

**CITY OF EXCELSIOR
Hennepin County, Minnesota**

MINUTES

**City Council Work Session
Monday, April 18, 2011
5:30 p.m.**

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Mayor Ruehl called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. Council members present: Berghorst (arrived at 5:38 p.m.), Caron, Fulkerson, Miller (arrived at 5:39 p.m.), and Mayor Ruehl. Also Present: City Manager Luger, City Attorney Staunton, Finance Director Carlson, and City Clerk Johnson.

2. Agenda Approval

Caron moved, Fulkerson seconded, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried 3/0.

3. Charter Commission Dialogue and Proposal

Luger said that at the April 4, 2011 City Council meeting, Charter Commission Chair Lloyd Bratland expressed interest in having discussions with the Council on a potential ordinance or Charter amendment to require the City's current long-term financial management planning practices be continued. The City Council agreed to discuss the matter further at a work session.

Luger said City Attorney Staunton, Finance Director Carlson, and she had drafted language to facilitate the Council's discussion. She noted that Charter Commission Chair Bratland had also provided information to staff today, which was e-mailed to the City Council earlier.

Mayor Ruehl said that there are three pieces to this. First, there is the discussion that Mark Bowers started with the petition relative to a rolling 5-year plan. There is also language that the Charter Commission is looking at and language that staff has put together. Some of the questions are whether the language should refer to a long term financial plan, should there be a specific number of years or a minimum number of years, and how should the specific elements of the plan be described. Then there is the question of whether the language should be memorialized as an ordinance or an amendment to the City's Charter.

He suggested that the plan be discussed first. He asked Finance Director Carlson if the City has a plan for projects that go out further than five years. Carlson stated that some of the items in the City's plan go out as far as 10 years.

3. Charter Commission Dialogue and Proposal - (Continued)

Luger said that Chair Bratland made it clear to staff earlier that day that the Charter Commission is looking at a charter amendment not just an ordinance.

Caron said the language that staff prepared seemed vague. She is not sure whether it should be an ordinance or a charter amendment, she is also not sure where to start. The language does not answer all of the questions that the Charter Commission wants to have addressed. What portions of the budget should be incorporated into the long term financial plan?

Mayor Ruehl said he doesn't see anything being requested from what the City is already doing. Berghorst said the major gap is the narrative portion.

Carlson said that there is extensive narrative in the annual budget and there will also be narrative with the long term financial plan when that is complete. She would like to get to the point where the long term financial plan is part of the annual budget and there is narrative for everything.

Lloyd Bratland, Charter Commission Chair, said he put together a list of items for conversation. The group as a whole needs to identify how the long term financial plan will be communicated to the public. Will it be a hard copy or put on the City's website? People can print information off of the website, but the website is not user-friendly and needs work. There should be a schedule so everyone knows when things will be completed. Should there be monthly, quarterly, and/or annual budgets on the website? He realizes that there is a simplified budget piece on the City's website, but it does not have narrative. Having a synopsis might help communications. Providing quarterly reports is also another opportunity to keep people informed. He doesn't think it matters if there is a 5 or 10 year long term financial plan, but there needs to be narrative and the assumptions that were used need to be communicated. He said the City's Enterprise Funds are not included on the City's website or anywhere else. The 10-Year Capital Improvement Program is on the City's website, but there isn't any detail on how it will be funded. He thinks something has to be provided to give people a macro view of the City's financial status and narrative written in a way that anyone can understand it. The City has a great base, but more is needed.

The Council and Charter Commission members discussed elements from the City of Lino Lakes and Mounds View's websites. All of the cities have the same governmental report requirements, regardless of their size. There is a lot of information on the City of Mounds View's website and some thought it was very detailed and easy to understand.

3. Charter Commission Dialogue and Proposal - (Continued)

Luger suggested that the Council focus on the 5-year plan because that is the first piece that the Charter Commission had requested. She said that if everyone tries to focus on all of the pieces it will take longer to implement.

