

CITY OF FALCON HEIGHTS  
City Council Workshop  
City Hall  
2077 West Larpenteur Avenue

MINUTES  
November 4, 2020  
6:30 P.M.

NOTE: THIS MEETING WAS HELD BY WEB CONFERENCE

- A. CALL TO ORDER: 6:32 p.m.
- B. ROLL CALL: ANDREWS X GUSTAFSON X LEEHY X  
MIAZGA X WEHYEE
- STAFF PRESENT: THONGVANH X
- C. PRESENTATIONS:
- D. POLICY ITEMS:  
1. Police Services

Administrator Thongvanh

Council member Wehyee made a request to discuss this item. At the meeting with Sheriff Fletcher, the Sheriff discussed the current model that Falcon Heights is operating within and increased costs (around \$400,000 per year) associated with the additional officer that is recommended for the city. The city has the option to create our own police department but the startup costs are high, around 1.2 million annually. Currently staff is looking for direction on how to proceed with this request.

The City of Roseville said they are not in a position to add Falcon Heights at this time but could revisit the issue in a year or two.

Council Member Miazga

Do we have power in the negotiation with Ramsey County?

Administrator Thongvanh

The County has to provide emergency services by state statute. But they do not have to provide additional services such as patrols, follow up on police reports, etc. The Contract Cities group of all cities part of the Ramsey County contract work with the County to negotiate the budget for services.

Council Member Wehyee

I think that the benefits of having our own police force will give our residents the ability to hold the staff accountable. One of the things that came out of the community conversations was a want for accountability.

Mayor Gustafson

Is it worth 3 million dollars a year to you?

Council Member Wehyee

We may accrue a heavy cost on the front end, but I think the cost will balance out over time. As time progresses, we should get to a place where in the long run we would be paying less.

Council Member Leehy

As we look at cities that are dealing with similar issues, it's important to consider urban versus rural differences. If we make this change too soon, the high impact on homeowners with the taxes is a large hindrance and something to consider.

Council Member Andrews

I am not interested in spending 3 million on our own police force. I think our residents would be very upset by that much of a tax increase.

Mayor Gustafson

We are currently paying for 30 hours a day in coverage, so we operate with a 6.2-6.3 FTE equivalent.

Council Member Miazga

I would like to see examples for staffing our own police department from some area cities. Would there be an option to send a request for letters of interest? I would like to see more transparency and no offence but you work for Ramsey County. You may have some implicit bias from working there.

Mayor Gustafson

Let me be clear, I do not benefit financially from the contract with the County and my work does not substantially change from having a contract with the County.

Council Member Leehy

I think this is a healthy conversation, we are just getting questions that we are interested in researching. As we look into this, I think it's important for us to make sure that we consider equipment costs as well as personnel costs.

Administrator Thongvanh

If the Council can let me know what specific areas they would like me to research, I will look into how to get the information. I will start with operating costs, startup costs including capital costs, annual costs, etc. I will also continue to have conversations with the City of Saint Anthony.

2. Fire Service Request of Interest (RFI) Updates

Administrator Thongvanh

We received three letters of interest- City of Saint Paul, Roseville, and our own department. We will have each agency provide a short presentation and an estimate of their costs either at the meeting or by the end of November. This will be a public meeting and we will notify residents through the usual channels.

3. Amendment to Chapter 54 & 113 Regards to Residential Edible Landscaping

Administrator Thongvanh

This ordinance amendment builds on the native landscaping ordinance to allow for vegetable and other edible plants to be grown in residential front yards. After the discussion with the subcommittee, survey, and discussion with the Planning and Environment Commissions, the ordinance amendment is now ready for review. It allows for edible gardens in front yards but imposes regulations that restrict maintenance/caretaking/harvesting to the property owner of the residential lot. The ordinance will be on the agenda for review and approval at the next Council meeting.

4. Community Park Building

Administrator Thongvanh

We didn't get funding through the bonding bill for improvements at the park building. We'll need to do some improvements and renovations on our own to keep it structurally safe for users throughout the year. We won't be using the building as a warming house due to COVID-19. We will be flooding the Community Park for a pleasure rink.

I'm estimating \$300,000-500,000 in renovations. It's not currently budgeted in our levy, but there are funds we can take it from. If we do nothing we will eventually have to tear down the building. The land is leased from the University of Minnesota so I would likely pursue a longer lease term to ensure we maintain use of the site before we make this investment.

Mayor Gustafson

For the coming years, are we looking at making repairs while developing a plan to tear down and rebuild?

Administrator Thongvanh

We have some items on the radar for the coming summer including internal and external improvements that would range from \$100,000-150,000. We could use capital improvements funds so it would not impact our levy. But when we start looking at more significant improvements, we would need to start looking at how it may impact the general tax levy.

E. INFORMATION/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Council Member Leehy

Our Parks & Recreation is energized in brainstorming ideas for residents' activities this winter.

Council Member Wehyee

A resident has asked for us to consider ways to improve communications on the fire department discussions. I would like to suggest doing a recording to talk about the situation and uploading it to our channels.

Council Member Andrews

The Environment Commission is looking at establishing some new priorities. The only other thing on our agenda is the electronic charging stations idea which we are still exploring.


Mayor Gustafson

The Planning Commission is looking at a vacant housing ordinance.

F. ADJOURNMENT: 8:39 p.m.

  
Randall C. Gustafson, Mayor

Dated this 4th day of November, 2020

  
Sack Thongvanh, City Administrator