



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, March 04, 2024
6:00 PM

Mayor
Amada Márquez Simula
Councilmembers
Connie Buesgens
Kt Jacobs
Rachel James
Justice Spriggs
Interim City Manager
Kevin Hansen

MINUTES

The following are the minutes for the Work Session Meeting of the City Council held at 6:00 pm on Monday, March 4, 2024, in the Shared Vision Room, City Hall, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula; Councilmember Buesgens; Councilmember Jacobs; Councilmember James, Councilmember Spriggs

Also Present: Lenny Austin, Chief of Police; Aaron Chirpich, Assistant City Manager / Community Development Director; Mitch Forney, Community Development Coordinator; Liam Genter, City Forester; Kevin Hansen, Interim City Manager; Scott Lepak, City Attorney; Will Rotter, Communications and Engagement Coordinator; Kelli Wick, HR Director

WORK SESSION ITEMS

- 1. Executive Session: Discussion of Labor Negotiation Strategy. Closed per Minn. Stat. 13D.03.**

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION: Move to recess to Closed Session pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.03, members of the public will not be able to attend the executive session portion of the meeting. For questions regarding this notice, please contact City Administration at 763.706.3610.

The City Council conducted a Closed Session to consider labor negotiation strategy.

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs to reconvene the meeting at 6:45 pm. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

- 2. Review Timeline for City Manager Search.**

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned that Councilmember Buesgens has joined the conversation as the Council president. The Council will need to set a date and time to discuss the finalist for the City Manager search. Final interviews will occur April 16-17 and a second interview around April 25, 2024. The Council will have reports on the finalist and

will be able to review and see video interviews so that each Councilmember can rate their choice of candidates.

Councilmember James suggested setting a date of April 1, 2024 during the work session to discuss the finalist for the City Manager role. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that there is a full agenda for the work session but staff could shift some items to the May work session.

The Council agreed that April 4, 2024 at 7:00 pm would work to meet and discuss the final candidates and April 17, 2024 and April 18, 2024 at 1:00 pm to conduct final interviews. The Council agreed to meet on April 25, 2024 at 1:00 pm to conduct second interviews.

3. Revisions to City Code Section 5A.410 regarding Conduct on Licensed Premises/Crime Free/Drug Free and Disorderly Use Lease Requirements.

Police Chief Austin reviewed how the Crime Free/Drug Free code is currently written. The Statute has changed from being on or near the premises to only applying to being specifically on the premises. The property maintenance code will need to be changed in order to reflect the new language but the process will remain the same. He explained that he read the DOJ letter that was sent to Anoka and noticed that Anoka does a lot that Columbia Heights does not do. He provided an example of when there is a call that generates a report on a rental, the report gets sent to the landlord. He added that the City only does this if there is a section of the Drug Free/Crime Free code that is violated. If the landlord is called and wanted a copy of the police report, they would have to file the data request.

Councilmember James asked how the code helps the Police Department if other cities are repealing their codes regarding Conduct on Licensed Premises/Crime Free/Drug Free and Disorderly Use lease requirements as well as it being potentially discriminatory. Police Chief Austin replied that the main concern is the safety of the other tenants in a rental property. He explained that the Council has the final say on what actions are taken. He provided previous examples on when the City Code 5A.410 was used.

Councilmember James asked who the violation letter is sent to. Police Chief Austin replied that it is sent to the landlord of a notice of violation. Unless there are three violations in a 12 month period, it is simply "on the books." He added that the Police Department works with the landlord in order to come up with a solution. The Fire Department has been diligent to come up with systems in order to deal with their part of the process such as doing regular inspections and follow up with it. Because of this, there has been a decrease in violation letters that have been sent out.

Councilmember James mentioned that typically, there are fewer calls if it involves someone in the same culture. She added her appreciation for the explanation on why it is helpful for the Police Department to continue using the code instead of repealing it. Police Chief Austin added that the Police Department tries to scrutinize every call, in order to determine if it is a clear violation.

