



City Council

Workshop

~ Minutes ~

1408 Lake Street South
Forest Lake, MN 55025
www.ci.forest-lake.mn.us

Karin Derauf, Deputy City Clerk

Tuesday, January 17, 2023

6:30 PM

City Center - Council Chamber

[City of Forest Lake - Livestream and Recorded Meetings](#)

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Mara Bain	Mayor	Present	
Sam Husnik	Councilmember	Present	
Hanna Valento	Councilmember	Present	
Leif Erickson	Councilmember	Absent	
Blake Roberts	Councilmember	Present	

3. Pledge of Allegiance

4. Open Forum - Citizen Petitions, Requests and Concerns

The Open Forum is available for residents to express personal opinions for any item of business. Please limit your comments to three (3) minutes.

5. Departmental Overviews

Comments: City Administrator Casey provided a brief introduction of City structure including that Forest Lake operates as a Statutory City. He also provided a summary and review of the Strategic Plan. He commented on the objectives including prudent financial responsibility and developing a sound financial and Infrastructure plan. He noted that additional work is needed in 2023 to finalize the 10-Year Plan which will be presented to Council at a later date. He also commented on the objective of a clear vision for the City’s parks, trails, and recreation system. He noted the Park Master Plan draft has been completed and is being reviewed. He also noted the objective of proactively engaging in community outreach, social media, and communications. He indicated the new webpage roll out next week and more activity on social media platforms. He referenced an additional objective for new and existing business development by leveraging the city’s quality of life, local advantages, and natural resources. He indicated that the City has adopted a Downtown Plan, hired a Community Development Director, adopted a new business assistance policy, and that the City provided assistance during the pandemic for business licensing relief.

City Administrator Casey provided a summary of the responsibilities of the City Administration department, noting several items including policy recommendations, local improvements and city projects, staying informed of federal, state, and county programs that affect the city, among many other duties. He also provided a summary of the year ahead which included more work on the 10-Year Plan, a new Public Works building, and road maintenance and repair, other City buildings, and



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staffing. He discussed current staffing and future staffing needs. He mentioned the EDA and the Downtown Plan noting that there is no funding sources for the proposed \$35,000,000 Plan. He also noted that the Park Master Plan also lacks stable funding sources.

City Administrator Casey commented on building permitting and the goal of getting permitting and payments to an online format. He discussed partnership with Washington County for an Environmental Center and yard waste drop off site noting the City-owned property across from the airport which is non-buildable for commercial or residential development. He indicated this is the same site as the future public works building.

He also discussed state legislative items for the year ahead including, THC legalization and House Bill 100, bonding bills, increased infrastructure funding, local governmental aid formulas for streets or general fund, administrative citation authority, and protection of local zoning. City Administrator Casey provided an update on the Water Plan and noted that that sewer system is stable with the finishing of lift station projects. He also noted the storm water system is functional as designed however, improvements are needed to meet and encourage future development.

City Administrator Casey gave an update of the Senior Center noting that the previous management group left and the City assumed responsibilities for the operation. He also commented on broadband expansion and labor contracts.

Finance Director Knopik, gave updates on the Finance Department noting the staffing changes. He also provided roles and responsibilities of the Finance Director position as well as the Accounting Manager position indicating the proper direction of the department and proper segregation of duties. Finance Director Knopik discussed the current challenges which include the software being fully utilized, bill backs and escrows, utility billing, lack of documentation on processes, staff turnover, and human resource knowledge. He also cited accomplishments of the Finance Department including automated accounts payable process, process documentation and improvement, cross-training of employees, and operational efficiencies for payroll, utility billing, and accounts payable divisions.

Community Development Director Wittman, provided a summary of the various divisions within Community Development which included planning, zoning, enforcement, economic development, and park and recreation. She also provided an organizational chart showing department structure which included a Community Development Director, Planner, Parks and Recreation Supervisor, and Administrative Assistant. She noted the 2023 budget of \$421,682 for mostly staffing citing a 39% increase from 2022. She commented on operational issues of department restructuring back in 2014 and the lack of resources to carry out basic functions. She noted the current issues including image improvement, organizational alignment, policy and procedure analysis, workflow standardization, and public communication and relations.



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Community Development Director Wittman noted the immediate, short-term, and long-term challenges for the department which included working with commissions, engineering services, operation processes, code enforcement gaps, building inspections, parks planning, and resource allocation based on community growth and development. She also cited the department goals of successful onboarding of new staff, update all community development forms, refine the permitting process, securing engineering services for building and permit review, review and update of EDA policy documents, creation of an events permitting and review process, and updates to the zoning codes.

Fire Chief Newman commented on the organizational structure of the Fire Department noting there are two stations, one in Forest Lake and one in Columbus, which is a sub-station. He also provided budget information noting the average yearly budget increases since 2013 of approximately 2.23% per year with payroll making up two-thirds of the increase.

He cited the calls for service noting an average of 433 calls per year over the last 10 years. He indicated the biggest challenge for the department is recruitment and retention and that firefighter pay impacts the ability to retain employees.

Fire Chief Newman provided department goals which included updating the pre-fire planning program to help minimize loss of property and cost of firefighting while improving firefighter safety. He cited the logistics and details of the Pre-Fire Planning Program. Fire Chief Newman provided information of the building department staffing structure including a building official, building inspectors, and fire tech. He noted the current budget of the building department is \$494,872 made up of approximately 95% payroll. He cited the 5-year history of building permits and inspections. Fire Chief Newman shared the goals for the Fire Department including securing engineering services, update building department processes, and develop an online permitting process.

Public Works Director Adams commented that the Public Works Department builds, operates, and maintains the City. He noted the divisions of the department including Streets, Parks, Fleet, Surface Water, Sanitary Sewer, and Water. He discussed his staffing structure noting there are full-time as well as part-time seasonal staff.

Public Works Director Adams commented on the various buildings they use to store equipment and supplies noting the need for one location for the Department. He provided budget information for the department and commented on department challenges noting that funding and staffing are lacking. He indicated the department operates at a level that is dependent on how much money the department has to spend and the number of staff available to do work. He indicated this creates a challenge when someone is on vacation or out sick. He also commented on the goals for the Public Works Department.



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Police Chief Peterson, provided the Police Department mission statement along with an organizational chart. He also shared the roles and responsibilities of the Chief of Police, Captain, Sergeants, Police Officers, Police Evidence Tech and Community Engagement Coordinator, and Police Administrative Assistants. He noted the number of calls for service being over 16,000 per year.

Chief Peterson cited goals of the department noting community engagement and community policing initiatives, monitoring department operations, monitoring and reviewing mental health in crisis calls, staff training, and continued assessment of technology needs. He cited current operational issues noting recruitment and retention as the biggest challenge. He also noted public safety policies and technology advancements as additional department challenges. He indicated that succession planning, and vehicle and equipment costs are also presenting challenges to the department.

City Administrator Casey summarized the department presentations noting that each department is heading in the right direction to make the city experience better for the residents.

Councilmember Roberts commented on the timeframe for getting building permits online. City Administrator Casey indicated there will be a reimplementation of the building software. Councilmember Husnik commented that it has been very helpful for Council and the public to understand what the staff does. Councilmember Valento also commented that it was very helpful to understand what the City Staff is doing on a daily basis. Mayor Bain commented on the needs noting parks, streets, and the Downtown Plan. She asked if it would be beneficial to review the benchmark studies and comparisons to other communities. She also commented that it would be helpful to have a quarterly financial report as well as the planned street projects. Councilmember Roberts commented on the presentations and thanked Staff for their work. He noted that it would be helpful to educate the residents on all the needs. He asked Police Chief Peterson about the succession plan for the Police Department.

6. Legislative Agenda

Comments: Due to time constraints, there was no discussion at the meeting.

7. Adjourn

Motion to: Adjourn



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RESULT:	ADOPTED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Mara Bain, Mayor
SECONDER:	Sam Husnik, Councilmember
AYES:	Bain, Husnik, Valento, Roberts
ABSENT:	Erickson