

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

MINUTES
December 2, 2020
6:30 P.M.

NOTE: THIS MEETING WAS HELD BY WEB CONFERENCE

- A. CALL TO ORDER: 6:30 pm
- B. ROLL CALL: ANDREWS X GUSTAFSON X LEEHY X
MIAZGA X WEHYEE X
- STAFF PRESENT: THONGVANH X
- C. PRESENTATIONS:
1. Fire Services – Request for Bids

City Administrator Thongvanh

During the September 23 meeting, the Council directed staff to send request for letters of interest to area departments. We received letters from three agencies: Roseville, St. Paul, and the Falcon Heights Fire Department. During the November 18 meeting, the Council authorized me to request bids from the three departments. We received bids from St. Paul and our own department. Tonight we will hear presentations from both agencies and Council will have a chance to ask questions.

City of St. Paul Fire Chief Butch Inks

In 2018, the department developed a strategic plan and rewrote our mission statement to reflect community engagement. Our core values are professionalism, respect, integrity, duty, and equity. We currently have 15 fire stations three fire stations are within 4 miles of City Hall. We've been providing services to Falcon Heights for medical calls since the 1990s. We have 435 professional firefighters and we believe we are an all hazard response fire department. All stations are fully staffed all hours and we maintain an average daily staffing of 114 firefighters.

The department prioritizes and invests in the City of St. Paul's equity initiatives. Our department resembles the community we serve. The price we place on our services is \$165,000, and it aligns with fire and rescue contract services that we provide for many of the surrounding communities including the State Fair, U of M, and the City of Lauderdale.

Council Member Leehy

Are your adjunct trainers in the department or are they located outside in the community? Is this a JPA or a contract?

Chief Inks

To lead training in our department, our members must obtain certification as instructors. Many are in our department. It is a JPA.

Council Member Wehyee

Can we expect the price to remain constant over time, or should we anticipate the cost changing? Second, I would be looking for an opportunity for our current firefighters to find employment with St. Paul.

Chief Inks

Yes, the cost is what it is today. We are not entering into this contract for profit. We noticed a need for services. There have been some increases over time but that is not the goal. We currently have three of your folks on our hiring list. But we also have some pathways programs for individuals to get into the department.

Council Member Andrews

The people that go through your pathways program, are they already certified through the community college system? What kind of communication would the Council have with the department?

Chief Inks

The certification is licensure through the State of Minnesota. For me, the best way to communicate would be through Sack, and then the information could be shared through him.

Council Member Leehy

As a JPA, do administrators have regular meetings with you for ongoing regular communication?

Chief Inks

Yes, we are open to having a standing meeting.

Council Member Wehyee

How open would the department be about being present at our community events such as Night to Unite and block parties?

Chief Inks

I would expect that, you need us to be there, we would want to be there. In addition, we would want to be engaged with your schools.

Andrew Temme, Falcon Heights Fire Department

I chose to become a fire fighter out of love for my neighbors. Why does Falcon Heights need a community based fire department? Neighbors helping neighbors. Qualified, credentialed. The Falcon Heights community has been taking care of each other through the Fire Department since the community was formed in 1945. Department morale is at an all-time high and we continue to receive applicants. I would like to thank the City of Roseville for helping us with leadership. We humbly request the opportunity to continue to serve this community.

Council Member Wehyee

The pros of the FHFDD are that it's homegrown and community based. How equipped are we at the moment and in the next year to respond to fires and emergencies that may occur.

Mike Arcand, Falcon Heights Fire Department

We have been asked to push a pretty large stone uphill after the department lost its leadership about 2 years ago. We continue to bring on additional fire fighters. We have mutual aid agreements with surrounding agencies so that if there was a large demand, we would have help from the surrounding communities.

Council Member Andrews

It would appear that the cost to maintain our fire department is about twice that of contracting with St. Paul. I know you can't equate passion, loyalty, and community good feeling to dollars and cents. I also know our residents are concerned about taxes increasing and balancing other needs in the city. I recognize the hard work of the department, I just don't know if financially it makes sense for the future.

Mike Arcand

As you add the capital costs and the costs of keeping up with technology upgrades required by the NFPA, it is expensive. But the city gets to control those costs. Once we sell the trucks and equipment, it's very difficult to get them back. I'm very hesitant to outsource the services and then not have the choice to go back.

Mayor Gustafson

I would recommend that the Council authorize the City Administrator to modify the final 2021 levy to reflect the final cost of going forward with the St. Paul Fire Department proposal.

Administrator Thongvanh

I am looking for a consensus for the Council on how I should proceed. Based on that, I will modify the levy to reflect St. Paul's bid.

Council Member Wehyee

This is a difficult decision, I have fluctuated a lot where I stand on this issue. Whatever is decided I feel very comfortable with.

Council Member Miazga

I'm comfortable with what is being recommended here, that we use St. Paul's proposal for our services and set our levy for next year.

Council Member Andrews

I appreciate the work of our fire department. We don't have 2 or 3 years to allow our department to mature. I support us going with the St. Paul proposal.

