



MINUTES

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge called the meeting to order at 7:36 PM.

ROLL CALL

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

Absent: None

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

DISCUSSION

A. Sanborn Renaming PRFC Feedback

Staff reminded Council that the effort to rename Sanborn Park began several years ago under a prior Council. This Council continued the process with community support, resulting in more than 200 name submissions through the engagement method Council selected. The Park, Recreation, and Forestry Commission (PRFC) reviewed submissions based on established guidelines and forwarded eligible names to Council, which narrowed the list to seven.

Bazyk shared that at its November meeting, the PRFC reviewed the seven finalist names, including an additional Dakota name. After discussion and outreach within their wards, the PRFC stated they were not comfortable recommending an additional Dakota name, since they are not subject-matter experts. Bazyk consulted with the Historical Society and a Dakota community member and learned that Dakota naming follows a distinct cultural protocol that would require turning naming authority over to Dakota representatives.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge thanked staff and outlined three options: proceeding with a Dakota name through the Dakota-led process, pursuing a co-naming approach, or selecting one of the seven remaining finalist names. Member Greenberg noted that Council already established a clear process and expressed caution about deviating from it, while acknowledging Council's authority to do so. Sandvik confirmed that the final decision rests with Council.

Mayor Sutton asked whether Dakota community members consulted had local ties; Bazyk confirmed they did, including one whose family lived near the park.

Member Parisian expressed support for allowing the Dakota community to name the park and stated openness to co-naming if the Dakota name remains primary. She emphasized that the original intent of renaming the park was healing and repair, and supported incorporating a land acknowledgment. Bazyk noted that a Dakota-led naming process would include ongoing educational elements. Mayor Sutton requested additional detail on what that would entail.

Mayor Sutton shared that community engagement showed strong support for a Dakota name, while also noting significant community interest in honoring Marjorie Johnson. He supported a co-naming approach that would include both a Dakota name and Blue Ribbon Park. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge supported a fully Dakota-led naming process, expressing concern that co-naming could dilute its meaning. He suggested honoring Marjorie in another way and emphasized the importance of a land acknowledgment. Member Wagner shared uncertainty

but agreed that a Dakota name would be an honor. He raised concerns that co-naming could cause confusion and supported learning more about the Dakota process before moving forward. Member Greenberg reiterated support for honoring Dakota involvement and acknowledged that a Dakota name and ceremony would carry weight. He remained open to either a sole Dakota name or co-naming.

Bazyk clarified that the Dakota process would be the same whether the outcome is a sole Dakota name or co-naming; the remaining question is how the co-naming process would function on the City's side.

Mayor Sutton emphasized honoring both community input and Dakota collaboration, suggesting that co-naming could reflect shared intent. Member Wagner and Member Parisian agreed that additional information on the co-naming option is needed before next steps, with Member Parisian requesting that any co-naming effort be led by the Dakota community.

Sandvik shared that the topic will likely return to Council in February or March after further coordination with Dakota representatives and preparation of materials.

B. LRT Design Discussion — Vegetation, Lighting, Pocket Park

Staff from the Blue Line LRT project office attended to gather Council input on landscaping, lighting, and the proposed pocket park as plans move toward 90% design.

McCoy reviewed landscaping concepts for the Downtown Robbinsdale station, including varying levels of native plantings and rock features intended to guide pedestrian movement. Council expressed support for increased greenery in the boulevard median, with a preference for concentrating plantings in higher-traffic areas. Mayor Sutton suggested community involvement in maintenance, which Council supported. Member Wagner asked about green roofs and solar, and Ryan noted these were explored but deemed impractical due to maintenance, though other sustainability features are included in the parking facility.

McCoy then reviewed lighting options, noting the City's current bronze fixtures with bird cutouts and banners. Council discussed choosing between decorative and utilitarian fixtures, emphasizing downward-facing, dark-sky-compliant lighting. Preferences included warmer light tones, pedestrian-focused illumination, durability, and maintaining the ability to use standard, off-the-shelf fixtures. Council supported incorporating banners and bird elements and favored a more historic, decorative style consistent with the downtown character. Lighting spacing options were also discussed, including combinations of roadway and pedestrian-scale lighting. McCoy noted that tree placement in the boulevard could affect sidewalk lighting and would need to be considered.

