

**WORKSHOP MEETING  
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE  
CITY OF VADNAIS HEIGHTS  
SEPTEMBER 21, 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; Planning/Community Development Director, Nolan Wall; Assistant City Administrator, Tim Sandvik; City Engineer/Public Works Director, Jesse Farrell; Fire Chief Chris Hearnden; and Deputy Clerk, Peggy Aho.

**1. Fire Relief Association Presentation**

Mike Bigelbach, President of the Vadnais Heights Fire Relief Association, and Doug Gerlach, Secretary of the Relief Association gave a presentation to the Council that: 1) gave the history of the Association; 2) how the fund works; 3) how the funds get distributed; 4) their proposed rate increase for 20225) and any potential liabilities to the fund.

Council Member Youker said that she supports this increase. Fire Chief Hearnden said that the idea was to discuss the proposed increase at this Workshop, and then if the Council is okay with it, they would come to a future Council meeting for approval in October.

**2. Shared Planner Position**

Planning/Community Development Director Wall said that discussion on this position is continued from the last Council Workshop. He noted that the Township has indicated that they would be flexible with when or how the shared position would be funded. Wall reviewed a list of tasks that the person might be tasked with.

Mayor Gunderson asked why the City should take on the overhead costs of having an additional staff person. Wall said the overhead costs for having the person on site could be part of the negotiations with the Township. Watson said the City would realize more benefit by having the person on site than if they located off site. He said that someone will need to supervise that person, and he thinks Wall would be the best for that.

Council Member Urban talked about past history of the city planner position and said that he thinks we should start using consultants to gauge what the City's level of need is for additional planning staff. He said the City is already adding 3 new positions and now another one, and said he is not in favor of having a shared position. Council Member Youker asked what the advantage of a consultant versus having a person on staff is. Wall responded that consultant's hourly rates would be higher and the City would have less control. City Administrator Watson said that using a consultant for things such as sign permits or accessory building permits and then passing through the cost to the residents, is not favorable. Watson said that this person would free up Wall's time to allow him time

to start other initiatives such as housing redevelopment in the City.

Council Member Rogers said the City has been given a gift and it should take advantage of it. Rogers said that the City is service organization, and residents expect services fast. Rogers asked Wall to develop a plan. He said that the City's goal should be to right size staff.

Council Member Youker asked how much time Wall spends on the list of tasks for this planning staff person. Wall said it depends on the time of year and what is going on but it seems like he only has enough time to react. Council Member Goebel asked if it would be fair to say that Wall doesn't have enough time to provide the level of service the City would like to provide. Goebel said that he thinks having this shared position could move the City towards being a proactive innovative community.

Gunderson said that this ask is different than Public Works coming forward with a request for a new piece of equipment. She asked Wall how much of his time would be freed up if the City were to hire this shared person and how does he see additional planning staff benefiting the taxpayers of the City. Wall said he could be proactive with programs such as a revolving loan program, a set aside programs to fund interior improvements for things such as manufacturing equipment. He said right now his department only has time to react. He said that City doesn't utilize it's our EDA program. He said they could also implement and monitor the age and condition of the housing stock in the City.

Mayor Gunderson said she doesn't want to go over the levy percentage that they talked about at the last Workshop, the 13.13% to cover the costs of this position. Urban said perhaps they could do some trading with other items. Urban asked if this position is needed to be filled, could the City look at raising its development fees to cover the cost of the additional person. Urban said he too wouldn't support a higher tax levy.

Council Member Rogers said that they spent hours on the Work Plan and Goals and one of the items is to right size the staffing level. Gunderson said we should always pay attention to the Work Plan and Goals but she is not okay with raising the tax levy percentage. Council Member Youker said she is also not comfortable with increasing the levy amount. After discussion, the Council decided to stick with the plan for the 13.13 % tax levy and find a creative solution for funding this position.

**2. Purchase of a Street Sweeper**

Public Works Director Farrell briefly reviewed staff's request for authorization to purchase an Elgin Street Sweeper, which is included in the 2022 Capital Improvement Plan budget. The Council okayed the purchase and will act on it on the Consent Agenda at tonight's Council meeting.

**3. Joint Powers Agreement with VLAWMO for Branch Ditch 5**

Public Works Director Farrell noted that the Joint Powers Agreement with VLAWMO for Branch Ditch 5 is on the Consent Agenda this evening. The Council had no questions about this item.

**Motion by Council Member Youker to adjourn at 6:57 pm.**