



Council Worksession
February 28, 2023
5:00 pm

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

Absent: Councilmember Emily Dunsworth

Staff in Attendance: Devin Massopust

Guests in Attendance: Gary Bank, Pauline Alfors, Zoey Tenenbaum, Eric Nelsen, Jamie Scott, Jason Steffenhagen, and Paul Zisla

Commission Applicant Interviews

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Gary Bank for coming in and applying for this position. She asked Mr. Bank to provide the Council with a brief history on how his personal and professional experiences will help him be an effective commissioner, if appointed.

Mr. Bank stated he has a variety of experiences in life. He indicated he was in the master naturalist volunteer program. He explained he has a bachelor's degree in recreation and park administration, a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in teaching.

Councilmember Allen asked what motivated Mr. Bank to continue serving on a City Commission.

Mr. Bank explained he was retired and he enjoys doing volunteer service. He stated he was fascinated by the plans the City had for its parks.

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 Mr. Bank what he would do if he disagreed with a policy or ordinance already in place.

Mr. Bank indicated he hasn't seen anything, any policies or concerns that were unusual to him.

Councilmember Abdulle requested Mr. Bank speak to the City's biggest opportunity and biggest challenges in New Brighton.

Mr. Bank stated his neighborhood was very quiet and he appreciated that. He explained he did not see any real challenges, but he understood the City had to be alert to thefts and other crime that was occurring. He believed the City had the protect and preserve its greenspace. He stated he appreciated the programming being provided by the Parks and Recreation Department.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Mr. Bank 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. She explained the next person to be interviewed was Pauline Alfors. She asked Ms. Alfors to provide the Council with a brief history on how her personal and professional experiences will help her be an effective commissioner, if appointed.

Ms. Alfors stated she was a software engineer in her career, along with a facilitator for the company she worked for. She noted she retired and her passion was being outside, enjoying the outdoors. She explained the pandemic drove home the need to be outside and having a safe place to be in the community, which she has found in the City's parks and trails.

Councilmember Allen asked what motivated Ms. Alfors to want to continue to serve on a City Commission.

Ms. Alfors stated explained she appreciated how welcoming PREC was and she appreciated the fact the group was now meeting face to face. She indicated she was reapplying because she wanted to continue her connections with this Commission while also learning about the City and its parks in order to share this information with her neighbors.

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. Alfors what she would do if she disagreed with a policy or ordinance already in place.

Ms. Alfors stated she believed everyone who worked for the City did a great job. She reported if she did have a concern, she would bring up a question to staff. She stated Director Fink does a great job providing information to PREC.

Councilmember Abdulle requested Ms. Alfors speak to the City's biggest opportunity and biggest challenges in New Brighton.

Ms. Alfors stated the City's biggest challenge and opportunity was climate change. She noted she was serving on the CAP committee. She discussed how important the City's parks and greenspaces were to the community.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Ms. Alfors 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. She explained the next person to be interviewed was Zoey Tenenbaum. She asked Ms. Tenenbaum to provide the Council with a brief history on how her personal and professional experiences will help her be an effective commissioner, if appointed.

Ms. Tenenbaum stated she was part of Student Council at Irondale and this helps her learn how to work with other people within a government structure and to create a better community at Irondale.

Councilmember Allen asked what motivated Ms. Tenenbaum to serve on a City Commission.

Ms. Tenenbaum explained she believed it was important to have younger voices within City government, because this demographic wasn't always represented.

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. Tenenbaum what she would do if she disagreed with a policy or ordinance already in place.

Ms. Tenenbaum stated she would bring this up to staff and ask to place an item on a future agenda. She would want to see the Commission discuss this concern in order to create an action plan on how to address the matter.

Councilmember Abdulle requested Ms. Tenenbaum speak to the City's biggest opportunity and biggest challenges in New Brighton.

Ms. Tenenbaum indicated the idea of sustainability versus providing opportunities was an opportunity for New Brighton. She wanted to see the City doing exciting things without hurting the environment. She explained she wanted to see the City getting teenagers involved in this effort.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Ms. Tenenbaum 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. She explained the next person to be interviewed was Eric Nelsen. She asked Mr. Nelsen to provide the Council with a brief history on how his personal and professional experiences will help him be an effective commissioner, if appointed.

Mr. Nelsen explained he has worked in public service for the past 20 years, mostly as a library administrator for the County and State. He indicated he has seen how government can work in peoples lives, which also made serving on the Planning Commission enjoyable for him.

Councilmember Allen asked what motivated Mr. Nelsen to want to continue serving on a City Commission.

Mr. Nelsen stated he was a relatively new resident to New Brighton, noting he moved to the community in 2018. He believed serving on the Planning Commission was a way he can give back to the community.

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 Mr. Nelsen what he would do if he disagreed with a policy or ordinance already in place.

Mr. Nelsen explained he believed this was best addressed internally. He understood he may have different opinions, but his job was to operate within the established rule set. He indicated he would bring concerns to his Council Liaison or City staff.

Councilmember Abdulle requested Mr. Nelsen speak to the City's biggest opportunity and biggest challenges in New Brighton.

Mr. Nelsen reported he was drawn to the community because it was a very attractive place to live, was well connected to transportation, and has a good sense of community. He believed the challenge would be to maintain a civic identity while balancing the concerns of residents who have lived here for generations. He anticipated communication with the public would also be of the utmost importance going forward. He indicated people would continue to want to move into New Brighton, which was becoming increasingly difficult due to the lack of available housing stock.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Mr. Nelsen 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. She explained the next person to be interviewed was Paul Zisla. She asked Mr. Zisla to provide the Council with a brief history on how his personal and professional experiences will help him be an effective commissioner, if appointed.

