



# CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Richfield, Minnesota

## City Council Work Session

### November 22, 2022

<b>CALL TO ORDER</b>
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The work session was called to order by Mayor Regan Gonzalez at 5:48 p.m. in the Bartholomew Room.

*Council Members Present:* Maria Regan Gonzalez, Mayor; Simon Trautmann (Arrived 5:50); Sean Hayford Oleary; and Ben Whalen

*Council Members Absent:* Mary Supple

*Staff Present:* Katie Rodriguez, City Manager; Amy Markle, Recreation Services Director; Rachel Lindholm, Sustainability Specialist; Sack Thongvanh, Assistant City Manager; and Chris Swanson, Management Analyst

Mayor Regan Gonzalez introduced the topic for discussion for the work session and turned it over to Recreation Director Markle.

<b>ITEM #1</b>	<b>ONE YEAR REFLECTIONS ON THE CITY'S ORGANIZED COLLECTION PROGRAM AND THE CITY'S PARTNERS IN ENERGY PROGRESS</b>
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Director Markle introduced the first topic for the night. She gave a summary of the organized collection rollout, including issues experienced and implementation process.

Specialist Lindholm went over what the organized collection program currently looks like for residents, city staff, and the haulers. This included an overview of communication, hauler relationship, and more long-term program planning. She provided an overview for what the future will hold for residents including pricing, educational pieces and general underlying improvements to the program and stated the program is in a good place.

Council Member Whalen asked about customer service stipulations in the contract. He was wondering if the standards set in the contract are being followed. Specialist Lindholm said that it depends on the hauler and when you call. She recognized sometimes there is no wait, but sometimes there are longer waiting times. She stated that if there is a large wait, we ask that residents contact the city directly.

Council Member Trautmann said the updates were great to hear. He said he has quit hearing complaints or issues regarding the collection program. He assumes that if people are not reaching out to the council staff must be doing a good job. He asked about how much of staff's time is currently

devoted to customer service. Specialist Lindholm said she probably gets around five calls a day now, some days more and some days less. She acknowledges there are significantly less phone calls than at the start of the program. Council Member Trautmann noted that five calls are still a lot. Specialist Lindholm acknowledged that is true, but noted that she has a good system set up to make the follow up to the calls quick and efficient.

Council Member Hayford O'Leary asked what they should be telling residents if they have an issue? He noted that the initial messaging at the start of the program was to have residents call their hauler. He wondered if that message has changed.

Specialist Lindholm said at this point it's fine to have residents contact her if they have already had issues working with their hauler on the problem. She said at this point the phone call amount is manageable.

Council Member Hayford O'Leary noted that he also has not received a lot of calls recently about the collection program. He thinks he may get one call a month about the organics charge, but he has utilized the time to talk with the callers about this specific program.

Council Member Trautmann also noted he is seeing less complaints regarding the program online. He noted how useful it is for the city to be able to step in and help if a resident is having issues with their hauler.

Specialist Lindholm then presented some general findings from the past year. She provided a summary of the organics collection including the tonnage for the year. Specialist Lindholm went over the contamination rates and weights the haulers are seeing in their collections. She provided a summary of most common contaminants and provided a plan for additional education the city will be doing in the future to address these problems.

Director Markle then provided a summary of the delinquent assessment process for outstanding trash bills. She went over the total amounts of assessments at the start of the process and where the city is at for a final certification list to be sent to the county.

Specialist Lindholm then presented a few final notes on the city's collection program. She wanted to thank council for their continued support for an anaerobic digestion at Hennepin County. She noted that the city needs to ensure we continue to have space to responsibly process our organics. This item is included in the city's 2023 legislative priorities.

Specialist Lindholm provided a summary of the recent recycling commodity study performed by the haulers. She noted there was a lot of positive news from the sorts. The haulers did see contaminants, like plastic bags, but generally the recycling stream was clean. She noted that based on the commodity study results, the city will see a credit on their total recycling bill, leading to a decrease in cost for residents.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez asked about a question raised when this new program was in the planning phases. Specialist Lindholm provided a summary of the resolutions of those conversations.

Council Member Whalen mentioned how he is even learning things about the recycling world. He believes the more we share educational materials on problem items the better.

Specialist Lindholm presented the overall lessons learned from the first year of the program. She went over the continued work that needs to be done on the data management side. She said that move in, move out is challenging, and the city will continue to work with the haulers to improve the process. She also noted that staff has also been contacted by several other cities on how Richfield implemented the process. She feels like other cities view Richfield's experience as a success.

Director Markle provided a final program summary of feedback and concerns staff is still hearing about the program. Mostly the issues are around missed pickups, pricing and the organics charge. Director Markle highlighted areas staff will continue to work on in the future. Specifically, the city plans to do more work on organics and reusing bulky item collection.

Specialist Lindholm mentioned that, based on the contract, residents will see a small increase for 2023 in their collection costs.

Council Member Hayford O'Leary said that with the decrease in staff time spent on residents' complaints, this may be a good time to update the website. He noted there is still a lot of information relating to the implementation of the new program up on the site. He thinks it would be nice to mimic the Hennepin County guide.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez congratulated staff on the amazing job they are doing. She felt the city is the shining example for all the work that has been accomplished. She also felt like this was the smoothest organized process in history! Specialist Lindholm thanked all staff and community members who were involved.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez turned the presentation over to Specialist Lindholm for the second topic of the night.

Specialist Lindholm introduced the topic and provided a recap on the activities and data for the Partners in Energy (PiE) program over the last year. The PiE plan was originally written by staff, community members, and business owners. She provided an overview of some of the programs and successes the city has seen since the PiE plan started. Specialist Lindholm then outlined future programs the city may work on.

Council Member Whalen asked Specialist Lindholm if there was data on why more people were not participating in programs like Xcel Energy's Windsource program. He felt like this program is significantly easier and cheaper than installing solar cells on a home. He talked about how moving to wind source is such a small additional increase in cost, it surprised him that more people do not participate. Specialist Lindholm provided some additional clarification on the programs available to residents. She did not know of any specific research on the subjects but discussed how Xcel is looking at the future of the program. Specialist Lindholm talked about how the city could look at doing more outreach on the Windsource program.

Specialist Lindholm went over some long-term goals outlined in the PiE plan including EV planning and other energy efforts. She said that city staff is committed to continued work on the plan in the future.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez shared a response to Council Member Whalen's prior comments. She said that even she didn't know about the Windsource program. She noted how many of these programs are hidden in the small language on the bill. They are a lot less likely than solar energy to be discussed.

Council Member Hayford O'Leary asked if the city had any estimate for what the average household is doing for energy efficiency in Richfield. Specialist Lindholm said she was unsure if there is a way to identify a base level for energy efficiency work. She noted that many people are doing the small things but far less people are dedicated to more substantial projects. Council Member Hayford O'Leary said that as a consumer it would be good to have some stories on some of this work. He noted that many times the costs savings are spotlighted with these programs but there is a certain level of comfort that comes from many of these upgrades.

Council Member Whalen mentioned the sustainability commission is working on a sustainability resource guide for residents to use. This guide would have basic info on renewable energy programs, links to general info about the programs, and points of contact if residents want to learn more.


Mayor Regan Gonzalez thanked staff for their work.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Regan Gonzalez adjourned the work session at 6:46 p.m.

Date Approved: December 13, 2022

  
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Maria Regan Gonzalez  
Mayor

  
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Kari Sinning  
City Clerk

  
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Katie Rodriguez  
City Manager