ROBBINSDALE

City Council Work Session
Tuesday, August 19, 2025

MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

ROLL CALL

Present: Member Greenberg, Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge, Member Parisian, Member Wagner, Mayor Sutton
Absent: None
Staff: Tim Sandvik, City Manager; Heather Rand, Community Development Director; Diaa Tahoun, Finance Director; Chase Peterson-Etem, City Clerk/Assistant to City Manager; Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

DISCUSSION

A. Updates on (Proposed) 2026 Budget

Sandvik opened the discussion by noting that September is when Council must set a preliminary not-to-exceed budget, with final adoption in December. He reminded Council that the process begins with the county assessor determining property values, while the City Council sets the budget and staff prepare it for review.

He highlighted several financial items. Robbinsdale will see an increase of about $311,000 from Fiscal Disparities, while Local Government Aid will rise only $2,549. Insurance costs are estimated to increase 11 percent in 2026, and negotiations with all five city unions are ongoing.

On staffing, Sandvik mentioned a potential addition of one police command staff position due to public safety demands, administrative adjustments across departments, and restructuring in Finance. One finance position was elevated to Assistant Finance Director, which has aided recruitment and retention, while other responsibilities are being reassigned.

He also reviewed estimated tax rates and 2026 Property Tax Levy options, reminding Council that the budget should reflect the priorities set during their January planning session.

Member Parisian confirmed that Fiscal Disparities and LGA numbers are finalized. She also asked about Parks staffing, and Sandvik explained that a previously budgeted position will now be filled full-time instead of relying on temporary staff.

Member Wagner asked about Finance staffing changes and the possibility of an Assistant City Manager. Sandvik confirmed recent restructuring and expressed support for an administrative role that could act as City Manager when needed, which Council supported.

Mayor Sutton raised the potential use of technology and AI to reduce staff workload, while also emphasizing the need for security. Tahoun noted that three new officers are expected from the Cadet program in 2026 or 2027, and deficit spending is manageable until those positions are filled.

Member Greenberg asked about tax capacity rates and comparisons with neighboring cities. Sandvik explained that multiple factors are involved and that the proposed levy would bring Robbinsdale close to peers at about

60 percent. Member Greenberg also asked what reductions would mean for services, and Sandvik said lowering the levy further could lead to debt spending or staff cuts.

Councilmembers discussed the proposed 8 percent levy increase. Member Parisian confirmed it would not result in layoffs, and Sandvik said leaving vacant positions unfilled would be the first step if reductions are needed. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge emphasized the importance of maintaining service quality and staff while trimming where possible.

Mayor Sutton asked about funding for the Parks Master Plan. Sandvik explained it is a long-term plan, with funding decisions addressed over multiple years through the CIP.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge invited Members Parisian and Wagner, who have prior budget experience, to share their perspectives. Member Wagner noted that staffing is a top priority and cautioned about the cumulative effect of levy increases from the City, County, and School Board. Member Parisian also emphasized staffing, as well as communications with residents and keeping levy increases steady year over year. She expressed comfort with the 8 percent proposal, noting it is much lower than the original staff recommendation.

Member Greenberg stressed the importance of maintaining reserves for emergencies and noted the impact of even small tax increases on residents with fixed incomes. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge added that a fully staffed police department leaves less budget flexibility. Sandvik agreed but noted that restructuring will continue.

Mayor Sutton stated he does not support staff cuts. Member Wagner asked about utility costs, which Sandvik said will be decided in December. Sandvik also reminded Council that last year's levy discussions began at 12 percent before being reduced to 8 percent, urging Council to adopt a number they can defend regardless of County or School Board decisions.

Member Greenberg, Member Wagner, and Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge agreed that 8 percent is acceptable for a preliminary not-to-exceed budget, though all expressed interest in exploring options to reduce it further if possible.

STAFF UPDATES

None.

COUNCIL UPDATES

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 6:53 PM.

Signed by:
Rachel Leen
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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:
Raymond Blackledge
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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem