



Council Worksession

March 22, 2022

5:00 pm

Present: Mayor Kari Niedfeldt-Thomas
Councilmember Abdullahi Abdulle
Councilmember Pam Axberg
Councilmember Emily Dunsworth
Absent: Councilmember Graeme Allen

Staff in Attendance: Devin Massopust, Jennifer Fink, Craig Schlichting

Guests in Attendance: Maren Hawkins (attending remotely)

Commission Interview

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas reported the Council would be interviewing Maren Hawkins for a commission position.

Councilmember Abdulle asked Ms. Hawkins to explain how both personal and professional experiences will help you be an effective Commissioner if appointed.

Maren Hawkins explained she has not interviewed for anything in a very long time. She stated she was a little unsure of herself. She noted she was a PERA at Pike Lake and she worked with a lot of different personalities, both students and staff. She believed she had patience and acceptance for these personalities.

Councilmember Dunsworth asked what motivated Ms. Hawkins to serve on a City Commission.

Ms. Hawkins reported Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas encouraged her to apply. She stated she wanted to be more involved in the community. She noted she has two daughters that were out of the house, and she wanted to get involved in the civic arena.

Councilmember Axberg stated each Commission is tasked with making recommendations to the City Council that comply with policies, rules or ordinances already adopted by the City Council. She asked Ms. Hawkins what she would do if she disagreed with a policy or ordinance already in place.

Ms. Hawkins stated she would look into the history of the ordinance and why it was in place. She would then try to find a person that she could learn from. She indicated she did not believe New Brighton would have ordinances in place that would bother her, but if there was, she would want to learn the history of why it was put in place.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas requested Ms. Hawkins speak to the biggest opportunities and challenges facing New Brighton and how do you hope to address these serving on a Commission.

Ms. Hawkins explained crime was an issue at this time. She hoped to make sure that residents have opportunities to be involved in the city and that this was a community they wanted to live and stay in.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Ms. Hawkins for coming in and applying for this position. She noted City Clerk Spangrud would be in touch with further information on how the Council was moving forward.

Massopust reported if the Council supported Ms. Hawkins being appointed to PREC, staff can update the Resolution and this would be approved by the Council on the Consent Agenda. The Council supported Ms. Hawkins being appointed to PREC. Further discussion ensued regarding the open seats on the City's Commissions.

Partners in Energy from Xcel Energy Presentation

Fink reported Center for Energy and Environment will share a brief overview about the Partners in Energy Program through Xcel Energy. She noted PREC discussed this matter and recommended the Council review it further. She explained Xcel Energy Partners in Energy provides communities in Colorado, Minnesota, and Wisconsin services to develop an energy plan and assistance with implementing that plan. Each community has its own unique energy needs and priorities, and Partners in Energy tailors its services to complement each community's vision. Applications are open and have two deadlines per year. The next is in July. The service is free. The goal is to create a plan for energy use reduction for both the City and its residents and businesses.

Mike Wilhelmi, Community Relations Manager for Xcel Energy, introduced himself to the Council noting he was the representative for New Brighton.

Tammy Gunderzick, Xcel Energy, noted she managed the Partners in Energy program for Xcel Energy. She explained this program was targeted at helping put together and implement energy action plans. She noted cities and counties generally take advantage of this program. She reported this program generally takes place over two years and discussed the three phases of this program which included developing a plan, implementation of the plan with Partners in Energy, and continued implementation. After that point, the city would become a graduate of the program, and the City would be in a full implementation mode and special projects could be pursued. The objectives of Xcel Energy for this program were further reviewed. A map of the cities Xcel works with in Minnesota and Wisconsin was discussed.

Marisa Beyer, Center for Energy and Environment, described how Partners in Energy works with communities. She reported this involved community planning, implementation support and data analysis. She commented on the process that would be followed to develop an energy action plan. She described how Partners in Energy assists cities with creating flyers and marketing materials to promote energy assessments and implementation activities. The support provided during the implementation phase was reviewed.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas asked if assistance with benchmarking from other cities was provided through this program. Ms. Beyer reported this assistance was provided.

Councilmember Axberg questioned if this was a framework that would address concerns in the City. Massopust reported the City has been following the Minnesota Green Steps framework in regards to sustainability and environmental issues. He commented on the steps the City has taken and explained the Partners in Energy program would be another step the City can take to provide community based energy efficiencies.

Councilmember Axberg stated she understood this was a free program but inquired what resources would be required from staff. Massopust reported staff does not have dedicated staff allotted to sustainability. He indicated staff capacity would have to be considered based on the recommendations that come from this. Fink noted she spoke with other communities regarding this matter and understood a Green Corp intern may be a

possibility to assist the City in implementing a plan. She reiterated that some of the work was work the City already needed to do, while other work was in marketing this program to local businesses. Schlichting explained this was an energy action plan would focus on how the City uses energy, electric vehicles and how the City uses its buildings. He reported the City has been opportunistic in this area and was pursuing pilot programs for an EV program. He indicated a climate action plan would integrate transportation, waste management, greenspace, and water. He discussed how the energy action plan would fold nicely into the City's climate action plan.

