

**WORKSHOP MEETING
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
CITY OF VADNAIS HEIGHTS
JULY 21, 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: 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 Caroline Beckman, and Deputy City Clerk Peggy Aho.

Others present: Bonnie Schwieger, Abdo, Eick and Meyers, LLP.

1. Audit Presentation

Bonnie Schwieger, Abdo, Eick and Meyers, LLP, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the results of the Audit that was prepared for the City by Abdo. She noted that during their review they look at City processes and how they are working. She noted no issues and stated their firm has issued an unmodified opinion as to the accuracy of the city's financial statements. As in past years, Abdo believes there is one area of risk in the City and that is the preparation of financial statements. She said that this is a common risk for smaller cities with limited staff. Although the audit firm prepares the financial statements, city staff is responsible for thoroughly reviewing the statements and approving them. She noted that it is the policy of the City is to have 35 to 60% of the coming year's General Fund balance on hand to cover the upcoming year's costs. She said that last year, the City had 53.9 which is within the City's policy limits. She then reviewed the budget compared to actuals and noted that overall revenues were above the budgeted amount and expenditures were slightly under budget. She said that overall, the general fund balance increased by about \$173,000.

Schwieger presented multiple statistical tables showing that the city has lower taxes and spends less than peer group cities. She said that Abdo can provide more detail to the Council regarding comparisons to other cities of similar size as Vadnais Heights.

City Administrator Watson asked what they are seeing metro-wide as it relates to the pandemic. Schweiger replied that they are seeing more interest in internal controls, and how to make sure a city has a good understanding on whether controls were well documented while working remotely, etc.

The Council discussed what it can use coronavirus relief funds for? Schwieger said that at this time it is a grey area and said that if the City needs any assistance regarding this, Abdo can discuss it with them further.

Mayor Gunderson thanked Schweiger for her presentation.

2. Community Engagement Committee

Assistant City Administrator Sandvik introduced the Community Engagement Committee item which was first discussed by the Council at its last meeting and is on this agenda for continued discussion and feedback from the Council. He noted that Mayor Gunderson had asked staff to look into what opportunities the City might have to increase inclusivity efforts. He noted that the first question for the Council to consider is what capacity should this ongoing effort be performed? He said that resident participation will be required for it 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 that in addition to defining the City's role, it would be helpful for the Council to identify potential community partners in addition to residents. Sandvik noted that the Council should also consider what the desired goal of these efforts should be.

Mayor Gunderson said that she has done a lot of research on this subject and that when the Council looks at the goals it set in place in 2019 for communication, this was something she thought the City should work on. She said that this is an opportunity for the City to look at how it is currently communicating with its residents and how communication efforts might be improved. She said that she believes this is important, but that it is not a one size fits all. She said that she has spoken with number of communities and other organizations, about what they are doing. She said it is clear that it should be tailored to each community and, that to her, Step 1 is for the City to identify needs or gaps within its current communications.

Council Member Youker said she would like to partner with organizations such as the Northwest Youth and Family Services and Merrick because they might be able to offer good insights to our area.

Council Member Urban asked how the City is planning on structuring the Committee and will the Council have specific things for the Committee to look at. Gunderson said that she wants it to be productive and engage all residents.

Council Member Morse asked what issues, if any, the City has had with its communications. He said that the issues need to be identified/defined. He also said he doesn't want to add any additional regulations on the people that are already here, especially businesses, because there are already so many state and county regulations. Gunderson said that she agrees with what Morse said. Urban said that he would not be in favor of any new City regulations. Youker said that she also agrees that additional regulations should not be made.

City Administrator Watson said that we should begin with a City-wide discussion and perhaps we will find some of our blind spots, and find new ways to spread the message, and hopefully it will enlighten us on how to communicate to different groups within the City. He said that he anticipates this being a long conversation over many months and years.

Gunderson asked what Sandvik has been seeing on Polco. She asked if a date for an initial roll out could be stated. Sandvik said that he thinks we should wait until responses come back from

the City Newsletter that will go out to residents in mid-August. Morse asked if staff can reach out to other communities to see how they created their committees.

3. 2019-2020 Work Plan Goal Review

City Administrator Watson reviewed the 2019-2020 Work Plan goals set by the Council in the spring of 2019. He noted that many of the objectives on the list were accomplished, but the City has been challenged with unexpected generational hurdles such as record rainfall, global pandemic, and social unrest. He asked that the Council provide direction to staff on next steps. Mayor Gunderson noted that the Council set the Work Plan and Goals in 2019 and she thinks that the City should continue to work on them. Council Member Urban said that planning is never a bad idea, but the problem we have right now is it is a different world then it was a year ago when the Plan was adopted. He said that he thinks the City needs to look at doing the bare minimum because we have to commit to street improvements and drainage issues and that the City is not in a position to do anything extra for the next year or so. Watson noted that with the CARES Act, the City will be receiving close to a million dollars.

Gunderson said her question is are the goals still valid goals? Council Member Morse said its best if you be open minded on what could be accomplished, but he thinks the City still needs to go forward and that maybe the Goals need to be prioritized and some items moved to a “Plan B” list.

Watson said that storm sewer may be an item that needs to be added and perhaps that would trump other prioritizations. Morse said that the improvements to the City’s trails system would become a “B” thing for him.

Watson said that staff can work on these items and have things ready to go if the funds are there. Gunderson said that sewer should move to the top of the list. Watson said that staff can begin working on an amended Work Plan and bring it back to the Council at a future meeting for discussion.

4. Other staff items:

Assistant City Administrator Sandvik noted that before the Council at the Council meeting is a proposed Amended Agenda which includes considering approval for staff to submit a grant for playground equipment to GameTime. He said that the City currently has a lot of GameTime structures in town and that GameTime has opened up a grant process for \$50,000 matching grants. He said that the City did go through a process with the Parks Commission to get feedback/ideas from vendors to update the City’s park system. He said that if the City were to be successful in getting grant dollars, it may need to take another look at playground designs.

Council Member Youker asked if this is a match that would use funds from this year’s budget. Sandvik replied that it would be paid out of this year’s budget, and that the funds would come from Park Dedication fees, which can’t be used for other City expenditures. Council Member Morse said that people’s priorities have changed and a lot of people are at home and doing stuff outside, and that he would be in favor of pursuing a grant this year. Mayor Gunderson said that

she appreciates staff looking into grant opportunities. Staff were directed to submit a grant application.

5. Future Council Requests:

Council Member Urban said that he would like to discuss, with regards to the Rush Line Project, security efforts on their routes and how the route may create a conduit to areas experiencing more crime. He said that he is concerned about what the City is connecting to, and being connected to cities that are not taking crime seriously. He said that the City should consider withdrawing its support for the Rush Line Project.

Council Member Morse asked for additional information from the Sheriff's office. Watson said they can ask Ramsey County to come back and talk about security on the line. He said that he will explore with others about this and bring in some expertise to talk about it. Urban said he would be interested in hearing from the Sheriff's office about crime trends and how they can do their jobs. Mayor Gunderson said that the issue of safety is a high concern for the residents of the City.

Gunderson said she would like to get a budget workshop scheduled for a date in August, either tack it onto a upcoming Workshop or have a standalone meeting to discuss it. Council Member Morse said his preference would be to have a standalone meeting. Finance Director Sundberg said that he would be ready mid-August to discuss the 2021 Budget and said that any direction the Council can give on a 2021 levy amount would be helpful. Gunderson said that the Council should pick a date at the August 4th meeting.

There being no further information, the meeting adjourned at 6:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Watson, City Administrator