

**WORKSHOP MEETING  
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE  
CITY OF VADNAIS HEIGHTS  
MARCH 17, 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 5:33 p.m.

The following members were present: Mayor Heidi Gunderson, Council Members: Craig Johnson, 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, Public Works Director Jesse Farrell, Finance Director Bob Sundberg, Interim Fire Chief Chris Hearden, City Attorney Erich Hartmann, and Deputy City Clerk Peggy Aho.

No others were present.

**1. Discussion on COVID-19/Corona Virus**

City Administrator Watson noted that it has been a busy week and stated that the Mayor proclaimed an emergency earlier today and now the next steps can be taken by the Council to ratify the Mayor's declaration and declare an emergency.

Watson said that City Hall and all public facilities have been closed and all public events (Commons, Egg Hunt, yoga, open gym, Commission meetings, etc.) have been cancelled. City staff are still coming into work and there are a couple people that are staying home after some recent travel. Some staff have been moved around in City Hall to accommodate some concerned individuals. Staff are doing a lot of cleaning.

Watson said that staff are anticipating only having City Council, Planning Commission and VLAWMO Board meetings. Watson noted that they are exploring splitting shifts especially in the Public Works department. Assistant City Administrator Sandvik noted that the Commons is not in full blown wedding season but there were some upcoming fundraisers and in house events and we have protections for the City, but think we need to be as flexible as we can and issue refunds as needed. Perhaps the Emergency Management Committee can be the one to decide whether refunds are issued. All events have been cancelled through April.

Watson next talked about fire operations. Interim Fire Chief Chris Hearden talked about the directive that came from Allina's medical director and the criteria that they are requiring if they come upon a person that shows signs of the virus. Hearden said that the Department does have some of the personal protective equipment but not a lot. They may stage in the area of a call. They will be trying to limit their exposure to people infected with the virus. He said that Ramsey County has altered their response and will not be sending deputies unless a situation becomes a hostile situation.

Council Member Johnson asked how they are handling incidents if they don't know whether the victim is ill. Hearden said that typically they would respond with three people, but now may only

send in one person to evaluate the situation. Mayor Gunderson said that Hearden has been doing an outstanding job and she appreciates it.

Watson asked if the Council should talk about quality of life calls. Hearden said that one type of call is a lift assist and right now Allina doesn't go to a lift assist and also currently Sheriff Deputies don't, it will only be Vadnais Heights Fire. He said they are working on controlling these types of calls especially with facilities that should be providing that assistance. Hearden asked if this is a type of service we want to continue to provide to our residents. Johnson said if not Fire, who? Hearden replied that that is the question and right now it's just Fire. Watson said that that is a question for the Council, it's a level of service, we have an issue with our fire fighters, and we need Fire to respond to real emergencies and if they are in situations that they don't feel safe doing, is it the City's responsibility to reduce those risks. Council Member Urban asked how often we are getting lift assist calls. Hearden responded one or two a week. Urban asked how many of those are at facilities that are supposed to offer the assistance. Hearden replied about half. Urban said that is unacceptable and we should begin charging for those calls. Watson said this comes down to how the City might be able to mitigate risk to its fire department staff versus a service level thing. If we can eliminate some of the less urgent calls from our call response is that a way to maintain the Fire Department?

Johnson asked if the Mayor could as part of the declaration of emergency say that the facilities need to take care of their residents. Watson said that the Council would have to tell dispatch that we are either going on those types of calls or not.

Council discussed the issue of what other cities do for these types of calls.

Harden said they have reached out to one that was calling frequently and most times if there is a frequent faller they talk to the family members about the need for other arrangements and finding more care for that person. City Attorney Hartmann said that the public backlash if the City didn't show up could be huge. He said he too is curious what other cities are doing. Urban said what would happen if the City put a fee on non-emergency calls beginning now. Gunderson said she is not comfortable with that.

Gunderson said that she wants to keep the City staff safe. She said that the policy needs to be the same whether the falls happen in a group home or a single family home but the question is what do we do right now during this time because of COVID-19. Urban said that he thinks the best approach would be to set a fee structure for continued use to deter non-emergencies. Watson said that staff should do additional research and bring it back before the Emergency Management Committee. Urban said that a notice could go out now to properties overusing our services that there would be no charge for the first lift assist but any after that will have a cost. Watson said that staff need direction right now whether the City is interested in trying to mitigate this and tell folks that we are not going to assist or continue going on those calls and tell them that beginning a certain date we will not be doing these types of calls any longer. The more calls that we reduce potential conflicts with the fire fighters being exposed to people that have the virus or the elderly who are susceptible to it. Watson said staff can look at the calls we've had and send them letters and try to encourage them to find other means of assistance.

Council Member Morse suggested checking to see what others are doing. Urban asked if it makes sense to send out a letter now to these places and say that given the times we are concerned about our personnel infecting them or them infecting our staff and that among other concerns we believe that lift assist should be provided by the businesses that are providing housing or they should be making other arrangements to care for their people.

Gunderson said that perhaps during this state of emergency the City should send out a letter that the facilities should fix the problem and if it's a resident of the City perhaps they need to move into assisted living options. Harden said that he can look at gathering in the information for last six months about whom they have provided lift assist.

Watson noted that he is asking the Council to approve the designation of an Emergency Management Team consisting of Watson, Mayor Gunderson, Council Member Johnson, Assistant City Administrator Sandvik, and Interim Fire Chief Harden and when needed other department heads. He said that in addition to meeting in person, the Team will also be able to have meetings over the telephone and be able to make decisions quickly. Gunderson said that things are changing rapidly and the City needs to be able to make decisions quickly.

All Council Members said that are okay with setting up and designating members of the Emergency Management Team.

## **2. Emergency Employee PTO Plan**

City Administrator Watson then reviewed a proposed amendment to the City's paid-time off compensation schedule that would give staff 80 hours of PTO on an 80/20 split. He said that the number one goal is to keep staff healthy and safe. This could be used if people are sick or if they need to self-quarantine because they have been exposed or if they need to take care of a family member. This is prorated based on an employee's standard hours. Council Member Urban asked if staff would be expected to work from home. Watson replied yes. Urban said that he thinks this is blown out of proportion but there will be a new normal and if you have a cold you will probably be encouraged not to come into work. He said that the City needs to look at how people can work efficiently remotely. Watson said that their plan is to have people continue to operate if they are required to stay at home.

Watson noted that there is a public hearing scheduled for next week for the At Home Project. Planning/Community Development Director Wall reviewed information about the process he is proposing. He noted that he has reached out to the City's Attorney's office about how a meeting could happen at this time. He suggested that the first part of the Planning Commission meeting will include a presentation by himself and the applicant on the At Home Project and then the Public Hearing will be held on a future meeting in April. He noted that the Planning Committee meeting will be broadcasted. They will suggest that people provide feedback prior to the continued public hearing which will be an on-line open forum. The Council discussed the proposed two-step process or whether they should just extend the application period. Urban said that he would like to keep the process on track. Mayor Gunderson said she would also not want to extend it. The Council decided to move forward with the process as is and allow people to make comments.

Wall said they will move forward with the first meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March which will be closed, and that he will send out letters to surrounding residents and post on the information on the City's web page detailing the process moving forward. No action will be taken, only process will be a presentation, the applicant and then any Planning Commissioners questions and then adjourned for seven days to allow time to create a safe area for the public to address the Commission and people could also submit an email.

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kevin Watson, City Administrator

Approved