Heidi Viesturs, Charter Commission member, said that Charter Commissioner Finch and she had spoken with the Charter Commission Chair, Finance Director, Mayor, and City Administrator for the City of Mounds View specific to the 5-year financial plan. City officials looked at what the City was already doing and wanted to be able to fulfill the expectations of the citizens. There was a disconnect in the communications on the timing, what is included, when citizens can expect the information, process, and procedure. The Charter Commission met with City Councilmembers and staff and then memorialized the dates of publication and what would be included. She knows Luger and Carlson did a comparison between what Excelsior does and what Mounds View does. The questions are what is the City doing already and what can the City do to build the trust with the community. She said citizens don't feel they have access or know how to get access to financial information. The City of Mounds View has modified their Charter a couple of times to make the items easier to work with for the City Council and staff.

Mayor Ruehl said the City is already doing many of the items listed on the City of Mounds View's website and more in other areas.

Charter Commissioner Viesturs said that the City of Mounds View does a 5-year financial plan, but it does not coincide with their budget.

Mayor Ruehl said everyone also needs to be mindful on what can be reasonably achieved with the City's limited staff. He asked what other pieces besides the narrative would be missing from the information the City already has.

Steve Finch, Charter Commission member, said that if you look on the City of Mounds View's website their 5-year plan is 24 pages. Excelsior has a one page PDF spreadsheet document. Mounds View has more information accessible than what Excelsior has. The Moundview City Administrator has a message for the narrative on fiscal terms and work programs linking the programs to the goals of the City. Excelsior should outline proposed policies and programs, and each year it should have how each policy and program will impact the City financially. The City of Excelsior will need to make some hard decisions over the next few years, so he doesn't think a 5-year plan will be adequate.

Carlson said that only the General Fund has been put on the City's website at this time because it was the only fund approved in 2010. The other funds

3. Charter Commission Dialogue and Proposal - (Continued)

are not on the City's website yet because the Council recently approved the budgets for these funds. Staff has been in the process of making a lot of improvements to the City's budgets, such as going from a 200 page budget book to a much smaller document. She noted that the City's website is also new. She said it's not possible to make all of these changes in a matter of one year.

Charter Commission Chair Bratland said he supports the work that Carlson has done. He said everyone needs to agree on what information is needed and then layout a plan on how to get there. A cost as well as a timeframe for providing the information needs to be established.

Mayor Ruehl reviewed some of the component pieces on the City of Mounds View's website. He noted that Excelsior has a lot of the same components that Mounds View has, but they aren't on the City's website. He agrees that there is not a lot of narrative.

Berghorst said that the Council agrees there is work that can be done to improve communications.

Mayor Ruehl said the City can get more information, organize it better, and explain it better on the City's website. He said the assumptions have been discussed in the budget work sessions so it would not be an extraordinary task to memorialize that.

Luger said staff is just finalizing the new format for the budget and providing it to the Council to review and approve. Once the new format is approved the new budget will be placed on the City's website. There is also a letter that summarizes the year in the new budget document.

Caron asked what the next steps should be.

Mayor Ruehl said the City of Excelsior has all of the documents that he sees on the City of Mounds View's website. All of the information has been in the City's annual budget book, so that document can easily be scanned and put on the City's website.

Mark Bowers, 194 West Lake Street, said his only concern with putting everything on the City's website is that there are a number of seniors who do not have Internet access. There needs to be a way for those individuals to receive the information so they can be informed. Mayor Ruehl said to put together a publication and mailing can be very expensive. Bowers said it could be just an overview with a snapshot in time. He's not suggesting that the City provide an entire budget book. Maybe information could be included

3. Charter Commission Dialogue and Proposal - (Continued)

in a newsletter. Mayor Ruehl said it's possible for the City to make the information available at the City offices and possibly place a short summary in the City's newsletter.

Carlson said that there are quarterly budget reports in the City Council agenda packets. Charter Commission Chair Bratland asked why that information couldn't be placed on the City's website. Charter Commissioner Finch said it's not enough just to put the information out there; the information also needs to be understandable.

Mark Bowers said the information that is important to the layperson is different than the information that the Council is receiving.

Caron asked where do we go from here. Mayor Ruehl said there are items that the City already has that can be put out on the City's website and there are other items that will take some time to prepare.

Berghorst asked if staff can identify what is already available and put it out on the website right now. Mayor Ruehl said staff should be able to scan some of the items and get them on the website and then begin working on the narrative. He would estimate that it might take around 3 months to complete these pieces.

Charter Commission Chair Bratland suggested doing the process in reverse and start with writing clear narrative and adding it to what is already available. When that part is done, then identify what pieces are missing.