Mr. Zisla explained he worked as a city planner before attending law school. He indicated he worked for a law

firm that was doing development work for the City of New Brighton and later worked as a real estate lawyer. He stated he later moved to Ramsey County. He discussed his history with the EDC noting he has served as the chair and commissioner. He stated he would like to continue serving on the EDC and noted he understands all final decisions for the City reside with the Council.

Councilmember Allen asked what motivated Mr. Zisla to want to continue serving on a City Commission.

Mr. Zisla indicated he could provide continuity on the EDC. He stated he wants to stay engaged and connected to the City, while sharing his expertise. He stated it was refreshing to have new members on the EDC.

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 Mr. Zisla what he would do if he disagreed with a policy or ordinance already in place.

Mr. Zisla reported he was not averse to having robust conversations with the understanding it was okay to raise questions to staff and the Council liaison. He explained he understood the EDC was an advisory board and that recommendations could be made, but the Council may not always follow these recommendations. He stated he always appreciated the fact that conversations could be held.

Councilmember Abdulle requested Mr. Zisla speak to the City's biggest opportunity and biggest challenges in New Brighton.

Mr. Zisla stated the focus on the EDC would be the redevelopment of physical spaces. He explained as the community continues to change and become more diverse; this was an opportunity for the City. He believed the challenge of the City was to continue to redevelop the community. He discussed how difficult it was for seniors and young adults who move out of their parents home to find housing in New Brighton. He stated he was proud of the new housing that has been brought into the community, but understood more housing options were needed. He encouraged the City to continue to address its sense of place while not forgetting the economics of The Exchange project.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Mr. Zisla 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. She explained the next person to be interviewed was Jaime Scott. She asked Ms. Scott to provide the Council with a brief history on how her personal and professional experiences will help her be an effective commissioner, if appointed.

Ms. Scott stated she grew up in a small town with parents and grandparents who were very involved in the community. She appreciated the close relationships and how people were giving back. She noted she coached soccer, basketball and was involved in her kids' activities. She explained professionally she has worked in roles that have gray spaces that involve problem solving and building relationships. She indicated she has a teaching degree, but has worked at Best Buy for the past 17 years working as a project manager.

Councilmember Allen asked what motivated Ms. Scott to serve on a City Commission.

Ms. Scott stated she has been seeking passion and purpose. She noted she has always liked giving back and being involved in the day to day of how people function. She indicated she was interested in serving on the Public Safety Commission. She explained she hosted the National Night Out party for her block and she attends the open house events at the fire station. She believed public safety was so intertwined into the community.

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. Scott what she would do if she disagreed with a policy or ordinance already in place.

Ms. Scott explained she enjoys learning and being challenged. She stated she would talk to people and figure out why certain perspectives were in place. She indicated she would want to gain multiple perspectives and would then work to bring everyone together to come up with a vision or strategy in partnership with others in order to move the plan forward.

Councilmember Abdulle requested Ms. Scott speak to the City's biggest opportunity and biggest challenges in New Brighton.

Ms. Scott explained she comes with no agenda. She indicated she visits neighborhood Facebook sites and noted she was interested in housing, zoning and development, along with how public safety was integrated into these plans. She commented on how water quality was a concern for her.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Ms. Scott 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. She explained the next person to be interviewed was Jason Steffenhagen (via Zoom). She asked Mr. Steffenhagen to provide the Council with a brief history on how his personal and professional experiences will help him be an effective commissioner, if appointed.

Mr. Steffenhagen stated personally he and his wife have adopted two boys, one from Ethiopia and the other from Haiti. He explained being parents of these two young men has challenged him on how to best raise two young black men, which involved great deal of learning and growing. He commented on a professional level he worked at Bethel for seven years and now was a local pastor. He discussed the diversity work he has been involved in with interfaith committees and noted he has led book studies on how to be an antiracist.

Councilmember Allen asked what motivated Mr. Steffenhagen to want to continue serving on a City Commission.

Mr. Steffenhagen explained when the group was started last year he was chosen for a one year term. He stated he has lived in New Brighton for eight years and he loves his neighbors, along with his neighborhood. He sees this position as a manner in which he can have an impact on the community. He discussed the personal and systemic work that needs to be done to address diversity and inclusion.

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 Mr. Steffenhagen what he would do if he disagreed with a policy or ordinance already in place.

Mr. Steffenhagen reported he believed the City has been more than welcoming of his questions and concerns. He believed there was a tactful and respectful manner in which to address concerns. He was of the opinion the Equity Commission has been a welcoming space over the past year, even when people have not always agreed.

Councilmember Abdulle requested Mr. Steffenhagen speak to the City's biggest opportunity and biggest challenges in New Brighton.

Mr. Steffenhagen stated the most challenging aspects are how we learn the stories that are most underrepresented in the community. He appreciated how the Council has tried to bring these stories to light, but he wanted to see the City continue to work on building trust with the community. He stated once this trust

was established he wanted to see the City asking hard questions in order to bring about equity.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas thanked Mr. Steffenhagen 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.

Worksession adjourned at 6:20 pm

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Terri Spangrud". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Terri Spangrud
City Clerk