

**Maple Grove Council / staff strategic  
planning session**

**DRAFT meeting minutes**

**February 12, 2022**

*DRAFT*

*(Delete this when final edits are complete.)*

**Call to order**

Pursuant to call and notice thereof, a Council/staff strategic planning session of the Maple Grove City Council was held at 8:30 a.m. on February 12, 2022, at the Maple Grove Government Center/Public Safety Facility, Emergency Operations Center, Hennepin County, Minnesota. Members present were Mayor Mark Steffenson and Councilmembers Judy Hanson, Karen Jaeger, Phil Leith, and Kristy Barnett. Absent was none. Present also were Heidi Nelson, City Administrator; Tim Mitchell, City Assessor; Ann Jacklitch, Building Inspection Services Director; Denise Thul, Human Resources Director; Ken Ashfeld, Public Works Director/City Engineer; Joe Hogeboom, Community and Economic Development Director; Greg Sticha, Finance Director; Tim Bush, Fire Chief; Chuck Stifter, Parks and Recreation Director; Eric Werner, Chief of Police; and Ed O'Donnell, Information Technology Director.

Mayor Steffenson called the meeting to order at 8:41 a.m.

**Welcome by  
Mayor  
Steffenson**

Mayor Steffenson welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked all Council and staff members for attending. He stated he looked forward to hearing from the staff members and having discussions regarding planning for the next two years.

**Department  
Director  
presentations**

City Administrator Nelson reviewed the day's agenda, beginning with presentations from each department director.

**Assessing**

City Assessor Mitchell reviewed the 2022 strategic plan for the Assessing Department, discussed the changing roles of the county and reviewed the staffing within the Assessing Department. He reported there has been unprecedented value

growth in 2022 for single family, lakeshore, townhome, condo, duplex, and twin home properties in Maple Grove.

City Assessor Mitchell commented on the assessment process noting it was a reflection of the real estate market. He discussed how the market condition adjustment is calculated and how this impacts the value of properties in the city. He estimated single family residential homes in the city increased by 14% to 22% over the past year.

City Assessor Mitchell reported he would be recording an informational segment with CCX Media that would be aired on March 7. He commented on the Assessing Department website updates that would be completed, which included assessment process information, sales mapping and property tax assistance information. He explained staff was preparing for increased calls and appeals at this year's Local Board of Appeal and Equalization meetings.

City Assessor Mitchell further commented on how the roles were changing for the County and City Assessors. He discussed how the Homestead Processing and Maintenance Program, Disabled Veterans Exclusion Program, Green Acres Program and Rural Preserve Program would be migrating from the city to the county. He stated fire and disaster reassessment work would also be shifted to the county. In addition, the county would now be determining dates for the Local Board of Appeal and Equalization meetings. He indicated his greatest concern with these shifts was how it was going to impact customer service.

City Assessor Mitchell discussed the new staff members that were brought on in the past year. He reported he would be reviewing work allocation and staffing assignments in the coming weeks noting he was preparing for future retirements.

Mayor Steffenson requested further information on how the shift in programs to the county would impact the city. City Assessor Mitchell discussed how several staff members would be heavily impacted as their work would be shifted entirely to the county. He stated he would continue to speak with the county about his concerns with these shifts and how customer service would be handled.

Councilmember Barnett asked if the city could have more than two weeks between the Board of Appeal meetings or if the city should be considering a third meeting. City Assessor Mitchell commented it was his hope to complete the Board of Appeal work

within two meetings. He was of the opinion the two week time period provided property owners an adequate timeframe to be notified of the appeal process.

Councilmember Barnett requested staff speak with the City Attorney regarding this matter. City Assessor Mitchell commented on the state statutes that were in place to protect the rights of residents that wished to appeal their property taxes.

Councilmember Barnett asked that staff highlight the property tax appeal information on the city's website.

Councilmember Jaeger questioned how staff differentiated between people who lived on lakes and ponds. City Assessor Mitchell discussed how staff worked to narrow its focus by neighborhood when setting values for properties on lakes and ponds based on property sales.

Councilmember Jaeger supported the city further advertising how taxes are split between the city, county and school district. City Assessor Mitchell explained some residents were fully aware of this, while others may not be and noted this information was disbursed to residents with their property tax statements.

Further discussion ensued regarding how single-family homes were shifting to rentals in the community and how this was impacting property values.

