

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS
DAKOTA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA

Minutes of the City Council Work Session
Held August 17, 2023

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a work session of the City Council, City of Mendota Heights, Minnesota was held at City Hall, 1101 Victoria Curve, Mendota Heights, Minnesota.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Levine called the meeting to order at 3:00 pm. Councilors Lorberbaum, Mazzitello, Miller and Paper were present.

Others in attendance included City Administrator Cheryl Jacobson, Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek, Finance Director Kristen Schabacker, Assistant City Administrator Kelly Torkelson, Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence, Natural Resource Coordinator Krista Spreiter, City Clerk Christine Lusian, Police Chief Kelly McCarthy, Fire Chief Dave Dreelan, Firefighter Tom Mattaini, and Parks and Recreation Commissioner Jo Schifsky.

PROPOSED BUDGET DISCUSSION FOR FY2024

Chief Dreelan began with review of the fire budget and introduced firefighter Tom Mattaini to review a proposed increase in city contribution to the fire relief association pension fund. The request would be for an annual city contribution of \$18,000 to fund firefighter pensions. Mattaini noted that the pension was one of the main recruitment and retention tools that the fire department had.

Councilor Mazzitello asked if the increase should be consistent with the market adjustment that the rest of staff are getting. Mayor Levine noted that firefighters were not included in the analysis for the compensation study and that a round number is better than a percentage. Councilor Miller said that this investment would help sustain the department as a paid-on-call fire department which saves the city significant money.

Chief Dreelan reviewed the remainder of the fire budget highlighting the additional costs of turnout gear inspections and the software for the fire marshal. He noted that there have been significant cost increases for turnout gear but that these updates are safety concerns and cannot be put off. City Administrator Jacobson explained that this request was originally included as a BIP but considering the life-safety needs associated with the request it was included as an operating expense. Dreelan shared that the estimated cost of a new set of turnout gear is \$3,500 and has a life expectancy of 4-9 years depending of the rate of use. Regarding the fire marshal software, Dreelan explained that this tool will better prepare staff for arriving on scene. The remainder of the requests reflect maintaining the status quo of operations.

Councilor Paper asked if it is still necessary for public works to plow firefighter driveways. Dreelan explained that in the past there had been situations where firefighters could not get to the station to respond to calls, that is less of a concern with the new station, however the service functions as a benefit to the firefighters.

Councilor Paper asked about changes in the costs of hoses. Dreelan explained that the department has adjusted the process for budgeting to have more accountability and ownership throughout the department and that the change has less to do with actual changes in costs and more to do with a better system of recording what the actual costs of business are.

Chief Dreelan reviewed the fire station roof replacement request. He explained that in anticipation of increased construction costs when the fire station was renovated, that a few capital improvement items were pulled out of the project to reduce costs, one being replacement of the existing roof. Dreelan shared that the condition of the roof has deteriorated to the point that it cannot be delayed any longer. The other project that was delayed was the parking lot resurfacing, however that project has been pushed back in order to prioritize the roof project in 2024.

Dreelan added that the council should be aware that in 2028-2029 he is anticipating needing to replace fire engine-10 which he anticipates to be a \$1.2 million expense. He encouraged the council to think about equipment reserve funds as these costs are continuing to increase.

Mayor Levine expressed interest in seeing farther reaching CIP plans in future budget documents to help prepare for this type of upcoming expense.

Chief McCarthy reviewed the proposed police budget and explained that there are no significant additional proposed expenses in the police budget.

Mayor Levine asked about increases in the contractual services budget. Assistant City Administrator Torkelson explained that LOGIS is one of the contractual services included in the police budget and there are increased costs from increased rates from LOGIS.

McCarthy reviewed BIP requests for the department including the decommissioning of retrofitted shotguns to be replaced with less than lethal tools. McCarthy explained that this request as well as the other requests in the police budget could be funded with Public Safety Aid that has designated uses that do not include building construction. Levine expressed appreciation for the shift in equipment away from more lethal tools to alternatives that are safer for the public and for staff. Other requests include reserve radios, pepperball launchers, updates to tasers, and a voice activated radio dispatch alarm.

Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek and Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence reviewed the BIP request for Marie Park dugouts. Lawrence explained that this request was the 7th priority of the Parks and Recreation Commission as well as a request from the Two Rivers Athletic Association (TRAA). She explained that the city has been doing these improvements throughout the park system and that dugouts provide shade and safety.

Mayor Levine noted that this field is primarily used by younger players and questioned if we needed to install dugouts at each of the city's baseball fields. Levine noted that she would prefer the city spend funds planting trees for shade rather than installing dugouts.

Councilor Lorberbaum asked the city administrator to expand on why she included this project in her recommendation to the city council. Administrator Jacobson explained that it was a potential use of

special parks fund and would provide an additional amenity to the city. She added that the project is inline with the council's expressed interests from years past.

Councilor Lorberbaum asked how additional funds can be added to the special parks fund. Jacobson clarified that funds are added through development in the city.

Councilor Mazzitello advocated for the project on the basis that the park was used by more than just TRAA and that just because TRAA used the site for younger players did not mean that older players could not use the facility and that he was in favor of the project to promote safety of all users of the park.

