

**STAFF SUMMARY
CITY OF MINNETONKA
CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION
MONDAY, MARCH 19, 2007
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Council Present: Dick Allendorf, Al Thomas, Tony Wagner, Brad Wiersum and Mayor Jan Callison

Council Absent: Bob Ellingson, Terry Schneider

Staff: Geralyn Barone, Joe Wallin, Lee Gustafson, Steve Lillehaug, Merrill King, Darin Nelson, Ron Rankin, Brian Wagstrom, David Maeda

Callison called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

1. Report from the assistant city manager and council members

Assistant city manager Geralyn Barone reported that the city's Eco-Fair attracted around 250 to 275 people on par with past years. A survey showed that most who attended had not attended previous fairs. The most popular seminar was "Coping with Shade" that attracted 93 people. The joint meeting with the Hopkins city council scheduled for March 27 has been postponed. Community Development director Ron Rankin said that the county will likely have a better idea of the exact land acquisition cost for the Shady Oak Road project soon and the meeting will likely be rescheduled for early May. Callison said county commissioner Linda Koblick is working on a resolution for the commissioners to express support.

Wagner asked Callison about the National League of Cities conference in Washington D.C. she and Schneider attended last week. Callison said that it was a good conference and they were able to meet with the staffs of Sen. Norm Coleman, Sen. Amy Klobuchar, Rep. Keith Ellison, and Rep. Jim Ramstad about the Glencoe project. Ellison is likely to propose funding in the budget for the project.

2. Emergency plan update

Fire chief Joe Wallin gave the council a presentation on the city's emergency plan. He pointed out that one of the changes contained in the proposed plan is a different way to use radio communication channels. Historically the fire and police departments use their own channels when responding to a situation as does the EMS personnel. Wallin said the plan calls for a channel to be assigned to a specific channel thus allowing all personnel responding to an event to communicate with each other.

Callison asked what if any backup system was in place for communications. Wallin responded the system uses scene of action channels not dependent on a computer system but instead allows for radio to radio communication.

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Callison asked if the city has 311 system capabilities should the 911 system become overwhelmed. Wallin said the city does not because the same people who will answer the 911 calls would also have to answer the 311 calls. He said the boards and commissions room in city hall is capable of hosting a phone bank and staff would be given scripts to respond to calls.

Thomas asked how the city's website would be integrated in an emergency situation. Wallin said information can be posted immediately. Thomas suggested that the use of the website be specifically spelled out in the plan. Wallin agreed this was a good idea.

Wallin praised a pilot program with the Minnetonka School District. The program will provide preparation training including CPR training to every high school student in the district. He said the program teaches the students how they can affect outcomes of things that happen to them.

Callison asked how the plan addresses transportation of the vulnerable like those in assisted living situations or suffering from Alzheimer's. Wallin said that the issue had been discussed but was not in the plan yet. Wiersum suggested that community groups such as the Boy Scouts or other organizations be specifically trained to assist in helping out this segment of the population.

Thomas asked if the city has trained weather spotters. Wallin said the police and fire departments are trained, but in the metro area weather spotting is not as vital as in rural Minnesota since in most severe weather situations the city receives many calls from the public providing storm related observation.

Wallin pointed out that around ten years ago there was a winter storm in the city where around 400 homes lost power. The city of Eden Prairie was similarly affected so the decision was made to work with the Red Cross to open an emergency shelter. Only three people showed up as most people had friends or family they stayed with.

Thomas said that following a storm residents have asked him if the city will remove fallen trees and branches if they are moved out to the sidewalk. Wallin confirmed on private property it is the property owner's responsibility to remove debris.

Callison asked if the plans take into account in public health situations that responders may not be able to assist because of their own health. Wallin said the plan takes into account the difficulty the city will have making sure there is enough staff available to deal with those type emergency situations. Staff will not only have to take care of themselves, but also their families. He said just getting employees to work will be a challenge. The city continues to work with Eden

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Prairie and Bloomington to respond even more seamlessly in public health situations.