Council Member Leahy

This is one of the most difficult decisions to make and have consensus with. When we look at the details we are faced with and the things that have happened with no longer having

Lauderdale, it seems to have forced us into this decision. I am in consensus with the recommendation to proceed forward with St. Paul.

Council Member Wehyee

I very reluctantly concur with the recommendation.

Administrator Thongvanh

With those final thoughts, I will move forward with modifying our levy for next year to reflect the changes.

D. POLICY ITEMS:

1. Extension of Professional Service Agreement for Administrative Direction and Command Services for Fire Service from the City of Roseville

Administrator Thongvanh

The City of Roseville will provide us a 60 day extension to our contract, and have included an opt-out option so that we can get out of the contract sooner if we are able to prepare the necessary materials.

2. Information Technology (IT) Services

Administrator Thongvanh

The City of Roseville and its contract holders have proposed that contract holders shift to a JPA structure. I am looking for questions from the Council and if there is agreement, will bring this for formal action next week on the JPA.

Mayor Gustafson

I am in favor on bringing this before the Council next week.

3. Ordinance Amendment Update for Drive-Thru

Administrator Thongvanh

After the public hearing during the Planning Commission meeting, the commission recommended to not amend the ordinance to allow for drive-throughs. The Dino's situation is unique in that it was a drive up window, not a traditional drive through.

Council Member Wehyee

Can you or Molly speak to concerns that were raised about traffic?

Administrator Thongvanh

The residents at the hearing were from the surrounding areas and believe there would be an increase in traffic. If the council decided to move forward with the amendment, we would do a traffic study. I'm not looking for a consensus now, this is more of an update. We could request an extension and have further discussions at a workshop in December or January.

Interim Community Development staff person Molly Just

At this point, what has been proposed is a text amendment to the ordinance to allow drive-throughs for eating establishments in this zoning district. There is currently no talk of a traffic study. The request was made by Dino's. At this point in the process, the public hearing has been conducted on the language as drafted. If you would like for a traffic study to be conducted, then the appropriate thing to do would be to suggest to staff to return to the Planning Commission and request that the applicant conduct the study. The Commission would have to review the language for the ordinance before the Council reviews it.

Mayor Gustafson

Our options are to either accept or reject the text amendment as presented. Otherwise, Council would need to send it back to the Commission for further review and issue the resident an extension letter.

Council Member Leehy

I am in favor of allowing more time for this.

Council Member Miazga

I am supportive of a 60-90 day extension as long as it allows time to really look at this.

Molly Just

In 2006, Dino's first came to the Council with the drive through request and at that time the City put a moratorium on drive-throughs in the City. The request was later denied and the code was revised to not allow drive-throughs for eating establishments, only for banks. As the policy makers, the Council members should consider what has changed since 2006.

Mayor Gustafson

This text amendment is not right for anyone other than the applicant. We want to be welcoming to businesses, but we also don't want to create a negative situation for nearby residents.

Council Member Weyhee

While I sympathize with our business community, I do worry about noise and traffic for the community members that live in that neighborhood.

Administrator Thongvanh

With consensus from the council, then I would direct Molly to prepare a staff report for next week when the Council could take formal action to reject the amendment.

4. Forestry and Tree Trimming Services

Administrator Thongvanh

We've been hearing complaints from residents on responsiveness. I am proposing that we seek an alternative forestry service.

Mayor Gustafson

So we just need to give you direction to obtain bids for different tree trimming and forestry services?

Administrator Thongvanh

Correct.

5. Budget

a. Enterprise Fund

Administrator Thongvanh

The proposal is to increase the enterprise by 3% to keep this fund healthy. This will not have a levy impact. It will have a fee impact on the water utility bill. Typical homes will see a 25 cent monthly increase, 75 cents per quarter.

Mayor Gustafson

The enterprise fund is what we use to cover the drainage improvements on Lindig.

Administrator Thongvanh

It also funds the Seminary pond improvements.

b. Capital Fund

Administrator Thongvanh

Currently we have budgeted \$84,000. Based on the decision to contract with St. Paul Fire Department, this fund would be reduced to almost zero. Moving forward, one of my priorities will be to work with the Council on our budget and finances. There are funds the Council needs to make decisions on. One of them will be the Capital Fund.

E. INFORMATION/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Administrator Thongvanh

The next Council meeting will be in-person and there will be a hearing for truth-in-taxation.

Mayor Gustafson

The first community conversation is tomorrow evening.

Council Member Leehy

Human Rights Day is coming up next Thursday, December 10. The monthly meeting for the Philando Castile garden committee is on Friday.

Council Member Miazga

NYFS meets Thursday morning. I am looking forward to being a facilitator for the Community Conversations.

Mayor Gustafson

Planning Commission met last Tuesday. There's a proposal for an ordinance for vacant homes. This will be an effort by the commission next year.

F. ADJOURNMENT: 9:20pm



Randall C. Gustafson, Mayor

Dated this 2nd day of December, 2020



Sack Thongvanh, City Administrator