Police Chief Austin explained that the first reading would be ready for the City Council meeting next week.

4. Review of Grant Applications for Sullivan Park Trail and Fitness Court.

Interim City Manager Hansen explained that the City started to seriously consider this item, the condition of the trail, and to find balance on serving a redeveloped site at Medtronic.

City Forester Genter reviewed the grant applications for Sullivan Park Trail and Fitness Court. The first grant, the Outdoor Recreation Grant, is from the Department of Natural Resources and would be for the trail. The grant is available every year with the funding level varying each year and the activities need to focus on outdoor recreation. The award goes up to \$350,000 and requires a 50% cost match from the grant match awardee. Staff are still researching the scope of the project for the trail but would like to put in new lighting in the future. The grant is due at the end of the month.

Interim City Manager Hansen explained that the grant would be for 2025 or 2026 construction.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if the City had the funds to match the grant. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that the City does and the funds would come from the Park Development Fund with about \$600,000-\$700,000 available.

City Forester Genter stated the second grant is for a fitness court. The National Fitness Campaign is a nonprofit that began creating fitness courts which is an outdoor workout space that has seven different movement stations and is ADA accessible and compliant. In addition, on the other side of the wall would be a fitness court studio which would mirror the size but would be left blank in order to be used for fitness classes that could be hosted by Parks and Recreation or a resident could rent out the space. The fitness court could come with an art component in the form of a wrap and would be sponsored by BlueCross BlueShield. The sponsor has committed to local artists as well as a \$50,000 grant towards a fitness court and a \$25,000 for the wrap and paying the artist.

City Forester Genter mentioned that BlueCross BlueShield has committed to funding ten communities in 2024 and it is on a rolling application basis. The grant would be awarded in 2024 and would begin construction in 2025. The classis fitness court is \$160,000, the grant funding would be \$50,000, the art component would be funded through the grant, and concrete and installation would be \$25,000-\$47,000.

Councilmember Buesgens asked what the City's responsibility would be. City Forester Genter replied it would be between \$135,000-\$177,000 and would come out of the Park Capital Fund.

City Forester Genter explained that the studio fitness court would cost \$185,000 with the City's responsibility being between \$167,500-\$227,500.

Councilmember Jacobs asked if it was an option to build the original fitness court and add the studio section later. City Forester Genter replied that he was unsure.

Councilmember Jacobs asked how reliable the material is in the climate. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that it is the same material that is used for playgrounds and would hold up.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if the City could afford the fitness court with the studio addition. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that it is affordable.

Councilmember James asked which option the Parks and Recreation Commission recommended. City Forester Genter replied that they were in favor of the larger option with the studio fitness court.

Councilmember Buesgens suggested surrounding the fitness court with trees since this summer is expected to be hot and it could keep the surface cooler.

City Forester Genter explained that Staff have met with the National Fitness Campaign representatives. They did an assessment on the City and identified a number of locations that would qualify for the grant funding at the maximum level.

5. Amending Resolution 2022-46 - No Mow May.

Communications and Engagement Coordinator Rottler noted there is new research that supports No Mow May and asked how the Council would like to proceed. Councilmember Jacobs expressed her support of having No Mow May.

Interim City Manager Hansen explained that if the Council is in favor of Less Mow May they would need to amend Resolution 2022-46. Councilmember Buesgens stated she is in support of Less Mow May.

Councilmember Spriggs asked if there were any programs that promote pollinator pathways. Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned there was previous discussion about doing a program that is similar to the tree program by having the City provide pollinator friendly seeds.

Interim City Manager Hansen recapped that the Council would like to see this item on the next Council meeting and to find ways to promote and make available ways to have pollinator options.

Councilmember Buesgens requested staff find a spot where the public could see City Forester Genter do a sample.