Barone mentioned that a television news station was investigating the functionality of emergency sirens in the state. She complimented the public works department for doing a good job testing the sirens in the city and keeping good records on the system. Wallin agreed and said if a siren is found not working Public Works is quick to repair it.

3. Storm water CIP and proposed fee increase review

Director of engineering Lee Gustafson presented the staff report.

Allendorf said the fee increase might be seen by some as a tax increase and asked what improvements and long term savings the public will see. Gustafson replied that tracking the long term savings is difficult but by doing projects sooner rather than later savings would occur in several areas. As an example by improving roads, maintenance costs are saved as are the costs associated with inflation on materials like asphalt and concrete. Savings also occur in environmental areas where dealing early on with state and federal mandates such as improving water quality standards saves money.

Thomas inquired how far into the future the MSA funds are spent. Gustafson said that a couple of the bigger county projects have used up much of the funds. He said that the retaining walls being used on those projects are much more expensive than the traditional modular block walls. The city is responsible for paying half of the cost of those walls or acquiring the right of way.

Allendorf asked if the 75 cent increase applied only to residents or if the increase also applies to businesses. Gustafson said the 75 cent increase only applies to residents and the business increase is based on a formula in the ordinance. Allendorf then asked why cities like Eden Prairie and St. Louis Park have lower utility fees. Gustafson explained that in Eden Prairie when a new development is built, the streets are constructed with complete storm sewer systems.

Wagner asked if the city needs to do more when proposed redevelopment projects come forward. Gustafson said the city looks at everything at the beginning of a project to save costs in the future. He said the last thing he wants is for a council member to call him and ask why an issue wasn't taken care of when a nearby project is done.

Wiersum said he was concerned about the 18 percent increase in the fee and the nearly 60 percent increase in the three or four years since the utility fees were established. He questioned how the city would get in front of the increases.

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Gustafson replied two years ago the financial impacts of the federal mandates weren't known and that he is confident the city now has a better handle on anticipating those types of mandates.

Callison said she was concerned like in transit discussions it was not possible for the city to build its way out of the issue. Instead of building more pipes and concrete she asked if there may be other alternatives that should be examined. Gustafson said that is already done and when the city can do something that qualifies for a load reduction credit the opportunity is taken. Each project is different however as issues and soil determine what can be done. Callison asked what would occur if the council decided upon a 50 cent increase instead of the proposed 75 cent increase. Gustafson replied staff would come back with a scaled back plan proposal.

Thomas asked if there were other funds with similar deficits. Finance director Merrill King replied other funds may go up one year and down the next. The concern with this structural imbalance is it involves an enterprise fund. Thomas said some residents may complain about the increase because they live on properties where an issue has been categorized as being a nuisance but the resident would only see the fee increase and want the city to do something about the issue on their property. Gustafson pointed out a recent discussion with residents that live by Circuit City where many of the properties have a standing water problem. He said those residents seemed OK when it was explained that a street overlay and a future street reconstruction will in time address the problem. Residents not only want to see projects done but see them done correctly.

Allendorf said he would support the fee increase because it amounts to about a nine dollar per year increase and fixes a structural problem. Barone pointed out that it would actually be less than nine dollars this year since the increase hasn't been implemented yet and it will be prorated based on the date of actual implementation.

Thomas said he too thought the increase looked justified but suggested staff look at the possibility of finding ways to solve some of the small nuisance projects. He also suggested that the council look at all the city's fees and have a discussion about adding them to the levy thus allowing residents to write them off on their taxes. Callison said the council implicitly had that discussion when the storm water fee was originally decided upon.

Wiersum suggested looking at creating a category of storm water issues where the city would assess for improvements if the residents agreed the project was important enough pay for. He said he would support the 75 cent increase.

Wagner said he supported the increase as well but prioritizing money in the fund would continue to be an ongoing issue. He said the session's discussion was

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useful because it showed how each project fit into the categories. Gustafson said preparing for the session helped staff, and in the future, similar presentations would be prepared for the council.

Callison said she too would support the increase. She said she was leery of promising people that nuisance projects would be taken care of.

4. Adjournment

The study session adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David E. Maeda
City Clerk