staff to find a fair solution before setting 2026 utility rates later this year.

Member Greenberg said he discussed this issue with Benshoof and other church members during his campaign and is open to the conversation. However, he noted residents might object because they pay property taxes while churches do not. He also mentioned that utility rates are already high, and the stormwater fee system is based on impervious surfaces and building size. He added that while 13 churches would be affected by the change, not all have expressed concerns.

Benshoof questioned why Robbinsdale's fee system, which appears fair and aligned with other cities, results in charges 2–5 times higher. Sandvik explained that as a first-ring suburb with aging infrastructure, Robbinsdale has higher costs than newer suburbs. Sandvik continued that staff are hesitant to offer discounts, as it may lead to similar requests from other institutions like schools, which are major contributors to the stormwater fund. He noted that staff view this through an equity lens, since each property should contribute to the fund in proportion to the benefit it receives. Council agreed that lowering the fees at this time would be difficult due to the challenge of shifting those costs to other community members.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge thanked Benshoof for his time and thorough research. Member Greenberg added that the City still wants to collaborate with Benshoof and the church to explore creative solutions for reducing the stormwater fee burden.

D. Upcoming Special Work Sessions

Sandvik noted that the upcoming tour of the public works facility was cancelled due to Richard McCoy traveling to Washington DC for a National Public Works Week celebration. Council and staff settled on Tuesday, July 17 as the rescheduled public works facility tour date.

Sandvik discussed the logistics of a Public Safety facility tour. He offered Council the option to do the tour as a group or do more robust individual tours. Council expressed interest in individual tours.

E. Items arising from the last Council Meeting

Sandvik mentioned that concerns about park signage were brought up at the last Council meeting and opened a discussion about how signage could be increased to make rules clearer. Sandvik showed examples of some park signage that already exists. Mayor Sutton noted a need for consistency between Robbinsdale signs.

Bazyk noted that there have been internal disagreements about what signs are needed, as well as a branding refresh, which has led to a delay in getting new signs out. He also noted that the large park signs at entrances are planned for replacement soon too.

Bazyk highlighted his plans for signage, including adding more general use signs near the entrance at the biggest parks. He noted that for park rentals, staff do their best to make sure that all the rules are followed. Staff will approve most rental or permit requests that come in if they are reasonable and the form is properly filled out.

Member Greenberg mentioned feedback that he received from residents that they generally do not feel unsafe or threatened within their community, and they support doing anything such as improving signage in parks, to prevent incidents in the future.

Mayor Sutton asked about the tight parking situation near Sanborn Park on both sides of Drew and Chowen, and Sandvik shared that it may be something for Engineering or Public Safety to consider.

COUNCIL UPDATES

Member Wagner stated that in 2023, the County announced the closure of the HERC, but now there is talk of it staying open longer. He mentioned that the cost of our trash pickup could increase if some of our trash can no longer be sent to the HERC.

Member Greenberg added that there is a community clean-up at Hollingsworth on the same night as North Memorial's walk. He wanted to make sure there was coverage at both events.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge mentioned a conversation with Phillip Gray asking for some ideas of how to reply to residents asking about the incident at Sanborn Park. Council mentioned that they have been referring to the Mayor's statements.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 10:48 PM.

Signed by:



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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:



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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem