



# CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Richfield, Minnesota

## City Council Work Session

January 12, 2021

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Regan Gonzalez at 5:45 p.m. virtually via WebEx.

Council Members Present: Maria Regan Gonzalez, Mayor; Ben Whalen; Mary Supple; Simon Trautmann; and Sean Hayford Oleary

Staff Present: Katie Rodriguez, City Manager; Chris Regis, Finance Director; Amy Markle, Recreation Services Director; John Stark, Community Development Director; Mary Tietjen, City Attorney; Blanca Martinez Gavina, Executive Analyst; and Kelly Wynn, Senior Office Assistant.

Others Present: Rebecca Kurtz, Ehlers; Peter Coyle, Co-Counsel Post 435 Attorney; Glen McClusky, Co-Counsel Post 435 Attorney; and Diane Miller, Post 435 Controller

<b>Item #1</b>	<b>COMMUNITY CENTER FEASIBILITY AT THE AMERICAN LEGION PROPERTY</b>
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City Manager Rodriguez introduced the item and provided an overview of the property, described a plan provided by staff and thanked staff for their time putting the plan together.

Director Markle provided a historical background of the current Richfield Community Center; the Parks Master Plan; results from a 2020 community survey; considerations noted from other communities; factors associated with costs; assessing needs; meeting needs in the short, medium and long term; and planning for the future.

Director Regis described the range of estimated costs to construct a new community center; project funding options; impact on the tax levy; tax levy impact on residents; estimated annual operations; and impact with a \$1millio subsidy.

Director Markle spoke of Richfield's current socioeconomics.

Director Regis discussed other considerations such as the impact on debt limit, future facility capital maintenance and impact on the bond rating.

Director Markle spoke of moving forward which included recovering from the pandemic.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked about buying the land now with the possibility of not building on it or building at a later date.

City Manager Rodriguez explained neither of those options would meet the needs of Post 435.

Attorney Coyle stated he supported staff recommendation but believed Post 435 will need to be a private sale. Post 435 wanted to be clear with their intentions and forward with the future of its members.

Council Member Whalen wanted to discuss the pertinent need for a new nature center and options at the current site.

Director Markle explained how the previous Recreation Services Director was strategic in the maintenance of the current community center but it is a dated building. She spoke of how it could be earmarked for future construction as it has a good location and is easily accessible. However, Wood Lake Nature Center is in desperate need of improvements and is currently about a new or renovated community center at this current time.

Council Member Supple reiterated that it does not seem financially possible to construct a brand new community center but would like to see a possible partnership with Wood Lake Nature Center and a facilities assessment.

Council Member Trautmann thanked staff for the hours spent and for the thorough presentation. He assumed with such a high cost to construct a new community center that it would require a bond and that is not currently a high priority. He then asked about a possible partnership with the school district.

Director Markle stated that has not yet been discussed with the schools but is an avenue worth pursuing. She spoke of high schoolers that have reached out about wanting an indoor space to play and work out.

City Manager Rodriguez stated she would like to set expectations that this would not be an immediate item but would look more into 2022.

Council Member Whalen echoed that the financial piece is clear but also stated that raising taxes is not always a bad thing as it invests in things the community needs. However, raising taxes 25% or more is not an option. He spoke of the need for banquet and meeting spaces in the community but with the pandemic it is unclear when large indoor gatherings could resume. He asked about what Post 435 would like to see in the new development including Veteran's housing, meeting space, etc.

Attorney McClusky spoke of how Post 435 would be more than happy to continue discussions around making space available to the community.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez explained the immediate issue concerns the small area plan and long term planning and it is not financially responsible for the city to purchase this area. She spoke of how things have changed due to the pandemic and created drastic challenges. This project is an example of just how tough things are right now and how this could put a lot of burden on city staff during an already challenging pandemic. She also spoke of how this is an item that needs to be addressed now for the community and unfortunately the answer can't always be 'yes.'

Council Member Hayford Oleary appreciated the information and spoke of how this will be a good way to build the tax base and create discussions with the community of why the city shouldn't borrow to build a new community center right now.

Council Member Trautmann echoed comments from Mayor Regan Gonzalez and Council Member Hayford Oleary in that the capacity staff can efficiently work at and the city tax base are both extremely important.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez expressed her excitement with the presentation provided and to be able to plan a future for the community.

Council Member Supple stated she is looking forward to going into the ice arena to see the renovations when tours become possible.

Director Markle spoke of the renovations wrapping up and staff will look into providing a virtual tour of the renovations.

City Manager Rodriguez gave a recap of discussion from the work session in that the city will not pursue buying the Post 435 property; more research will be done to follow Director Markle’s direction provided in the presentation; and avenues will be explored in partnering with the school district in possibility of a new community center.

Director Stark explained how in initial conversations, the location at Veteran’s Park has been eluded to a ‘campus’ with both private and public amenities. He spoke of looking at the whole site as a puzzle in that all the smaller pieces need to fit together which includes both Veteran’s Park and the surrounding buildings. He stated public engagement is extremely important but will be very difficult due to the pandemic. Most engagements will need to be virtual and that does not fit the needs of all the community members. He asked for ideas from staff and Council on how to be inclusive for as many residents as possible.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez asked about Post 435 working with a potential developer to meet the needs of the members.

Director Stark stated potential developers would like to see it as a cohesive picture. He spoke of the desire to have the park amenities to be as or more available to residents and not have private structures hinder that access.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez thanked everyone for attending and for the robust discussion regarding the future of the community.


**ADJOURNMENT**

The work session was adjourned by unanimous consent at 6:47 p.m.

Date Approved: January 26, 2021

  
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Kelly Wynn  
Senior Office Assistant

  
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Maria Regan Gonzalez  
Mayor

  
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Katie Rodriguez  
City Manager