Councilmember Dunsworth asked if the City would be positioning itself well by pursuing this program in possibly receiving funding from the State in the future. Massopust noted this could be a possibility.

Fink reported Xcel Energy takes applications twice a year for this program and the next round was due in July. She asked if the Council supported the City applying for the program.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas stated she was thrilled to have the City apply and participate in this program. She asked what kind of public engagement would be required for this program. Fink reported she could work with the facilitators to make sure the City was not over asking the community for assistance or existing commissions could be utilized to assist in finding a vetted group that was willing to work on the engagement panel.

Councilmember Dunsworth commented she loved this and she believed it would be easy to get members of the community to assist because this program was narrow in scope and sustainability efforts were top of mind for people. She fully supported the City applying for this program.

Councilmember Abdulle supported the City applying for the program as well. He explained this program aligned well with the Council's goals for the City. He believed there was enthusiasm in the community behind this topic and that there would be support from residents. He suggested a survey be completed prior to the City setting its goals within this program.

Councilmember Axberg supported the City applying for this program too.

Home Energy Squad Partnership Program

Fink stated the mission of the Center for Energy and Environment is to "discover and deploy the most effective energy solutions that strengthen the economy and improve the environment." In order to accomplish that, one of the services that the Center for Energy and Environment offers is a Home Energy Audit. After experiencing this first hand, staff reached out to CEE. A number of cities "buy down" the cost of these audits for residents. She asked if this was something the Council wanted to consider.

Stacy Bootscamp, Center for Energy and Environment, explained she worked on residential and Home Energy Squad outreach. She provided further comment on how energy audits work and noted they were available to all CenterPoint and Xcel Energy customers in one to four unit homes. She described the products that were installed during the audits that assist customers in saving immediately. She explained the audit provides an energy fitness plan along with a guide for next steps and rebate information. She explained CEE was a non-profit organization that works to help people make their home more efficient. She commented further on how the City can partner with CCE to promote and subsidize the expense of the home energy audits. It was noted free energy audits are provided to families living at 60% AMI.

Councilmember Abdulle questioned what the expense was for a home energy audit. Fink reported the most a home energy audit would be was \$100, and commented further on the services included with the audit.

Councilmember Abdulle asked if there was an ideal time of the year to complete audits. Ms. Bootscamp reported audits were completed all times of the year.

Councilmember Axberg reported she looks at her energy usage all the time and took advantage of rebates. She supported the City promoting this program, but did not support the City subsidizing the program.

Councilmember Dunsworth questioned how residents learn about this program. Ms. Bootscamp reported this information can be included in city newsletters and monthly utility bills. She discussed how greatly this programs benefits lower income families and those residents with aging homes.

Fink requested further information regarding the loan programs that were available for those who have a home energy audit. Ms. Bootscamp discussed the low interest financing loan program that was available to residents who choose to make energy efficient improvements to their homes.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas asked if translation services were available for the home energy audits. Ms. Gunderzick explained flyers can be sent out for translation services.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas supported the City developing materials that could be sent to the various departments in the City so they can have flyers for the public. She indicated she supported this program and wanted to see the City get the word out on home energy audits. She stated she was not committed to subsidizing the program at this time.

Councilmember Axberg questioned why people were not getting the audit at this time, or pursuing the next steps. Fink believed this was due to a lack of awareness and perhaps the \$100 fee. She reported a \$75 fee may be more doable than \$100.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas stated it would be really help for the Council to have data on the number of people who follow through with the suggestions within the home energy audit and to understand how a City subsidized program assists in getting more residents to complete a home energy audit. Ms. Bootscamp reported she would investigate this further and would report back to the Council.

Councilmember Dunsworth reported a small subsidy may draw in the next layer of the population into this program and would assist the community in pursuing greater energy savings.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas requested further information on how the City of Fridley completes its program. Ms. Bootscamp described how the City of Fridley completed its home energy audit program.

Councilmember Abdulle stated he saw a \$25 subsidy as an investment in the City and noted this small amount of money may draw more people to the home energy audit program. In addition, a small subsidy would show the City's strong commitment to energy efficiency. Ms. Bootscamp commented on how beneficial it was for CEE to partner with communities in order to spur trust with residents as to the benefits of the program.

Councilmember Abdulle asked if home energy audits were completed in apartment complexes or other multi-family housing units. Ms. Bootscamp described how home energy audits were completed on these types of properties, noting they could involve the landlord, or the audit can be done with the renter. Further discussion ensued regarding the low interest loans and other assistance that was provided from the Home Energy Squad.

Worksession adjourned at 6:23 pm

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Terri Spangrud". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Terri Spangrud
City Clerk