

Maple Grove City Council work session

Meeting minutes

January 16, 2024

Call to order

Pursuant to call and notice thereof, a City Council work session was held at 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 16, 2024 at the Maple Grove Government Center/Public Safety Facility, Hennepin County, Minnesota. Present were Mayor Mark Steffenson and Councilmembers Judy Hanson, Kristy Barnett, Kristy Janigo, and Rachelle Johnson. Absent was none. Present also were City Administrator Heidi Nelson, Finance Director Greg Sticha, Community and Economic Development Director Joe Hogeboom, Economic Development Manager Joe Amerman, Public Works Director/City Engineer Chris LaBounty, Fire Chief Tim Bush, City Attorney Justin Templin, Parks and Recreation Director Chuck Stifter and Chief of Police Eric Werner.

Mayor Steffenson called the meeting to order at 4:40 p.m.

Performing arts center update

Economic Development Manager Amerman reviewed information regarding various aspects of the proposed performing arts center in Maple Grove since the last discussion. He reviewed operations of similar venues in other metro cities, such as the Hanifl Performing Arts Center, Ames Center for the Arts, Bloomington Center for the Arts, and Hopkins Center for the Arts. He noted the funding for constructing these venues primarily came from fundraising and grants. He explained the Hanifl project received a \$2.75 million donation from the Hanifl Foundation, and the Ames Center receives an annual \$100,000 contribution from Ames Construction for operation.

Economic Development Manager Amerman noted Avalanche Arts, the non-profit behind the Maple Grove center, planned to contribute \$2 million for construction, with additional funding expected from grants and fundraising activities. The estimated average annual operating budget for the facility was \$435,000. He explained that Avalanche Arts committed to covering all operating costs associated with the project, and notably, there was no request for a city subsidy for the operation of the facility.

Shane and Danielle Vinup provided an update on the work of their non-profit organization, Avalanche Arts. The Vinups expressed interest in a partnership with the city for the use of the city owned land parcel, and would take on the responsibility of capital fundraising for the construction of the performing arts center as well as ongoing operation costs. The Vinups indicated they have met with the Cross Community Players and they showed interest in renting rehearsal/performance space, and the Maple Grove Arts Center was interested in utilizing the theater's lobby as a gallery space. RJM Construction has provided the

Vinups a construction budget based on the design of the Hanifl Center, estimating \$14,000,000 in capital costs for the project, with considerations for specific items not needed in Avalanche Arts' space.

Based on council consensus, it was determined that further evaluation was needed of potential partnership structures for the land and asked that this be brought back for discussion at a future date.

Police Department update

Police Chief Werner presented an overview of service statistics and key focus areas. He stated the 2022 community survey indicated a 91% satisfaction rate with Maple Grove's police services, maintaining consistently high ratings over the past fourteen years. He noted in 2023, police staff handled 53,833 calls-for-service, reflecting a 6.19% increase from the previous year. Crime data showed a decline in Group A and B offenses, with notable decreases in violent and property crimes but an increase in motor vehicle thefts.

Police Chief Werner explained that the report highlighted the use-of-force data, emphasizing the very low incidence relative to the high number of calls-for-service. Traffic safety remained a top priority, with increased traffic stops despite recruitment challenges. He further explained the School Resource Officer (SRO) program faced changes due to legislative adjustments that lead to the temporary suspension of SROs in schools. He noted that would monitor changes in law before reintegrating SROs into schools.

Police Chief Werner also spoke about the Hennepin County embedded social worker program, police recruitment challenges statewide, employee wellness initiatives, and future staffing needs. He further discussed technology implementation, including body-worn cameras and drones, and spoke about upcoming priorities. He communicated the need for capital improvements and additional space for the Pets Under Police Security (PUPS) facility and noted more information would follow at a future work session.

Rush Creek Cemetery city acquisition request

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom informed the City Council that in the summer of 2023, the Rush Creek Cemetery Association President approached the City of Maple Grove, requesting the city to assume ownership and management of Rush Creek Cemetery. He stated the cemetery was approximately 150 years old, and had 757 total plots, with 185 sold for future burials and around 40 plots available for future sales. He explained that if the city took over ownership of the cemetery, it would be responsible for maintenance, coordinating future burials, and managing unsold plots.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom indicated that the Rush Creek Cemetery Association expressed its intention to provide the city with its remaining funding balance of approximately \$27,500 if ownership was transferred. He stated the Association had invested in recent improvements, including a new entrance gate, fencing, and a utility shed. Over the past five years, annual operating

expenses for the cemetery averaged around \$10,200, with annual revenue averaging approximately \$11,800, primarily from plot sales.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom stated that if the city assumed ownership, expenses were expected to increase due to added duties previously handled by the Association volunteer, which would require additional city staff. Maintenance activities might also need contracting, and revenues could decrease with the limited number of plots remaining for sale.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom explained that state law allowed the city to take over ownership, but it was not obligated to do so. If the city assumed ownership, it would have to operate and maintain the cemetery. He advised that if the Association were to dissolve without a local government takeover, ownership responsibility would fall to Hennepin County and the county was not required to provide formal upkeep. It was noted that the Rush Creek Cemetery Association intended to dissolve due to a lack of volunteers.

After further discussion, staff was directed to bring the Rush Creek Cemetery item back to a future work session with information about other cemeteries in Maple Grove and opportunities to assist the Rush Creek Cemetery Association with identifying partnerships/board members.

2023 MGFRA bylaw changes

Fire Chief Bush; President of the Maple Grove Firefighters Relief Association (MGFRA), Chris Baker; and Treasurer of the MGFRA Jeff Woodbury recommended approving seven changes to the MGFRA bylaws. The proposed changes included revisions to membership status definitions, alignment of board duties with state requirements, adjustments to service certification deadlines, addition of marriage dissolution provisions, modification of the vesting schedule, and addressing combined service pensions as per Minnesota Statute 424A.015.

City Attorney Templin reviewed the proposed bylaw changes to simplify board position descriptions and ensure compliance with state statutes and accommodate special membership status for individuals managing charitable gaming operations, in alignment with Minnesota Gambling Control Board requirements.

It was noted MGFRA, functioning as a defined contribution relief association, provided retirement benefits to paid-on-call firefighters in Maple Grove. The city contributed annually to MGFRA, and the funds were invested to offer lump-sum service pensions to qualifying firefighters. The proposed bylaw changes addressed challenges in finding members to manage gaming operations and streamline board positions.

President of the MGFRA Baker stated that the amendments also addressed changes in Minnesota State Statutes, allowing immediate fund distribution following divorce and full vesting for paid-on-call

firefighters with ten or more years of service, aligning with common vesting practices in state retirement plans.

President of the MGFRA Baker noted that the financial analysis indicated that defined contribution pension plans, like MGFRA, were fully funded, eliminating the need for periodic actuarial studies. The city's financial obligation was fulfilled with the annual payment to MGFRA.

President of the MGFRA Baker also proposed 10-year vesting revision was not expected to impact the city's funding obligation or the future of the special fund. It aligned with practices in comparable cities with relief associations.

President of the MGFRA Baker explained the potential impact on recruiting and retention efforts was considered minimal, based on the experience of previous vesting changes in 2018. Various factors influenced the decision to leave active service, and the number of firefighters close to ten years of service was provided.

Staff was directed to bring the proposed changes to the MGFRA bylaws to the February 5, 2024 City Council meeting for council consideration.

**Other items as
deemed necessary**

None.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m. by acting Mayor Steffenson.

Respectfully submitted,

Heidi Nelson
City Administrator