



CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Richfield, Minnesota

City Council Work Session

May 9, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Supple called the work session to order at 5:18 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; Kristin Asher, Public Works Director; Joe Powers, City Engineer; Matt Hardegger, Transportation Engineer; Jay Henthorne, Police Chief; Chris Link, Deputy Public Works Director; Rachel Lindholm, Sustainability Specialist; and Chris Swanson, Management Analyst

ITEM #1	STAFF IS SEEKING DIRECTION ON A PROPOSED INCREASE TO ELECTRIC AND GAS FRANCHISE FEES AND THE STREETLIGHT USER FEE TO HELP FUND RIGHT-OF-WAY IMPROVEMENTS, SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS, AND TO COVER ELECTRICITY COSTS FOR THE STREETLIGHTING SYSTEM.
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Deputy Director Link provided a summary of the items for discussion. He talked about the city's current fee structure and outlined the rising cost in utilities in recent years. Deputy Director Link reviewed the proposed increase in fees, including what projects would be supported along with the \$50,000 earmarked for sustainability projects.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked if staff could provide an outline of how the fees are structured. Deputy Director Link provided a summary of the current fee structure, specifically highlighting the difference between the electric and gas franchise fees and the streetlight user fee. Council Member Hayford Oleary noted that other cities are using these fees for dedicated bike ped funding and would be in support of increasing the amount to \$250,000 a year for this work. Director Asher said some of this funding is already included in the franchise fee but would be willing to explore additional options.

Council Member Whalen asked if there was a way to do a sliding scale for the fee. Specifically, he was wondering if there was a way to require higher energy users to pay a larger portion. He talked about how the City of Portland is using a model with a sliding scale and that this has raised a significant amount of funds. Director Asher said staff will do some more research.

Council Member Whalen asked staff why we haven't done a standard 3-5% annual increase each year to reflect that pricing has continued to increase. Deputy Director Link stated that state statute restricts when the fees can be increased.

Mayor Supple asked how multi units are billed. Deputy Director Link detailed the way these units are billed. Mayor Supple asked if the recent increase in utility costs was because of an unfunded mandate from the state. Deputy Director Link said that is not the major driver but there are additional costs from state decisions.

Council Member Hayford O'Leary asked what projects have been funded so far from these franchise fees as he would like to see these funds spent on projects that benefit the whole community. Director Asher said that the funds cover rejuvenation work done on the street. Council Member Hayford O'Leary said he understood but wanted to be transparent that multi units are paying a bigger portion of the bill.

Staff outlined the next steps with the implementation of these new fees. Staff expects this new rate to go into effect January 1, 2024.

ITEM #2	REFRESHER ON LOCAL SPEED LIMITS, STAFF'S ONGOING SPEED LIMIT STUDY, AND AN UPDATED STAFF RECOMMENDATION FOR DISCUSSION.
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Transportation Engineer Hardegger provided a summary of previous discussions, including the history of speed limits in the city and what can be regulated per state statute. He provided a broad summary of what other cities are doing around lowering speed limits along with a refresher of the work session held in September of 2022.

Staff provided the council with their recommendation that the speed limit in the city should be 25 mph. He went through the methodology for how staff came to this conclusion. Staff noted the entire city is residential and having a standard speed limit in Richfield would not create "high speed zones" in racially diverse areas. Engineer Hardegger provided information on why staff is not recommending 20 mph as the adopted limit. He noted the proposed speed will create an opportunity for more voluntary compliance. He also talked about one of the long-term goals of the city is to support active transportation. He asked how the council would define success for this project.

Council Member Trautmann talked about his goals for this work. Specifically, he wanted to see increased safety. He asked about the benefit of a 25-mph speed limit if folks were already driving this speed. Staff noted this reduction helps push down the median speed of everyone. Council Member Trautmann asked if there would be any impact on the top 5% of speeders. Staff said there is mixed data around this question as the speed reductions are new. Staff did note that other cities found the median speeds stayed the same but the odds that someone was speeding decreased when speeds were reduced. Council Member Christensen noted she hears a lot of speeding around the STEM school. She asked if staff had an education and enforcement plan in place. Staff said they do not have a plan yet but would come up with a robust education campaign. Staff did say they would work with other cities that have done this work to come up with best practices. Chief Henthorne noted that with a reduction in most speeds they can better focus on the small number of habitual speeders.

Council Member Hayford O'Leary confirmed with staff that the recommendation was a lowered speed. He asked staff on looking at setting a 20-mph limit, particularly in some areas where we already see reduced speeds, in the future. Engineer Hardegger agreed there were some neighborhoods where folks already drive slower. He said that having a neighborhood-by-neighborhood speed limit would be challenging from a messaging and enforcement aspect. He did discuss some of the work that can be done in the interim to continue to reduce speeds. Council Member Hayford O'Leary thanked staff for the response, he did say he would prefer 20-mph, but would be willing to support a 25-mph standard. He also asked staff to look at how stop signs are placed to see if this can impact speeds. He felt strongly that 77th Street should not be over 30-mph. He noted that there are many lower income families living on this strip of road and that they should also receive

the benefit of the reduced speed limits. Staff said they would investigate this in the future. Engineer Hardegger said a speed study would be done sometime later this year in that area and that one of the challenges that has been found with this discussion is there is not good data on speeds across the city.

Council Member Whalen thought the city should also focus time on making pedestrian crossings safer. He specifically spoke of the crossing at Chicago as an area of focus. He did agree that he would like to see 20-mph across the city but recognized that lowering the speed limit does not make people decrease their speed. He also wondered how much it would cost to re-sign the city. Staff said that this cost would be minimal as most of the work is done in house.

Council Member Trautmann spotlighted 77th Street on the map. He noted that 20% of residents live along this corridor, next to the highway. He wanted to advocate for decreasing the speed on 77th to make it safer for kids and the families in this corridor. City Engineer Powers noted the Chicago Ave crossing statement may be improved in the upcoming 494 project. Staff reiterated that this would be an area of particular focus. Director Asher mentioned the play between finding the right speed for a road while not creating additional traffic. Council Member Trautmann said he really felt strongly about decreasing 77th to 30-mph and, for the sake of safety, the council should do what they can to make it happen regardless of the pain. Council Member Hayford O'Leary was supportive. Mayor Supple said she was pleased about the updated proposal. She felt the multi-tier system presented at the last work session would have been confusing to residents and challenging to enforce. She talked broadly about wanting to keep the speeds down across the entire city, specifically looking at roads like 77th.

Council Member Whalen asked about earlier comments regarding designing roads to be driven slower. He asked if there were options to continue to decrease traffic speeds without reconstructing roads. Staff said there are ways to add additional items to the road to help with this.

Mayor Supple said her main goal was safety. Council Member Christensen agreed; she talked about what she had seen on other streets that may help slow down drivers. Staff were willing to look at other options to reduce speeds in the future. Staff noted there is always a balance in terms of what can be done and the cost of the upgrades. Council Member Whalen noted this was also climate action as slower drivers create less emission and the city should incentivize walking, biking, or public transit. He talked about how slower speed limits may encourage other forms of transportation. Council Member Hayford O'Leary asked about how the city could lower speed limits on county roads. Staff said they would investigate. Council Member Whalen asked that we include county roads in future maps.

Mayor Supple asked if roundabouts will still be 15-mph. Staff said the recommended speed limit for a roundabout is still 15-mph.

Council Member Hayford O'Leary congratulated staff for their work on this item.

Staff provided a final summary of the discussion and a timeline for the next steps. Staff planned to start looking at an education strategy sooner rather than later. Implementation will be in the fall of 2023-spring of 2024.

Director Asher asked if there needed to be more public discussion on this or if the council was comfortable moving forward with this program. Council Member Christensen asked if this timeline worked with the speed limit discussions with the county. Director Asher said the city can start that conversation immediately and this work can move forward.

Mayor Supple asked if plans to talk with MnDOT about their current construction schedule and the impact this will have on their work. Staff said they have thought about this item and believe the impact will be minimal, as the MnDOT projects do not redirect any traffic to city roads so there should be little impact. Staff will reach out to make sure MnDOT is aware of the work.

Council Member Whalen asked about the current traffic count maps and the locations of the speed surveys. Staff said the surveys are based on complaints or state aid programs. Engineer Hardegger noted that staff plans to provide more random sampling moving forward.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Supple adjourned the work session at 6:47 pm

Date Approved: May 23, 2023



Chris Swanson
Management Analyst



Mary B. Supple
Mayor



Katie Rodriguez
City Manager