

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

**MINUTES**  
September 16, 2020  
6:30 P.M.

**NOTE: THIS MEETING WAS HELD BY WEB CONFERENCE**

A. CALL TO ORDER: 6:31 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL: ANDREWS X GUSTAFSON X LEEHY X  
MIAZGA    WEHYEE X

STAFF PRESENT: THONGVANH X

C. PRESENTATIONS:

None.

City Administrator Thongvanh requested to add two items to the agenda: Item 4 would be a discussion of election information, and Item 5 would be a discussion of rental permits for housing.

D. POLICY ITEMS:

1. CARES Act Funding

City Administrator Thongvanh

The city was allocated \$412,789 in funding. Various uses of funding have been seen in other communities. Some businesses in Falcon Heights are utilizing business support funding from Ramsey County.

One use of funding could be to support staff time that has been allocated to COVID-19 related work in recent months. I've spoken with a few auditors about this. Another option would be to support public safety work. During the pandemic, all encounters with fire and police officials are being treated as a COVID event to protect staff safety.

To create and administer a city program by the deadline of November 15<sup>th</sup> may be impossible due to our current staffing capacity. One option could be to work with Ramsey County to connect residents to existing resources, or to work with county agencies to manage applications. This would avoid the City from handling sensitive personal information on income and identity.

## 2. Proposed 2021 Levy Updates

### City Administrator Thongvanh

There are some projects that are on the radar that will impact the levy in coming years. This year's levy shows an 8.9 percent increase from last year's levy, which factors in a COLA increase of 3% for all city staff. The city tax rate fluctuates between approx. 20-35 percent, and the rate is based on the total valuation of property within the City. Compared to other cities in Ramsey County, the city is near the middle in terms of tax rate. A median value home in Falcon Heights (\$314,000) would see an increase of \$79 per year. The preliminary levy will be brought to the council meeting next week.

## 3. Public Safety Updates

### a. Police Services

### City Administrator Thongvanh

Our contract with Ramsey County expires at the end of 2021, and we are required to give notice of termination 9 months prior to that. Discussions are in the works, and I included our service contract with the county in the packet for council and the public to review. Sheriff Fletcher will be at the meeting next week to provide an update and answer questions.

### b. Fire Services

### City Administrator Thongvanh

The mayor and I met with members of the fire department about issues including the ending of our contract with Lauderdale, equipment, and partnership with the City of Roseville for department leadership. Once the city's levy is approved, it can't be increased but it can be reduced. This impacts our decisions around the fire department related to operations.

### Mayor Gustafson

Morale is higher among members of the department. The City of Roseville is no longer able to provide fire administrative services after 2020, so we will need to accommodate this within our department. We still need to find qualified leadership for the department. We discussed these issues with the captains and others on the department.

### City Administrator Thongvanh

We need to look at ways to provide services during daytime. Losing Lauderdale, we have fewer calls which raises cost per call. We can always put off capital investments, but eventually those expenses will be there. In the 2020 budget, we were able to include funds for new helmets and new hoods. Roseville may be willing to provide day services through a contract. Roseville's per-call cost is \$500, compared to ours which is approximately \$6,000. The City will send a letter of interest to a few area departments to find out what costs would be.

### Mayor Gustafson

I would like to highlight that this is not a rushed decision, and that the City has been in conversations about the future of the department for many months. In seeking proposals from other departments, we are doing our due diligence.

Council Member Wehyee

If there are opportunities to improve our communication around this topic, I'd like to explore those.

City Administrator Thongvanh

I will continue to look at various options and will probably seek formal action from council at the next regular meeting to send a letter of interest.

4. Added Item: Election Information

City Administrator Thongvanh

Council Member Miazga had made a request earlier to do a separate mailing for election information. We have been providing information in some of our existing channels- our fall mailed newsletter which is sent to every resident, our weekly e-newsletter, and social media. Now the question is whether the council would like the city to do an independent mailing with election information. It was estimated to cost about \$12,000-13,000.

Council Member Andrews

If we are putting adequate information on these channels, combined with additional information that is available to residents from other sources, I don't believe it would be necessary for the city to do another mailing.

Mayor Gustafson

I agree.

City Administrator Thongvanh

Alright, we will go with that direction.

5. Added Item: Rental Permits for Housing

City Administrator Thongvanh

Rental permits renewals are coming up this fall. We have a fire marshal that is anticipating limited availability this fall, although this doesn't alleviate our responsibility as a City to safety. We may need to look at whether we have anyone internally do to the inspections, or whether we need to contract the service. Some communities have suspended the inspections for the year and dealt with problem properties as they have come up. If we can stress the safety protocol for inspections during COVID-19, I think we should consider continuing to do it to ensure houses are safe for renting.

Mayor Gustafson

I would be in favor of continuing the inspections, whether through training someone from our fire department or hiring an interim.

Council Member Wehyee

What goes into an inspection? Is there any contact with residents or people on site?

City Administrator Thongvanh

The Fire Marshall has a checklist of items to look for in the building, such as smoke detectors. They look at the bedrooms and make sure rooms in basements have egress windows, which we have discovered code violations on in the past. Inspections for multi-family buildings aren't necessary for every tenant's unit unless requested by the tenant, or the property owner has raised an issue.

Foster care or daycare homes receive inspections and are licensed through the State of Minnesota.

Council Member Wehyee

I would be in favor of inspections.

City Administrator Thongvanh

I'll move forward with that direction and I'll see what's viable, either looking internally or hiring a temporary consultant.

E. INFORMATION/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Council Member Andrews

The beekeeping ordinance will have a public hearing at Tuesday's Planning Commission meeting and then come before council. The Garden subcommittee has been collecting survey results and the process of analyzing and crafting an ordinance has been arduous. What we will be doing is defining residential gardens, and limiting community gardens to parks and not allowing them within residential properties. We feel this is better than having people do something called a community garden in their yard go through a process that could create alienation among their neighbors. We also talked about the existing garden that is planted and maintained by residents on Tatum, and this garden will be unaffected by the ordinance and will be grandfathered in.

City Administrator Thongvanh

To clarify, a residential garden would be allowed on the property as long as it adheres to the native landscaping requirements, and it must be maintained by the property owner. Regarding the garden on Tatum, we have not received notification that it is used by anyone other than residents. Unless we hear the property owner has rented out space to non-residents, we will continue to allow it.

Council Member Leahy

The mayor and I visited the Philando Castile memorial after the vandalism last week, and the family of Philando Castile was grateful for our solidarity. There's been a lot of work by the committee that maintains the garden to decide what to do.

Council Member Wehyee

We are very excited about Sheriff Fletcher's update to the council next week.

Mayor Gustafson

At the Ramsey County League of Local Government monthly meeting we got an update about the technology needs of the school districts and different ways the needs are being met in the community. People PC is a great resource for anyone needing access to hardware. I'm also looking forward to the Sheriff's visit.

City Administrator Thongvanh

The consultant we are looking at using for the community conversations shared an updated proposal. The proposal includes additional time for some preparation work, and increased the initial amount by about \$1,000.

Justin Markon, our Community Development Coordinator will unfortunately be leaving. I have hired an interim staff member from WSB Associates. We're hiring for the position and I've changed the title of the position to Planner/Community Development Coordinator to capture the skillset we are seeking in the position.

F. ADJOURNMENT: 9:21 p.m.

  
Randall C. Gustafson, Mayor

Dated this 16th day of September, 2020

  
Sack Thongvanh, City Administrator