

**WORKSHOP MEETING
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
CITY OF VADNAIS HEIGHTS
AUGUST 17, 2021**

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 5:30 p.m.

The following members were present: Mayor Gunderson, and Council Members Greg Urban, Patricia Youker, Steve Rogers and Erik Goebel. The following member was absent: None.

Also present were: City Administrator, Kevin Watson; Assistant City Administrator, Tim Sandvik; Planning/Community Development Director, Nolan Wall; City Engineer/Public Works Director, Jesse Farrell; Fire Chief Chris Hearden; and Deputy Clerk, Peggy Aho.

Mayor Gunderson opened the meeting at 5:30 p.m. The Council went into a Closed Session at 5:30 p.m.

Gunderson reopened the Workshop meeting at 6:24 p.m.

1. Parks, Rec and Trails Commission Chair

Assistant City Administrator Sandvik noted that they would like to annually have the Parks, Rec and Trails Commission Chair attend a workshop.

Kari Hauck, Parks, Rec and Trails Commission Chair, came before the Council to give an update on the Commission's activities and recommendation to the Council.

Hauck thanked Sandvik and Katie Everett for their support and also thanked Council Member Rogers for attending the Parks Commission meetings.

Hauck said that parks are facing the devastation of EAB, and hoping that the Council spends more attention on the removal and emphasize replacing the trees. She also said that the Commission would like the Council to consider are some best landscaping practices, they would like to see long term in the parks such as pollinator and rain gardens in our parks.

Sandvik said that there are some great partnership opportunities for strategic planning for opportunities. He said it would be helpful to know if the Council supports the ideas.

Gunderson said that these are great suggestions. She said that she thinks there are some things that could fit in nicely especially with grants. She asked what the number one initiative the Commission would want included in next year's budget. Hauck responded that the storm water project at Westfield Park would be the number one and that the pollinator gardens in Berwood Park would be a close second.

Council Member Rogers said there are three different projects, but it may be more advantageous to do all three at one time.

Council Member Urban said that there is a segment of the population that might look at the pollinator gardens as an un-manicured lawn and not be in favor of it. He asked how they would plan to get over that. Hauck said that gets back to signage, the educational element, so that people can learn about them and understand the benefit to the community.

Urban asked if they are planning for an education factor in the budgets. Sandvik responded yes that would be included.

Urban also asked about the pollinator gardens and said that it takes several years of establishment by people that are very knowledgeable about the gardens to get the wanted plants established. He asked if the cost and follow through maintenance cost in this so that we get what we are looking for. Gunderson said that they talk about that in the packet and that they would be covered by grants. Council Member Rogers said that the Commission talked about it at the meetings and said that they will be using people that are experts in that area.

Council Member Youker said that the initial funding by the City is \$24,000 to \$29,000 and that is before a grant. Sandvik said yes, and it would be about \$10,000 per garden. Youker said then we are looking at 50% for the City once the grants come in. Sandvik replied yes perhaps a little more. Youker asked what is on-going expense to maintain. Sandvik noted that the City has budgeted \$1,000 per year and they will also align volunteers. Youker asked if we get a grant and cost sharing for all 3 of the projects, is there a chance that we wouldn't see 20%. City Engineer Farrell said that for Bridgewood Park we were looking for grant funds of about 90% and that funds would come from the County and or the State, so as VLAWMO gets more robust with their staffing and planning, they are able to capture more of the revenue that everyone is paying as part of their taxes.

Youker said that she thinks the pollinator garden is a great idea.

Hauck said that she would also like to ask the City to dedicate more attention to the trails in the City and the trail system. She said they would like an opportunity for Council to support inventory of current trails so that we can make decisions on long-term planning and look for opportunities for the Council to support completing an investment of our existing trails and long term planning to maintain what we already have.

Farrell noted that at this time the City is having the trails and parking lots rated.

2. Public Works Tech Position

City Engineer/Public Works Director Farrell said that before the Council is a brief memo and draft job description for a senior engineer tech. He said that an engineer technician would support a lot of the things that the Parks Commissioner brought up. Farrell said that having a person on board, would help to cut back on dependence of the city on S.E.H. He added that this person would be prudent and we could accommodate the cost of this position with the use of utility fees or through the levy.

Mayor Gunderson said that this position was not included in our initial budget package and asked what the cost would be. Farrell said that it's probably about \$100,000 after savings from S.E.H savings.

Council Member Urban asked if we would still have S.E.H. doing some work, Farrell responded yes, but more reliance rather than dependency.

Council Member Youker asked if the \$100,000 includes vacation, insurance, etc. Farrell said that \$100,000 is a rough number.

Urban said that he assumes this will be on a future workshop for discussion so that the Council can ask more questions. Gunderson replied, absolutely.

City Administrator Watson noted that Farrell is just one person managing about 2/3rds of the City's operations.

The meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Approved