McCoy reviewed the proposed pocket park at 40th Avenue and West Broadway, where the Robbinsdale Market previously stood. Plans include realigning the intersection and addressing stormwater challenges through an underground water treatment chamber. Larger trees would be placed around the structure, with space reserved for a potential public art feature. Staff confirmed the property is privately owned, with BLRT covering capital costs and the City responsible for future maintenance. Council expressed interest in maximizing the space with art, seating, cycling amenities such as a fix-it station, and possibly contemplative garden elements. Fruit-bearing trees were discussed as a possibility, though staff noted constraints related to underground infrastructure.

Finally, McCoy reviewed signal mast options along County Road 81. Council supported painting signals to match the selected lighting standards, noting the City's past success maintaining painted signals and the relatively low maintenance burden.

C. Human Rights Commission - Proposed Ordinance Feedback

Sandvik noted that several Human Rights Commission (HRC) members were present to discuss revisions to the proposed public camping ordinance, which Council previously declined to advance. In October, the HRC provided feedback on what they would like to see if the ordinance were reconsidered. Julie Ralston-Aoki thanked Council for involving the HRC and emphasized concerns that a camping ordinance would disproportionately impact unhoused individuals. The HRC questioned whether an ordinance is necessary at all and recommended forming a temporary task force of subject-matter experts, including County staff, public health professionals, service providers, and people with lived experience. If Council proceeds, the HRC stressed that support resources must accompany any ordinance. The HRC drafted alternative language drawn from other jurisdictions that emphasizes humane treatment, clear communication, and access to services.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge thanked the HRC for the thoughtful and human-centered work and appreciated the focus on avoiding criminalization. Mayor Sutton acknowledged the HRC's work but emphasized that drafting ordinance language is ultimately the City's responsibility. He shared that his conversations with unhoused individuals reflected support for notice and communication rather than enforcement. He supported hearing from experts and leading with empathy, while also maintaining public safety and preventing encampments. Member Parisian thanked the HRC and stated that she does not believe sufficient data currently exists to justify an ordinance. She supported gathering more information and forming a temporary working group before advancing any draft, noting the complexity and trauma associated with homelessness.

Member Greenberg asked about the original intent of the ordinance. Sandvik explained it was meant to provide a mechanism to respond to camping on public property, with empathy and resource connection prioritized over enforcement. Member Greenberg stated that public spaces are not designed for overnight camping and that having a policy backstop is reasonable, while still supporting care for unhoused populations. Member Wagner shared mixed feelings, appreciating the clarity of the HRC draft but expressing concern about implementation and staff capacity. He supported forming a temporary committee to hear from faith leaders, service providers, shelters, and County partners. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge echoed concerns about vagueness in the previous ordinance and supported hearing from experts and individuals with lived experience before moving forward.

Sandvik asked whether Council preferred subject-matter experts to attend a work session or to form a temporary advisory committee. Member Parisian reiterated the importance of first determining whether an ordinance is necessary, noting the lack of formal data. Sandvik explained data challenges, as homelessness itself is not tracked unless other violations occur. Member Greenberg noted that public concern centered on fears of a "homeless ban," which eased once residents understood the ordinance addressed camping, not homelessness.

Ralston-Aoki reiterated that the HRC serves in an advisory role and encouraged Council to consider disproportionate impacts on Native communities. She emphasized the need for clarity to avoid criminalization. Council agreed that the next step is to bring in subject-matter experts and stakeholders to guide future discussion. Sandvik concluded that staff will gather information and coordinate next steps.

D. Human Rights Commission - Proposed Statements

HRC members shared concerns from Somali community members who have experienced fear and discriminatory statements related to recent federal immigration enforcement actions. Courtney noted that other metro communities have issued statements in support of affected Somali and Karen residents. Member Wagner expressed support for issuing a statement of solidarity. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge suggested re-sharing the City's previously adopted pro-community resolution. Member Greenberg supported a statement paired with actionable steps, such as translating the pro-community resolution into Somali. Sandvik noted that partners are offering "know your rights" sessions, but cautioned that broad promotion could create safety concerns.

Member Parisian thanked the HRC and emphasized the importance of acknowledging community fear while maintaining consistency and equity across impacted groups. She suggested a single letter to congressional representatives affirming Robbinsdale's expectation that federal authorities uphold the rights of Somali, Karen, Latino, and other marginalized communities. Mayor Sutton questioned whether a letter would be more effective than in-person engagement. Ralston-Aoki noted safety concerns with public gatherings. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge agreed that residents may not attend public meetings and supported a letter, while asking whether Council members preferred individual or collective statements.

