

CITY OF FALCON HEIGHTS
City Council Special Joint Workshop

Saint Anthony Village City Hall
Council Chambers
3301 Silver Lake Rd NE
St. Anthony, MN 55418

MINUTES

Thursday, February 8th, 2024
7:00 P.M.

A. CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 PM

St. Anthony Village Mayor Webster goes over housekeeping rules of a City Council Workshop prior to Council introducing themselves at roll call. Both Mayors are appreciative of the joint workshop.

B. ROLL CALL:

Falcon Heights
City Council

GUSTAFSON_X_ LEEHY_X_
MEYER_X_ MIELKE_X_ WASSENBERG_X_

St. Anthony Village
City Council

WEBSTER_X_ DOOLAN_X_ JENSON_X_ RANDLE_X_
STEPHENS_X_

STAFF PRESENT:

Falcon Heights LINEHAN_X_
St. Anthony Village YUNKER_X_

C. POLICY ITEMS:

1. Joint meeting with the St. Anthony Village City Council to discuss a potential partnership for police services

Mayor Gustafson provides an opening statement. He states the two Councils are coming together tonight on a quest to keep both communities as great places to live, work, play and raise families; and, public safety is at the center of it all. Falcon Heights and St. Anthony Village shared a 23-year relationship with policing services. However, in 2016, any complacency surrounding policing was rocked away out of both cities. The killing of Philando Castile had a big impact on everyone in the community, and, unfortunately, the 23-year relationship between both cities did not survive. Falcon Heights undertook a process to determine what the community seeks in police services. The City has contracted with the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office (RCSO) since 2018. It was determined that the contract did not tailor to Falcon Heights entirely by both parties. Mayor Gustafson notes that since 2020 the City has been looking for a new provider. In 2022, Falcon Heights brought in the Center for Values-Based Initiatives to analyze what the community seeks in police services. It was determined that the community-based servicing and personal attention that St. Anthony Police Department (SAPD) provided was missing. Mayor Gustafson continues to state that St. Anthony's police department

has been doing tremendous work. He is hopeful Falcon Heights can partner with such a great police department.

Mayor Webster notes that St. Anthony is exploring the option to expand capabilities of the department, while providing community-oriented policing to residents of St. Anthony, Falcon Heights and Lauderdale. The previous partnership benefited St. Anthony residents by providing additional resources. After the death of Philando Castile, the partnership with Falcon Heights ended in 2017. St. Anthony continues to provide policing services to Lauderdale. Mayor Webster continues and states their police department is focused on continuous improvement. She is incredibly proud of the officers, who remain committed to community-oriented policing as exemplified by their strategic plan. Their department serves as a national leader for small police departments. Webster is confident that under the leadership of police chief Jeff Spies, the department will continue its improvement and provide high quality services to their community members.

Councilmember Leehy is thankful of the joint work session. She served on the neighborhood commission for almost 10 years before being elected to Falcon Heights City Council and her main value is community. One of her goals was ongoing inclusion and equity training for staff, Council and contract members serving Falcon Heights. There was a plan in place until the sudden and shattering death of Philando Castile. Afterwards, a task force was created and Councilmember Leehy was asked to be the co-chair. This helped determine values for inclusion and community efforts as well as values for policing. The City moved to a contract with RCSO, but she would have preferred to stay with SAPD, to be a part of the healthy police reform that SAPD underwent. She believes these discussions create dialogue and give an opportunity to actually implement change.

Councilmember Jenson echoes Councilmember Leehy's comments as he served on Council during the time. When the decision to involve the Department of Justice (DOJ) was made, the SAPD was interested to pursue improvements that the DOJ laid out for St. Anthony. They also created a strategic plan based on continuous improvement. The present transparency and accountability are remarkable as they are now a model for other small police departments nationally. He is happy to be part of this current discussion.

Councilmember Mielke believes there should be a meeting with black leaders from the community, for them to learn more about the evolution of the SAPD.

Councilmember Jenson wonders if there is way to gather data from the two populations to determine that moving forward with discussions is the right thing to do.

Mayor Webster appreciates that comment. She likes to think of this first step as a data gathering phase through community engagement, with both councils valuing community engagement. It is also important to engage with their police department to determine what a partnership might look like and to address potential concerns.

Councilmember Wassenberg agrees and notes not every organization is perfect, but it's those that are willing to learn and improve that evolve. Transparency and continuous improvement are important for Councilmember Wassenberg, and those are evident in

the changes the SAPD has made. He also appreciates the new technology being used to provide more transparency. He encourages residents to look at the improvements the SAPD implemented.

