

**WORKSHOP MEETING  
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE  
CITY OF VADNAIS HEIGHTS  
MARCH 16, 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 Heidi Gunderson, 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; Public Works Director/City Engineer, Jesse Farrell; Fire Chief, Chris Hearnden; Deputy Clerk, Peggy Aho and Parks and Rec Supervisor, Katie Everett.

**1. Parks and Rec Update**

Katie Everett gave an update on the Parks and Recreation activities over the past year which included renting snowshoes (57 rentals), holding a 50K (67 registered), and three blood drives (126 units collected). She noted that a lot of what the City has offered is self-guided activities to be done either at home or in a park. There has been increased park use and at home activities for those choosing to stay home. Everett said that today the City began handing out at-home egg hunt bags, and most of them have gone on the first day.

Everett said that the Parks and Rec Department is beginning to plan for summer activities and noted that registration is now open for some spring sessions. She said that modifications have been put in place for the youth spring programs, and the City is currently hiring seasonal staff. She said that all dates are tentative and that they are also planning a spring scavenger hunt between March 22 and April 2.

Everett noted that the City has several park projects planned for 2021 including finalizing installation of the playground at Kohler Meadows, and installation of pickle ball courts at Bridgewood Park. She said that the City will be resurfacing the court at Bridgewood and removing the tennis equipment and adding pickle ball equipment. She said that they plan on holding pickle ball training sessions. Everett also noted that benches will be installed at several locations using donations the City recently received from the VH Lions Club. She said the City is also working on replacing park entrance signs once the weather warms up.

Everett said that City staff are researching new Civic Rec software and are hoping to have new software installed and running mid-summer 2021.

Mayor Gunderson complemented Ms. Everett on doing such a wonderful job, especially during the pandemic and said that many community members are so very grateful.

## **2. Green Step Cities**

Assistant Administrator Sandvik noted that Council Members Rogers and Goebel requested additional information on the Minnesota Green Step Cities program. Sandvik said that in 2020, when presented to the Council, the Council was not interested in moving forward with the Green Step Cities program at that time. Sandvik reviewed what the MN Green Step Cities program is. He said that there are five levels, or Steps to participate as a Green Step city and he reviewed the steps noting that Step One is the simplest as the City would achieve by passing an approved resolution. Sandvik reviewed the list of best practices and unique actions and identified which ones the City is currently doing completely or or partially, and highlighted some the City is not capable of doing.

He said it is staff's recommendation that two significant things would need to happen for the City to participate beyond Step 1. Sandvik said if the City is participating in the program, it is his opinion that a couple investments would have to be made by the City including formal direction to staff regarding priorities for these sustainable efforts and the City would have to add additional staff.

Mayor Gunderson noted that Council Member Rogers and she talked about the Green Step Cities program, and she also had a conversation about it with Council Member Goebel. Gunderson asked if there were any questions or comments. The Council discussed the initiative. Council Member Youker questioned who would be funding this and monitoring the City's participation and data - she found out Great Plains Institute and other organizations use information, and they report to regional indicator initiative among other organizations. She said there are many different programs that are not just local but it is national and in some cases international. She said that Great Plans Initiative is a lobbying organization. The Council discussed many points as well as how much staff time would be used to work on the initiative.

City Administrator Watson said that perhaps Phil Kern, the Goal Setting Session facilitator, could help the Council flush out the conversation of what goals around sustainability the City has, and perhaps there is a connection to Green Steps. Rogers said he will do some additional research and find out what the cost might be to implement this program.

## **3. Ramsey County Closest Unit Dispatch Mutual Aid Agreement**

Fire Chief Hearden talked about the Ramsey County Closest Unit Dispatch Mutual Aid Agreement program that is being utilized by many areas throughout the metro area. He said that with the GPS on the equipment, Ramsey County, can track fire apparatus locations and then dispatch the closest unit for major events, cardiac arrests, structure fires and water/ice emergencies. Hearden noted that every other Ramsey County cities utilize this program except for Vadnais Heights. Hearden says he thinks it would be a good idea for the City to participate. It would be a good resource for our residents and if we are able to help someone across our border, good for them.

Council Member Urban said the cost of public safety in general is a very large portion of the City's budget. He said, philosophically, with regards to the Fire Department, he thinks everyone would agree that fire should be a county provided service, but unfortunately that is not the way it is set up. Urban said his issue is Vadnais Heights has chosen to spend a lot of money on our safety equipment and other cities haven't, and he would hate to burden Vadnais Heights' citizens with the cost of that. He said the City shouldn't just give away the cost of providing a better service to our neighbors without them paying for it. Hearden agreed the call volumes aren't going down. Hearden noted that a majority of the cities that would be sharing in this agreement are also staffed fulltime.

Rogers said that this only comes into play if we were out and there is demand in the area? Hearden replied yes. Mayor Gunderson said as long as the City has the option of opting out of the Agreement or tweaking it if needed, she could support this but she would like to see some additional data on how it is working out. Council Member Youker asked if there would be some shared costs involved with this. Hearden said other than everyone is willing to come into each other's cities, any equipment used on scene will be replaced by the ambulance responding. Council Member Goebel said that he supports this. Hearden said that he could give monthly updates or generate a report when additional information is requested. Council Member Youker said she can support this.

Hearden said that he will make sure that the City attorney reviews the contract and then he will bring it to a future meeting for Council consideration at the next Council meeting.

#### **4. Auto-Aid Agreement with the City of Maplewood**

Fire Chief Hearden noted, in 2009, Ramsey County Fire Chief's got together and developed auto-aid agreements. He said for sections of our city, if we have a house fire, Little Canada, Lake Jo, etc. may be sent out for a house fire. Hearden noted that we have never had an auto-aid agreement with Maplewood, but now they are moving location of their station they will be in close proximity of us. These agreements are specific to structure buildings (commercial or residential) only.

Mayor Gunderson said that it makes sense to enter into an auto-aid agreement with Maplewood.

#### **5. Potential Civic Unrest**

City Administrator Watson noted that he received an email to Council with a letter from Ramsey County regarding potential civic unrest during the Chauvin trial. He said that he will work with the Ramsey County Sheriff's office to educate some of the local businesses on how prepare to protect their businesses. Council Member Urban agreed and said that he is not sure it's the City's job to protect individual businesses. He said that the Ramsey County Sheriff's office did a great job last time.

Watson noted that the City staff will start having dialogue with the businesses and make sure that they get a copy of the letter from the Sheriff's office.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:57 p.m.