Mayor Levine asked about the feasibility of adding trees to the park for shade. City Administrator Jacobson noted that trees would not be eligible for funding through the special parks fund. Mazzitello added that he was in favor of the dug outs over trees because of the safety factor involved in dug outs. Councilor Miller agreed. Councilor Lorberbaum wanted to see where the budget was at in the end. Mayor Levine wanted staff to find high impact safety measures that the city could invest in and was not clear if dugouts were the best way to promote safety in the parks.

The council discussed challenges with diminishing funds that lack ongoing funding mechanisms. Levine noted that capacity for future funding was one of the reasons that the city was looking into franchise fees.

Lawrence reviewed the BIP request for the Rogers Lake shelter replacement. This project is the second highest used shelter in the city. Staff are interested in expanding the size of the facility. Councilor Paper was not interested in replacing the shelter but recognized that there could be some cosmetic upgrades for minimal funds. The council agreed.

Lawrence reviewed the Wentworth pickleball installation BIP request. She shared that staff have received questions about this project which would provide additional pickleball courts on the North side of the city. Levine asked if the space was being used for any other purpose, staff reported that no other organized activities have been observed in the space during the summer. Staff also included that this project would involve community engagement efforts.

The Council agreed to find out if there was interest in the community for expanded pickleball facilities. Director Ruzek added that staff can move forward with a survey and engagement for this project at any time as it would be funded with the special parks fund rather than the levy.

Mayor Levine noted that she wanted to prioritize funding maintenance of facilities that the city already had and until the city was able to fund all necessary expenditures that it should not be adding additional facilities that will add to the maintenance burden.

Lawrence introduced the board replacement of the Wentworth hockey rink BIP. Councilor Paper asked for more details pertaining to the failures of the current infrastructure. Staff said they would follow up with additional information.

Lawrence introduced the recreation budget highlighting that the budget was mostly remaining the same. Staff are proposing a decrease in the summer concert series budget, keeping the number of concerts the same or slightly increasing the number depending on cost of performers.

Natural Resources Coordinator Spreiter presented the natural resources budget. She explained that this is the first year that we have pulled these items into its own budget, that previously these items were included in other budgets. The budget includes a line item that encompasses the Natural Resources Management Plan Projects as well as budget to maintain existing restoration projects. There is also an increase in the natural resources maintenance fund that was a recommendation from the Natural Resources Commission.

Mayor Levine asked if the city was still treating trees infected with emerald ash borer (EAB). Spreiter said that the city is still treating some trees but that treatment does not completely protect the trees from EAB, but that it slows the progress of the infestation. Rather than relying on treating trees, the city's focus should be on replacing trees.

Mayor Levine asked if the city is replacing boulevard trees. Spreiter said that the best practice is to move away from planting trees in the boulevard because they are difficult to maintain and the city does not currently budget to maintain boulevard trees. Councilor Mazzitello explained that boulevard trees also have to be removed when infrastructure projects require working in the right of way.

Councilor Lorberbaum said that residents are confused if they need to be maintaining trees that are in their right of way and wanted more information about expectations for maintenance of boulevard trees to be in a future newsletter from the city.

Mayor Levine noted that the city spends a lot of staff time working on natural resources and that currently was not reflected within the natural resources budget. Councilor Mazzitello liked having the separate budget that focused on natural resources, but he was interested in seeing some additional delineation of projects rather than grouping them together into a single line item.

Councilor Mazzitello expressed interest in seeing the funds for the assistant city engineer, which he felt should have a surface water focus, also represented within the natural resources budget. Director Ruzek clarified that the main responsibilities of the assistant engineer will be city infrastructure and utilities.

Parks and Recreation Manager Lawrence reviewed the Par 3 budget. While staff are expecting high revenues, there are also additional expenditures including overtime to meet the service needs of the course, and there were some additional costs associated with tree removal that the course had to fund this year. Levine wants staff to be more targeted in the number projections to more accurately show the impact of the success at the Par 3 golf course in the budget.

Lawrence reviewed the BIP request for fiber to go to the golf course. Councilor Paper expressed hesitation spending that amount of money to run fiber thinking that it is not known what future technologies will come out that may make that infrastructure obsolete.

Assistant City Administrator Torkelson added that along with running the fiber, the city would run conduit infrastructure that could be repurposed for future technology changes in the case that fiber was no longer the standard. Councilor Mazzitello asked about the possibility of expanding the size of the conduit to allow for additional lines to be buried along with the fiber. Director Ruzek said that it can become a lot more complicated when multiple lines are run together.

Lawrence reviewed the greens roller BIP request. Councilor Miller asked if it would be possible to get a used machine. Lawrence said that staff have looked into that option, however it is difficult to confirm the value of a piece of machinery that is used.

Lawrence added that there is a request to get some additional furniture for the par 3 golf course. The Council was in favor of the furniture request.

ADJOURN

Mayor Levine adjourned the work session at 6:13 pm.

ATTEST:



Christine Lusian, City Clerk



Stephanie B. Levine, Mayor