Mayor Gustafson states when Falcon Heights looked at rekindling the relationship they agreed it's important to get everyone involved in the process. He looks forward to the community engagement.

Councilmember Doolan looks forward to defining the process and phases and adds it's very important to engage both communities as there is a lot history to be understood and acknowledged. She wonders how the Falcon Heights community feels about this potential partnership. It is important that everyone feels like they are being heard and that their perspective is valued.

Mayor Webster also wonders how the communities can learn about things they may not have considered, and how feedback is being used in potential next phases.

Councilmember Meyer resonates with comments mentioned previously stated. He learned about the events filtered through national news media, which did not present the most nuanced picture of the events. When he went door-knocking, policing was brought up and a number of residents stated they missed the SAPD, sharing stories with Councilmember Meyer about how they were a part of the community. Councilmember Meyer appreciates that.

Councilmember Stephens appreciates the comments and believes that there should be various ways for the community to provide feedback.

Mayor Gustafson states it will be a long process, but that is needed because any decision has long-term impacts. Therefore, input from everyone is needed. He suggests bringing forward ideas for community engagement.

Councilmember Stephens wonders if we should get input from residents on how they like to provide feedback.

Councilmember Leehy notes community involvement is important for Falcon Heights. She notes these conversations will stir up different kinds of emotions for everybody, but wants to break the silence through open dialogue. She explains avenues need to be explored for ways to talk about the two cities and how their communities relate to each other. She also believes an important aspect is to heal and rekindle the relationship again.

Mayor Webster thanks Councilmember Leehy for authenticity and has considered the importance of reconciliation as they are both governing bodies that experienced tragedy. She mentioned the ripple effects that impacted everybody involved, how this has not been discussed and how that shared connection will be a healthy path forward, regardless of the outcome.

Mayor Gustafson suggests town halls and comment form on both cities' websites.

Councilmember Wassenberg agrees and notes residents like to provide feedback in various ways, through online forms or in-person meetings.

Mayor Webster recaps some the comments provided by the St. Anthony Councilmembers to ensure she captures it correctly before providing direction to the City Manager. She then asks what other elements should be considered.

Councilmember Doolan notes the importance of transparency in the process. If residents provide feedback of what's important to them, that needs to be taken into account. The data gathered is important for the St. Anthony community, regardless if they move forward with the partnership.

Councilmember Jenson wonders how the responses will be interpreted. The data gathered by both communities should be shared by both as well.

Both Mayor Webster and Mayor Gustafson agreed.

Councilmember Leehy agrees and notes every individual should be heard.

Councilmember Jenson points out a timeline should be determined.

Councilmember Stephens agrees and this timeline should be transparent.

Mayor Webster states it is also important to get feedback from the City of Lauderdale.

Councilmember Doolan agrees and notes she started a cost and benefit analysis.

Mayor Gustafson says that with everyone's various schedules, getting started with collecting feedback rather sooner than later is key, as well as getting some townhalls scheduled.

Councilmember Doolan believes being out in the community and doing outreach is also very important.

Councilmember Leehy agrees that there needs to be multiple avenues for people to communicate.

Mayor Webster wonders how both Councils feel about directing staff to engage with community outreach efforts.

Councilmember Randle wants to first determine the workload of staff.

Councilmember Jenson suggests discussing with both City Managers to determine staff workloads.

Councilmember Mielke prefers to use an outside resource to develop survey questions.

Councilmember Meyer suggests using the outline of the Centers for Values-Based Initiatives.

Both Councils decide to utilize future work sessions to further develop community engagement plans.

Mayor Gustafson thanks the St. Anthony Village Council for the opportunity to start collaborating again.

Councilmember Leehy shares words from Valerie Castile. Castile expresses her appreciation for the willingness of both Councils to create a community-driven policing model. Law enforcement should understand good communication, the ability to deescalate a situation and removing themselves from harm's way. Putting these collaboration efforts and reform initiations into action promotes safety for all.

Mayor Webster thanks both Councils for their time and engagement.

Both Mayors and City Managers will further discuss engagement plans.

D. ADJOURNMENT: 8:08 PM

DISCLAIMER: City Council Workshops are held monthly as an opportunity for Council Members to discuss policy topics in greater detail prior to a formal meeting where a public hearing may be held and/or action may be taken. Members of the public that would like to make a comment or ask questions about an item on the agenda for an upcoming workshop should send them to mail@falconheights.org prior to the meeting. Alternatively, time is regularly allotted for public comment during Regular City Council Meetings (typically 2nd and 4th Wednesdays) during the Community Forum.

Dated this 13th day of March, 2024



Jack Linehan, City Administrator



Randall C. Gustafson, Mayor