Council discussed options including re-sharing the pro-community resolution, issuing a public statement similar to neighboring cities, and sending a letter to congressional representatives. Mayor Sutton expressed concern about engaging in federal policy debates but emphasized the importance of ensuring that residents feel safe and welcome. Additional examples from other cities were discussed, including statements from Golden Valley, Minneapolis, and Edina. Sandvik clarified that staff is not proposing a public gathering and reiterated the importance of residents feeling comfortable calling 911 if needed.

Member Wagner expressed trust in staff to draft letter language for Council review. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge asked if Council supported staff preparing both a public statement and a congressional letter. Council reached consensus to direct staff to draft a public pro-community statement and a letter to congressional representatives for Council review.

STAFF UPDATES

The Robbinsdale Fire Department held its annual meeting. Tom Robertus and Karsten Nelson were reinstated as Captains, and Cieran Murtagh was promoted.

Staff are working with Phillip Gray from JCPP on "Know Your Rights" educational materials.

Tim will be using end-of-year PTO under the use-it-or-lose-it policy, and will be in and out of the office starting in mid-December.

A. Council Assignments

As we enter the new year, Council assignments will be determined. Sandvik directed Council to start thinking about which roles they are interested in for 2026.

B. December 16th City Council Items - Employee Handbook Updates, COLA, and Insurance Contributions

Sandvik noted that several staff-related items, including updates to the employee handbook, will be included in the December 16 Council packet. Items are brought to Council when they may have financial implications. Items include:

- Beginning next year, long-term disability coverage will be offered, with plan options varying based on family structure. The City will also go out for bids to identify potential cost savings in insurance plans.
- Minnesota Paid Leave implementation begins January 1. A minimum 50/50 split with MetLife will be used due to their three-day processing turnaround.
- Two bargaining groups have approved their contracts, which will be included in the December 16 agenda, and one additional group is expected to finalize soon.
- A new PTO option will be available, with some staff potentially grandfathered into the current system.

Additional PTO days are offered to those who switch, providing greater flexibility in how staff use their time off.

C. Requested Information - Heat Pump considerations related to City Code updates

A resident recently inquired about heat pumps in relation to allowed decibel levels in City Code. Staff noted that the City's standards are consistent with neighboring communities and, in some cases, more generous. At this time, there are no recommendations for updating the code. Member Wagner asked whether the City would provide guidance if a resident's heat pump exceeds the decibel limit. Sandvik explained that the City cannot address a violation until it occurs, but so far this has not been a significant issue. Council and staff concluded that the City is willing to assist residents in finding solutions if problems arise.

COUNCIL UPDATES

School Board Public Hearing:

Member Greenberg reported on a recent School Board meeting and noted that next Monday night there will be a public hearing on proposed school closures. He emphasized that the hearing will have no time limit for the number of speakers, with each person allowed three minutes, and that those wishing to speak must fill out an online form beforehand. He stressed the importance of Robbinsdale leaders speaking up, noting that losing all community schools in the City would significantly harm its long-standing fabric. Member Greenberg encouraged Council to push back on the decision, potentially through zoning considerations, while noting there may be risks involved. Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge cautioned against any actions that could negatively impact students or disrupt the school district.

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge highlighted the importance of community attendance at the hearing as the most effective way to influence the School Board's decision. Member Greenberg expressed concern over how the district appears to be pitting schools and programs against one another, citing the IB program as an example. The main point for the City is that, if the decision proceeds, Robbinsdale would have no community schools remaining, which is unique among area cities.

Council directed staff to post on digital platforms to encourage community members to attend the public hearing, including a clear call to action.

Council Member Wagner's Departure:


Member Wagner shared that next week will be his last City Council meeting. He explained that he is engaged to a Minneapolis City Council member, and his future in Robbinsdale has changed, making it appropriate for someone more rooted in the City to serve. Council members congratulated Member Wagner and praised his thoughtfulness and curiosity during his tenure. Sandvik outlined next steps, noting that the Council will approve his resignation next week and appoint a new Council member in 2026 through an application process, reflecting recent changes to the procedure.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Blackledge adjourned the meeting at 11:23 PM.

Signed by:

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Rachel Leen, Communications Coordinator

Signed by:

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Raymond Blackledge, Mayor Pro Tem