



CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Richfield, Minnesota

City Council Work Session

April 25, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Supple called the work session to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Bartholomew Room.

Council Members Present: Mary Supple, Sharon Christensen, Simon Trautmann, Sean Hayford Oleary, Ben Whalen

Staff Present: Katie Rodriguez, City Manager; Dustin Leslie, City Clerk; Sack Thongvanh, Assistant City Manager; Melissa Poehlman, Community Development Director; Jenell Wood, Assistant Fire Chief; Jay Henthorne, Police Chief; Amy Markle, Recreation Services Director; Kristin Asher, Public Works Director.

ITEM #1	CITY COUNCIL AND STAFF QUARTERLY MEETING-POLICY TOPIC PROPOSALS AND TENTATIVE 2024 WORKPLANS
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Mayor Supple introduced the topic to the audience and spoke about limited resources and fitting priorities within the city’s work plan.

City Manager Rodriguez presented the process in drafting the priorities and spoke about how they were ranked. She also touched on the work plan for 2023-2024 as well as action steps. She then introduced Proposal #1: Additional Renter Protections. Council Member Whalen summarized the priority to the rest of the Council.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked Council Member Whalen if he was hearing about issues from renters in the community and what led to him putting forward this priority. Council Member Whalen spoke about criminal background checks and how the long timeline made it impossible for some people to even apply for rental units. He also spoke about lack-of-notice for evictions and displacement of people due to the high upfront costs of moving in.

Community Development Director Poehlman spoke about using third party housing navigators to be more proactive with renters and to find out the issues renters are facing. She also spoke about looking into what other communities are doing as well as watching what happens at the Legislature in terms of renter protections.

Council Member Hayford Oleary spoke about where Minnesota was at compared to other states in terms of renter protections and the city is lagging behind.

Mayor Supple stated it was important to strengthen renter protections. She further stated that working with a housing navigator would put the city in the right direction.

City Manager Rodriguez introduced Proposal #2: Institutional Housing Ownership and summarized it for Council. She noted there was currently not a problem of investors buying up homes in Richfield but that staff would continue to monitor.

Mayor Supple stated she brought forward this issue because there have been issues across the nation and wanted to make sure it would not happen in Richfield. She noted that required inspections have helped the issue and agreed with staff continuing to monitor the issue to avoid future problems.

Police Chief Henthorne spoke about inspections and the high levels of code compliance within the city and how it ensures fewer issues for the future.

Community Development Director Poehlman stated there was a bill at the Legislature which would help with the issue as it would define what an investor was. While she did not agree with all of the wording in the bill, she noted it would be a step in the right direction.

Council Member Trautmann spoke about Airbnbs stating that he used to be supportive of them but is now worrying they could change the dynamic of neighborhoods. He spoke about measures taken in Bloomington about Airbnbs.

Community Development Director Poehlman stated it was difficult to track Airbnbs in the city as rental licenses do not distinguish between short-term and long-term rentals. There was also a discussion about the city's tourism tax and ensuring that Airbnbs were paying it.

City Manager Rodriguez introduced Proposal #3: State of the Community Event. She noted that it was likely too late to have an event in 2023 but could schedule one for spring 2024. Due to limited resources, there would have to be cuts to other programming such as Minutes with the Mayor.

Mayor Supple spoke about attending the Three Rivers Park District State of the Park event and that is was a good way to showcase their work. She further stated it would be a good opportunity to have multiple organizations within the community have a voice.

Council Member Hayford Oleary stated it would be worth doing if it could be balanced with other resources. He noted it would pair well with other current initiatives such as strategic planning.

Council Member Whalen stated he did not have strong views either way on the idea but thinks a forum in which the community can be showcased would be a good idea.

Council Member Christensen stated that bringing in community partners would be a good idea because it will give lesser known organizations a chance to become better known.

Council Member Trautmann noted it may be a good idea to piggyback this with another event to increase attendance.

City Manager Rodriguez introduced Proposal #4: Eliminate Parking Requirements. She spoke of concerns regarding safety, staff time, and resident push back which could affect other strategic planning initiatives.

Council Member Hayford Oleary spoke about the proposal and stated he was not suggesting an all-or-none proposal. He also noted that he hears a lot of complaints about parking.

Community Development Director Poehlman stated staff was looking at solutions for spillover parking and noted a lot of departments would be involved in creating a plan for eliminating parking requirements.

Public Works Director Asher spoke about parking difficulties during the winter and issues residents face when there is limited parking during snow emergencies.

Police Chief Henthorne talked about how common parking complaints were for the city and that there were around 1,200 parking complaints out of 40,000 total calls for service over the course of the previous year. He further noted that the amount of complaints were increasing each year since there was less and less parking available. He also spoke about the difficulties of plowing and towing during snow storms due to the narrowing of the roads.

Council Member Whalen stated that streets in Richfield are wide and that while it may affect some residents ability to park, he did not see it as a reason to keep parking requirements in place. He also stated that 1,200 out of 40,000 calls did not seem like a lot.

Police Chief Henthorne stated that 1,200 out of 40,000 may not seem like a lot but adds up to 100 calls a month which takes up a lot of time for officers since they respond to every call.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked the Chief how many calls were actually violations compared to perceived violations? Chief Henthorne stated he had no data on how many were actually violations but that officers work to educate residents in all instances.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked if staff could research the areas where it would work better to have less parking requirements. He stated that he could see why a 100% elimination would be too much for a lot of residents but argued it could be a way to get more small businesses in the city as well as affordable housing. He spoke about specific examples he sent out to the group prior to the meeting.

Council Member Trautmann said he was supportive of looking at where it would make most sense to change parking limits.

Mayor Supple stated she did not support eliminating parking minimums and that a better way would be to look at areas where it would be more effective and looking at variances on a case-by-case basis. She further stated that residents were concerned about barriers for certain groups with elimination of parking minimums. She also spoke about winter parking requirements and emergency vehicles not being able to get through.

Council Member Whalen stated he was generally supportive of this proposal but that doing it all at once was not practical. He stated that eliminating parking minimums was not eliminating parking in the city. He also spoke about climate change and that society needs to change their habits in order to keep the planet habitable. He asked staff what specific parking ratios were problematic in the city.

Community Development Director Poehlman stated that Beacon housing developments have not used all the parking. She stated fast casual type restaurants will often get variances for parking requirements. She further stated that there were not enough staff resources as most of the department's work was legally required work. She said that if the Council wanted to make this proposal a priority, that the department would have to move other priorities over. She said that there have been restaurants that the city has worked with on a case-by-case basis with parking variances.

Mayor Supple stated that the city could advocate for more transit in the area by putting it on the list of legislative priorities.

Council Member Hayford Oleary argued that transit will never be able to compete with cars while everything is catered to driving. He noted that transit has improved and parking minimums should reflect that.

City Manager Rodriguez spoke about the variance process as well as lack of sidewalks making it more difficult to put in reduced parking minimums.

Council Member Whalen said it seemed like the Community Development Department needed more staffing to help with big picture items. He noted that many of the priorities of the strategic plan included community development and that they were important priorities. City Manager Rodriguez spoke about available staffing resources, support from other departments for community development projects, and reduced revenues related to redevelopment.

Mayor Supple and City Manager Rodriguez summarized the conversation and spoke about next steps.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Supple adjourned the work session at 6:53 pm

Date Approved: May 9, 2023



Dustin Leslie
City Clerk



Mary B. Supple
Mayor



Katie Rodriguez
City Manager