6. Parks and Recreation Commission – Park Plan Update.

Interim City Manager Hansen noted that the Parks and Recreation Commission would like to support park redevelopment but would need to update the Park Plan. In order to update

the Park Plan, the Parks and Recreation Commission will need to get public input. The first opportunity for public input will be at the City Expo. Staff propose to also provide a survey for the public regarding parks. He added that it may be an appropriate time to include questions regarding Murzyn Hall and what the community would like to see.

Councilmember Buesgens noted that the public may be more engaged if there are photos of the amenities they would like to see in the parks instead of simply answering questions. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that it was a great idea but most likely would not have time to get there by the first opportunity at the City Expo.

Councilmember James mentioned that she saw other cities using QR codes in parks that lists a few survey questions so that the feedback could be from regular park attenders.

Interim City Manager Hansen stated that Staff would come back to the Council in April with some proposed survey questions regarding Murzyn Hall.

7. Review of Board and Commission Applicants and Scheduled Interview Times on March 8th and March 11th.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned that she was available for both of those days to conduct interviews.

Councilmember Spriggs noted that he was not available on March 8, but would try to get March 11 off from work so he could attend. He added if he could not get off work, he would read the applications and submit his rankings of each applicant.

Interim City Manager Hansen stated that the interviews would begin at 1:00 pm on March 8th and 3:00 pm on March 11.

8. Council Corner.

Updates from council regarding schedules, information sharing and priorities for continued education.

HOME Line Email Discussion.

Councilmember James asked if other Councilmembers were going to the City Day on the Hill and noted that Mayor Márquez Simula would also attend. She added if any of the Councilmembers had any issues they wanted to be brought to City Day on the Hill, she would be happy to say something on their behalf.

Councilmember James stated that HOME Line provided a lot of details. She noted that the Council could discuss the just cause for termination and pre-eviction notice being 30 days as an ordinance.

Councilmember Buesgens asked what the eviction rate was in the City. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that he did not know.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that the Council would use the information to come up with some ideas and questions. Interim City Manager Hansen would then take the questions and ideas to Staff and then bring it back to the Council.

Interim City Manager Hansen suggested that the Council come up with two or three topics that they would like to discuss.

Councilmember James stated that she would like to discuss the 30-day pre-eviction notice, the just cause for termination, the renter opportunity to purchase, and the prohibition source of income. She added that she is against a crime free ordinance because it causes a lot of issues before the police are called. Mayor Márquez Simula suggested putting a date in the calendar to re-evaluate the crime free ordinance.

Councilmember Spriggs stated in 2022, the City had 119 evictions out of 901 rental properties and 3,251 rental units. The 8.2 evictions in Anoka County were from Columbia Heights in 2022.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned there are a number of cities that have a requirement for rental property owners to pay for relocation benefits if they are doing any renovations on the building and she would be interested in discussing this more as a Council.

Councilmember Buesgens stated she heard that City inspectors are not allowed to write "mold" in their inspections and asked if that was true. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that he was unsure.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that her preference for discussion was the 30-day pre-eviction, first right to purchase, and relocation benefits.

The Council agreed to discuss all three of these items.

Interim City Manager Hansen noted that in order to accomplish some of the HOME Line items, it may require additional staff. He emphasized the importance of the Council considering what it would cost tax payers to do projects. He added that the Council should lay out all of the potential projects and then decide together which ones they would like to focus on. The Council agreed.

Councilmember Jacobs asked if Interim City Manager Hansen could include a list of how much Staff time each project would take.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned that projects take time and the hardest part is having patience during the projects. Mayor Márquez Simula added that the Council will be revisiting the goal setting. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that it could be possible to discuss the goal setting items during the May, June, or July work session.

Councilmember Spriggs noted that with the State budget surplus, it is looking more like \$3.8 billion instead of \$1.7 billion. He wondered if it was possible to ask for a full ask of \$25 million for the Public Works building due to the additional bonding. Interim City Manager

Hansen explained that with State bonding, they like to see a 50/50 match. The City can ask the lobbyist to have a conversation about receiving additional funds.

