

**WORKSHOP MEETING  
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE  
CITY OF VADNAIS HEIGHTS  
AUGUST 20, 2019**

The workshop meeting of the Council of the City of Vadnais Heights was held on the above date and called to order by Mayor Gunderson at 5:35 p.m.

The following members were present: Mayor Heidi Gunderson, Council Members: Craig Johnson, Patricia Youker, Greg Urban and Bob Morse. The following member was absent: None.

Also present were: City Administrator Kevin Watson, Assistant City Administrator Tim Sandvik, Planning/Community Development Director Nolan Wall, Public Works Director Jesse Farrell, Finance Director Bob Sundberg, Fire Chief Ed Leier, and Deputy City Clerk Peggy Aho.

Others present were: Susan Vento, Metropolitan Council

**1. Update from Metropolitan Council's District Rep. Susan Vento**

Susan Vento, Metropolitan Council Member, gave an overview of what she has been working on over the year. She said that she strives to try and help build bridges, and partnerships. She noted that the Vadnais Heights Comp Plan is on track for approval by the Metropolitan Council in October.

**2. Discussion on the Draft 2020 Budget**

Mayor Gunderson noted that the Council does not need to make any decisions at this meeting.

Finance Director Sundberg reviewed the 2020 Levy Analysis spreadsheet that shows the 2019 levy and a breakdown of an inflated analysis. He noted that the spreadsheet includes the levy components of the general fund, the tax rate, and possible CIP projects. The Council reviewed the Cost Summary for the General Fund (revenues and expenditures), and the individual funds.

The meeting adjourned at 6:48 p.m.

Mayor Gunderson called the meeting back to order at 7:25 p.m.

Communications Specialist - \$80,000

City Administrator Watson reviewed the request to hire a full-time communications specialist. Watson noted that some of the money the City will receive from Comcast can be used to fund this position. Assistant City Administrator Sandvik spoke about the City being more engaged with local partners and being more proactive. He said that this item is before the Council to see if the Council has any interest in pursuing hiring a communications specialist. He said if the Council is interested, staff can come back with a job description and list of duties. Mayor Gunderson said that it is not whether or not we do it but at what level do we do it and that communication with residents is important.

Council Member Morse asked how many years will the City get the projected \$50,000 from Comcast. Watson responded that it is a 10 year agreement but if Comcast's revenue goes down the amount the City received would also.

Council Member Urban said that he does not support hiring a full-time communications person and that he doesn't believe it's necessary. He said he thinks the City could have a contract person work 8 hours a week to get the City's message out.

Gunderson said that marketing the City is important. Urban said that perhaps Century College would have a class that might want to do the communications work. Watson noted that he would be looking for an individual that can be the City's voice, come to meetings, and communicate with residents and seniors and also be available at all hours of the day.

Morse said his priority is funding the CIP. He said that it comes down to return on investment (ROI). Residents would want to see something tangible. He said that he would need to be convinced that there is a ROI.

Council Member Youker said that she would like the City to explore hiring a communications specialist because we need to communicate our messages properly to the community. Gunderson agreed. She said that she also believes the Council's priorities are streets and stuff, but she thinks the City should do something with communication. She said that she believes it bears more discussion.

Watson said that the internet has created an open door and if we aren't answering the door people get frustrated and go somewhere else. The City needs someone to be available 12 to 15 hours a day. It would be an exempt position and be active during all events.

Morse said that a communications person could touch base with new residents, perhaps set up some type of program. He said he thinks the work could be done for less than \$80,000. He said if the City could get the work done for less, he would be in favor of it. Council Member Johnson said that he thinks the City should pursue a contract employee.

Watson said he will look at a contractor or a part-time, half-time person and run the numbers. Gunderson said that she would also like to know what the different job titles encompass in the chart that Sandvik provided. Sandvik said that he will send a list of job titles along with work scopes to the Council.

Gunderson said that she is open to getting additional information.

#### Pick-up Truck – Chief's Vehicle

Fire Chief Leier reviewed the proposed changes and CIP purchases for the Fire Department. He noted that he has reduced costs in a few areas, but things that are

changing and there is a vehicle that needs to be replaced. Leier laid out two options for purchasing a new vehicle: Option 1 – replace the 2002 Ford Pick-up truck with a new vehicle; or Option 2 – purchase an off-road/trail rescue vehicle. He noted that he is allocating \$50,000 for this purchase. He said that a new chief will probably make the final decision.

Leier noted that in 2017 the Council adopted a 3-year plan to replace portable radios and allocated \$50,000 for each year. This is year 3.

Leier stated that 81% of the Fire Department budget is for employee costs. He said that they are falling behind on their work. He is recommending that they hire one additional full-time employee. Leier noted that there are gaps in coverage during shift changes that need to be covered. Council Member Urban asked if there is any consideration to paying some of the current employee's overtime to cover any gaps. Council Member Johnson said that he supports getting an additional full-time firefighter. Mayor Gunderson said that she is continually impressed with the work that the Fire Department does. Council Members Morse and Youker also said that they are in favor of hiring an additional person.

City Administrator Watson noted that Peggy will contact Council Members about setting a separate meeting date for additional budget discussion.

The Workshop adjourned at 8:45 p.m.