Miller said that staff has done a lot of work over the years putting the financial data together and people need to understand that staff does not have a lot of extra time in their day to put more information together. The language that is developed should be placed in the Charter so it's codified for future City Councils. He would like to see staff go back and create a project plan with a timeline that they feel is reasonable.

Mayor Ruehl said he agrees, but he still wants to find a way to communicate what the City already has to the citizens as soon as possible. Miller said he agrees, but that still is a lot of work and takes time to download it on the website. He does not want to micro-manage or decrease the flexibility of the Council with what gets placed in the Charter.

Caron said there are two different things being discussed. The first item is to put out on the website the documents that the City already has and then

3. Charter Commission Dialogue and Proposal - (Continued)

work on the language that the City would consider putting into the Charter. She believes the City of Mounds View's language flowed better. She asked how the Council wants to start that process. Should the Council have more work sessions on this or should there be a Council work group?

Miller said the first item would be to put items on the website and then have staff work on the language for the Charter. Staff will need to put together a project plan with the tasks and timetable.

Luger said that staff can put together a plan with a timeline on how soon items can be completed and put on the website and how long it will take to develop language for the Charter. Staff will have the plan ready for the May 2, 2011 Council meeting.

Charter Commission Chair Bratland said the Charter Commission is willing to assist with the language for the Charter.

Mark Bowers said, as the initiator of the petition, he started this process in October of last year. If this process is going to take another three months it starts to send a message of lack of expediency. Another three months would be July and that's almost a year since it was initiated.

Caron said that this is the Council's first meeting on this. She noted that the City has staff time allocated on a lot of projects that are already lined up. Realistically, unless they dropped everything three months is a reasonable amount of time based on her years of experience on the City Council.

Miller said three months seems like a reasonable amount of time to him also. He said putting together the communication and getting what the City already has out on the website won't take as long.

Charter Commissioner Viesturs suggested that the City Council make announcements at City Council meetings so people who watch the meetings and don't have access to a computer are notified when things are available.

Bob Bolles, Charter Commission member, suggested that Charter Commissioners Bratland and Finch and Mark Bowers take the Mounds View Charter, budget, and narrative as a basis to begin with and possibly have a staff member work with them to help facilitate getting the work done.

Berghorst said to improve communications maybe the City could have City Council items readily available for citizens at the Library. Carlson said the City does have documents available in the Library.

3. Charter Commission Dialogue and Proposal - (Continued)

Miller said he agrees with Bolles. It might be helpful to have a smaller group help with the research that staff needs to do. Mayor Ruehl said he hesitates trying to form another committee. Staff can put a plan together and work the plan. He doesn't want that timeline extended out with all sort of meetings because it will take up too much time.

Charter Commissioner Viesturs said one thing she had learned with meeting with the other cities is that it isn't fair not to get input from staff. To the extent that the Charter Commission will be working on language it would improve the process and save time with staff input.

Luger asked the Council to clarify the task for staff. The Council asked staff to put together a detailed work plan for completing the financial items and placing them on the City's website that the Council can review at the May 2, 2011 Council meeting.

4. Establishing City Council Agendas

Luger said that at the last work session the Council was mostly in agreement that any Councilmember can add items to the agenda, but if a Councilmember wanted to have someone present at a meeting that the full Council would have to approve the speaker before a presentation is added to an agenda.

Caron stated that she agreed with the guidelines that Luger presented. Miller reiterated the guidelines; if it is an external person then it must be approved by the full Council, but any other topic can be added to any agenda by one Councilmember. The Council agreed on these guidelines.

Luger asked the Council how she should handle requests from the Charter Commission. The Council agreed that the Charter Commission can contact Luger directly with items they want placed on an agenda and Luger will place them on the soonest feasible agenda. The Council agreed that if Luger is unsure which items take priority when scheduling work sessions that the items would come to the full Council for them to prioritize.

5. Frequency of Communications to City Council from City Council Representatives

The City Council did not have time to discuss this item and agreed to place it on a future work session agenda.

6. Other

None

Minutes
City Council Work Session
April 18, 2011
Page 8

7. Adjournment

Berghorst moved, Fulkerson seconded, to adjourn at 6:55 p.m. Motion carried 5/0.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheri Johnson
City Clerk