Councilmember Spriggs mentioned that he was asked to sign a letter for the Legends for a bill that is coming up. He asked what access he had for the City's letterhead. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that he did not have an answer from the City Attorney but from his perspective, the City's letterhead is typically used when it is from the entire Council instead of one individual Councilmember. He suggested that the Council determine if is appropriate or not.

Councilmember Jacobs asked Councilmember Spriggs if he was writing the letter as Councilmember or his personal name. Councilmember Spriggs replied that he was writing it as a Councilmember. Councilmember James stated that she is comfortable with it unless it says it is from the entire Council; in which case she would desire to have all of the Council agree to it.

Councilmember Jacobs asked if Councilmember Spriggs could create his own letterhead as a Councilmember. Councilmember Spriggs replied that he was fine with that but did not know what the best formatting would be. Councilmember Buesgens added that it looks more professional if a letter comes with the letterhead and added that it makes sense to have each Councilmember have their own letterhead. She suggested taking the Councilmember names off of the letterhead if it is coming from an individual. Councilmember Jacobs agreed.

Interim City Manager Hansen stated that he would speak with the City Attorney to get more guidance regarding the use of City letterhead. He clarified that the Council desires to have City letterhead and to simply remove the other Councilmember's names if an individual Councilmember would like to use the letterhead.

The Council agreed.

Councilmember Spriggs asked if letters would need to be reviewed by the City Attorney before they are sent out if the City's letterhead is used. Interim City Manager Hansen encouraged the Council to direct any questions they had to the City Attorney.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned budget increases for Parks and Recreation staff and added that it would be great if they hired weekend staff to help with events and parks. Councilmember Jacobs wondered what the availability would be like since staffing was short the past two summers.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if there were "adopt a park shelter" options. Councilmember James added that it would be nice to have staff for the park shelters to keep them clean.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if there were enough trash receptacles at the parks. Interim City Manager Hansen explained that more trash receptacles have been added after

hearing public feedback. Councilmember Jacobs mentioned her experience is that the trash is not being taken out in a timely manner.

Mayor Márquez Simula noted that it could be helpful to have a staff presence at a park to help handle any issues that may arise.

Councilmember Buesgens asked why workers are required to be 18 years or older. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that for the Public Works Department, staff are required to be 18 years or older because they often drive a City vehicle. The Parks and Recreation Department does hire 16-17-year-olds.

Mayor Márquez Simula suggested using the County work program and hire an 18-24-year-old that could oversee 16-17-year-olds. The City could apply through the County and the County would pay for the entire program. She added that the Council would have to think about adding additional staff to the budget and then work with the County to see if they could find people to work.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if it was possible for 16-17-year-old seasonal workers to do the job as long as they are with an employee that is 18 years or older. Interim City Manager Hansen replied that the City does not hire any Park staff seasonally if they are under 18 years old but the Recreation staff hire 16-17-year-old seasonal staff.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned a soccer club that is a private school and City partnership. She wondered if this could be part of the Parks and Recreation program and wanted to discuss the item with the budget in the future. The Council discussed other programs that look similar to this model. Councilmember James suggested that the Council speak to different programs, such as the Frights, to learn how they are run privately through the school and the City.

9. Old Business.

Follow up from Interim City Manager on items needing further resolution from the February Work Session.

Interim City Manager Hansen mentioned that he had an update on the City Attorney which would be provided in writing and asked that if there were any questions to go directly to him.

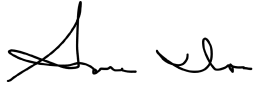
Interim City Manager Hansen added that staff would like to continue to recognize employees and have been in discussion about creating short videos to feature employees. Councilmember Jacobs asked if a feature could also be included in the newsletter.

The Council agreed.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs to adjourn the meeting at 8:34 pm. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Ion', written above a horizontal line.

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary