

**WORKSHOP MEETING
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
CITY OF VADNAIS HEIGHTS
JUNE 16, 2020**

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 5:16 p.m.

The following members were present: Mayor Heidi Gunderson, Council Members: Greg Urban, Patricia Youker 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, Finance Director Bob Sundberg, Public Works Director Jesse Farrell, City Attorney Erik Hartmann, and Deputy City Clerk Peggy Aho.

1. Open Meeting

Mayor Gunderson opened the meeting at 5:16 p.m. Gunderson closed the meeting to the public at 5:17 p.m.

2. Closed Session pursuant to Minn. Statutes Section 13D.05, Subd. 3(c)(3) to discuss the sale of the City's Property located at 843 East County Road F

Mayor Gunderson opened the closed session at 5:18 p.m. pursuant to Minn. Statutes Section 13D.05, Subd. 3(c)(3) to discuss the sale of the City's property located at 843 East County Road F.

3. Open Meeting

Mayor Gunderson reopened the Regular Workshop at 5:44 p.m.

4. Inclusivity Efforts

Assistant City Administrator Sandvik introduced the topic intended for Council led discussion. He noted that Mayor Gunderson had asked staff to look into what opportunities the City might have to increase inclusivity efforts within the City. He said that this item is brought before the Council at a Workshop for discussion.

He said that the first question to consider is 'in what capacity should this ongoing effort be performed and what would the make-up of the committee be?' He believes resident participation will be required to be successful; however, the City can facilitate a Work Group, Task Force, Committee, a formal Commission, or another alternative to help move considerations forward. He said in addition to defining the City's role (make-up of the committee might include: elected officials, staff, residents, and/or businesses), and it will be helpful for the Council to identify potential Community Partners. For example, White Bear Schools (WBS) has recently hired a Director of Equity and Engagement. He said as the City continues to partner with WBS in a variety of capacities, this may be an opportunity to further both entities' missions. He said that local non-profits who already serve in this capacity might be willing to explore partnerships also.

Finally, Sandvik said that City staff have related experience working in other communities, including with some of our neighboring local government units.

Sandvik said that a second consideration for the Council would be ‘what are the desired goals of these efforts?’ And said that there are a variety of considerations, but defining, at least initial expectations, would be helpful moving efforts forward. He said that ultimately, this item will be a Council led discussion but staff will be prepared to provide feedback and additional considerations, if requested.

Mayor Gunderson noted that she had approached staff two weeks back about this. She thinks that much like the Kohler Road Task Force, we would try not to give any predetermined goals or structure to the committee. She noted that she has been looking at what surrounding communities are doing and said that some don’t have any initiative in place but some do. She said that she believes it is the Council’s job to discuss what the make-up of the committee structure should be and how that can be achieved. She thinks it would be a great idea to use representatives from school districts as well as student council reps and representatives from the business community and perhaps even a Fire Department or Sheriff’s Department liaison.

Council Member Morse noted that he is a member of the White Bear Lake Rotary and has been since 2006 as well as the School District 624 and many other organizations/foundations. He said that none of them have tackled this yet, but the Rotary Club is forming an equity committee. He said he should be able to bring some information forward from them to the Council. Gunderson said this is something that is timely and something we haven’t had before. She said she would like to reach out to the chairperson of the Shorewood group which has had something like this in place before. She said if this is something the Council can support, then the Council’s job would be to determine how to message this and how do we get people to apply.

Sandvik noted that it is up to the Council to determine how to make up the committee. He said that he can bring back examples on how committees have been formed in other communities and within the City, but for an effort like this to be successful, it requires Council buy in. He noted that staff are interested in pursuing opportunities to learn more about inclusivity committees.

Council Member Urban asked if we will be able to reach out this year to this committee to see what sort of items would be coming out of it. Gunderson noted that inclusivity is important to her and that she thinks the committee would identify the needs in the City and tailor it to make it work for the City.

Urban asked if people reached out with specific ideas to the Mayor. Gunderson said not specifically, she had several residents reach out to her and they said it would be important for the City to do something like this. She doesn’t think it will cost much, mostly staff time. Watson said it would depend on the directives or the outcomes on what the commission decides. He thinks the Sheriff’s office would be a welcomed participant. He thinks it needs to include organizations within the community.

Mark Heider, 3988 Woodview Drive, asked why this isn’t before the City Council for action at an open session to have the citizen’s help deciding what to do. He asked when it will be brought

before the Council. He said it is important to the residents. He also noted that he is disappointed in the message that was sent to the Governor in May and raised an issue with how Council Member Urban added the Resolution – Open Minnesota, to the meeting agenda and there was no earlier notice about it.

Lucie Passus, 3760 Edgerton Street, noted that she saw Inclusivity Efforts as a topic on the Workshop agenda and came to the meeting to address the Council and City Staff about how she believes the City could increase its inclusivity efforts. She said inclusivity means the quality or state of being inclusive; including everyone, especially allowing and accommodating people who have historically been excluded. Her recommendation to the Council and to City Staff is to: 1) Appoint a person by application (preferably non-white, female and or someone from the millennial generation) to fill former Council Member Johnson's seat. 2) Engage the League of Minnesota Cities to learn about race equity. 3) Declare racism as a public health issue. 4) Pledge to stand against racism. 5) Encourage Ramsey County and the Sheriff's Office to adopt the goals of #8cantwait – policies that can reduce the harm caused by law enforcement. 6) Allocate funds for a required annual racial justice and public policy workshop for all staff and elected officials.

Council Member Morse asked Passus to go into more detail about #8cantwait program. She said that the #8cantwait program is designed to help law enforcement make policy changes on things like use of force.

Gunderson said she appreciates Passus' presentation and said that a lot of her items will be discussed in the task force.

Heather Gustafson, 99 Southwood Dr, said that she thinks that Passus said it best but that since it was introduced and there was only silence on the Council with only one of the Council Member contributing at all, says quite a bit to the people that live in our City. She reached out to the Mayor about forming a human rights committee because it is long overdue. She said that the City needs to step up and that silence looks bad. Gustafson suggested that the Council take Passus' suggestion into consideration, put her on the task force, immediately, and make it a #1 priority.

Gunderson thanked all for their comments and said that there is a process for developing a new committee/task force and we do notice that, and there will be a process to follow. She asked if there is Council buy in on moving forward. Morse said he would agree with it. Urban said it makes sense to see what other cities (preferably ones the same size as Vadnais Heights) are doing so we can get a concept about what this would look like and a good example won't be another city. Council Member Youker said she agrees with Urban and agrees that we need a framework and that we should not just jump into it. She suggested seeing what the neighbors want and what we will do with it.

Gunderson noted that before this is up for approval and before we solicit people to be part of a committee, we need to look at what others are doing and she can talk to people that are chairpersons and see what it working. Urban agreed that we need a framework and that rather than having staff spend a tremendous amount of time on it, it makes sense to see what others are

doing. He said it could take some time to build this out but using what other cities have done would save time. Gunderson said we can put out feelers in the community about who might be interested in being on the committee and then the Council can think about starting the process in the interim.

Urban said that he thinks the direction of the Council should be to direct staff to see what other similar sized cities are doing and put together a framework for consideration at the next Council meeting, and that this should include a template of who would be on it and how we would take those applications. Gunderson said it won't be very difficult to create, and that some committees have between 7 and 9 members and some more, but the Council would need to define what the group is. Urban asked if the City would start taking applications before we know what the framework is.

Sandvik noted that staff have already completed a number of the tasks Council Member Urban is talking about and said that the next step would be to have staff complete a study on what other cities are doing. Then the City could begin putting out communication requesting information on what the community would like to see and whether they might be interested in serving on the committee. Staff is prepared to have a framework for consideration by the Council at the next Council meeting. Gunderson said we can begin promoting it and asking people that would be interested. Sandvik said they would get it out any way they can.

Heider again addressed the Council and said that any of them could put this item on tonight's Council meeting agenda and that this is a hot issue right now and he would recommend that this should be on a special council meeting and make sure that people know about it.

Gunderson said that it will be on the next Council meeting agenda. City Administrator Watson said it can go before the Council at a Workshop for the Council to define the committee and the makeup of it and then the Council would approve via a resolution at a Council meeting. He said in the interim, the City can solicit those that would be interested in being part of the committee but we can't formally do anything until the committee has been formalized.

Gustafson asked who would choose who is on the committee. Gunderson said that in the past we have looked at letters of interest and then depending on the feedback/numbers, those that apply would be on the committee unless there is a lot of interest then the Council would need to pick.

5. 2020/2021 Budget

Finance Director Sundberg reviewed his memo and reviewed the projected revenue shortfalls. Staff are predicting roughly \$600,000 shortfall in budgeted revenues due to the pandemic. There are three things that can be done to cover the projected shortfall and those are increasing revenues, decreasing spending or utilize fund balance and staff are recommending a combination of all three. Sundberg reviewed expenditure savings that are being proposed and the projected fund balance. He said this is preliminary.

Urban said that right now the City is about \$600,000 in the hole. Sundberg replied that the shortfall of \$600,000 is in the General Fund. Sundberg replied that the City could save about \$175,000 by not doing the rest of the CIP items planned for 2020. The Council can act to move

the monies from the CIP fund to the General Fund via a resolution. Urban asked if we are considering backing off of CIP items in 2020. Sundberg said that Farrell talked about moving some items from 2021 to 2022. Watson reviewed the proposed cuts and realized savings and said that it would have to be Council decision if it were to hold off on some and move funds between accounts.

Council Member Morse asked as far as the refinancing of the Commons was that built into Sundberg's modal. Sundberg said that that is not built into this but it will come into play when the Council sets the levy for next year. It doesn't impact the General Fund or the CIP fund.

Watson noted that as far as the list, his plan is to not finish out the CIP budget this year and wait and see what happens with revenues. He asked if the Council is okay postponing the Koehler Road survey and the hiring of the communications specialist expenditures another year? He said that would be his recommendation.

Urban asked if the repair on the trackless machine will be another \$20,000 repair. Public Works Director/City Engineer Farrell said that they don't know and that they do know there will be increased maintenance and repair costs. Urban asked if based on hours and life span is there reason to believe that we have another year on this machine. Farrell responded that this a very valid concern. He noted that last year the machine broke down twice and the repairs were very expensive. He said that they hope that the Tool Kat will improve the level of service they are able to produce. He noted that he supports leaving the purchase of the trackless machine until next year.

Council Member Youker asked Farrell if he has any idea what the trackless machine would cost next year. Farrell replied that he doesn't know, and that the state contract runs out and it will presumably be more and that they will have to see when the state contract comes out.

6. Council Vacancy

City Administrator Watson noted that the Council had this discussion at the last meeting and it is an opportunity for the Council to discuss next steps. He laid out three options for the Council to consider: appoint an individual after an application and interview process and set up an interview panel with the Council, appoint an individual without an application process, or leave the position vacant and wait until the general election and let the voters decide the next Council Member. Mayor Gunderson said she has had the advantage of being part of filling seats twice since she has been on the Council. She said it would be her suggestion to leave the seat vacant until the elections. She said that before the City could adequately notice it, and get interviews completed, it would be sometime in August before they could get the seat filled and the new member would only have 6 meetings. She thinks they should leave it up to the voters. Council Member Urban said that he agrees, he said he has received lots of calls from people with three different directions he and thinks we should have the top vote getter going immediately after election. Council Member Youker also agreed.

Council Member Morse said that he has talked to a number of residents to see what they thought and the majority of what he heard is that they want the person to be voted in by the community.

Lucy Passus asked staff how long it would take to advertise the position and to fill it. Watson replied that it would depend on getting a group together, getting enough applicants and do interviews. Passus said she is amazed at the hesitating and the chance to make positive changes.

Heather Gustafson said she doesn't see why action on this can't be pushed through tonight as quick as the resolution in May so there is no reason why this can't be done fast.

Gunderson said that there is a process for developing a task force and it will come back before the Council. Watson replied yes.

Mayor Gunderson adjourned the Workshop at 7:00 p.m. to go into the full Council meeting and said that they will continue the Workshop after the Council meeting.

Mayor Gunderson reopened the Workshop at 8:25 p.m.

7. Public Comment Accommodations at City Council during COVID

City Administrator Watson noted that this is a continuation of conversation held at the last meeting. He has been exploring what other cities are doing and has discovered that there is no perfect answer. The Council discussed various options including zoom.

Mayor Gunderson said that a hybrid approach seems bulky and that her goal is to be respectful about people that cannot come out due to COVID. Gunderson said perhaps we should look at it on an individual case basis and work with people individually.

Watson said that he will continue to look at what others are using to see if there is something that would work with the City's system. Watson suggested adding language to the agendas that says something about contacting the City Clerk if they wish to attend a meeting to address the Council.

Council Member Morse made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Youker. Meeting adjourned.