## **Information Technology**

Information Technology Director O'Donnell thanked the Council for their time. He explained password authentication was his biggest concern at this time. He stated he would like the Council and staff to consider using a 10 to 12-character password for security purposes. He discussed how a tokenized, two-factor system would greatly improve the security of the city's network. He commented on the opportunities with Microsoft Office 365, or Office in the Cloud. He reported he would be migrating the IT Department to Office 365 this year and would migrate the remainder of the city by department in 2023. He discussed the benefit of having SMART technology and digital transformation. He noted he would be working to enhance the city's dashboards, forms, electronic payment options, and to further automate processes.

Information Technology Director O'Donnell reviewed the city's cybersecurity multi-layered approach. He explained the city had state of the art technology in place to assist with intrusion

prevention, and monitors all incoming/outgoing network traffic. He reported malware scanning was completed through LOGIS. He discussed how the city takes a snapshot of its data every hour to assist with rewriting protected data in the event a breach were to occur.

Councilmember Hanson stated she was really pleased with how well the IT Department addresses cyber security on behalf of the community. She understood that planning and preplanning was so important. She supported all measures staff can take to keep the city protected. She noted she assisted the City of St. Paul in setting up its camera registration program and would be willing to assist staff with this new program.

## **Community and Economic Development**

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom discussed the housing trends and issues in the city. He noted there has been a 38% increase in rental housing licenses in the past five years. He indicated the community was facing an increase in housing costs, along with an increase in the senior population and a rising need for affordable housing. He reported staff would like to streamline the internal licensing procedures and would be evaluating staff priorities. He suggested the City Council consider limiting rental licenses city-wide or by quadrant, and that the Council consider putting a moratorium in place on single-family rentals due to the transition of more attainable housing units for ownership to rental.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom commented on the value of the partnerships the city had in place with Habitat for Humanity, CommonBond and Woodland Mounds in order to provide affordable housing in Maple Grove. He discussed how the city may want to identify new uses for Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) funds and other funding from the county and state.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom commented on the planning that was occurring for Territorial Road. He discussed the neighborhood meeting that was held and noted staff was pleased by the number of residents that attended. The next steps for Territorial Road would include engaging in conversations with Hennepin County while also working to understand how to protect a historical property.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom reviewed the future development plans for Weaver Lake Road and Main Street. He reported senior housing and market rate

apartments were being proposed along with a curling center or other entertainment use, restaurant, shared parking and sculpture garden. He indicated staff was waiting to hear from Lifetime Fitness before the city can move forward on this project.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom commented on the city's economic development initiatives. He stated staff was continuing to evaluate workforce development in Maple Grove, while also enhancing partnerships with North Hennepin Community College and Osseo Schools. He indicated staff would like to attract new entertainment businesses to the city.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom discussed the city's zoning code enforcement efforts. He reported the city has seen a dramatic increase in complaints during the pandemic and staff was looking at how to address this concern both short and long-term. He indicated another zoning enforcement inspector may be needed in the future to assist with being proactive in neighborhoods while also assisting with inspecting the increasing number of rental units in the community.

Councilmember Leith asked how staff was keeping up with all of the rental inspections. Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom indicated this has been a challenge and staff was considering adjustments to the current processes in order to streamline current tasks.

Councilmember Leith thanked staff for bringing up the need for a potential moratorium on rental licenses, in order to provide staff the time it needs to address the number and dramatic increase in single family rentals in the community.

Mayor Steffenson agreed stating the number of rentals in single family neighborhoods was a growing concern.

Building Inspector Services Director Jacklitch discussed how not all residents are going through the right process to receive a rental license and noted her HOA was creating its own process to manage renters. She stated it was important to communicate with both the landlords and renters when properties were serving as a rental.

Councilmember Jaeger questioned if the city had too much senior and affordable housing. Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom stated the city was still in need of senior

housing given the fact there was an increase in the aging population.

Councilmember Barnett asked what was the true level of affordable housing the city had to provide per the Met Council. Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom explained that while the city does not have a required number of units to attain, the Met Council does dictate that the city have a certain amount of land guided for high density residential development, which can facilitate an affordable housing project. Additionally, incentives are provided in the form of grant availability if the city develops a certain amount of affordable housing each year.

Councilmember Barnett stated she would like to see another project like Woodland Mounds in Maple Grove. She indicated this would allow the aging residents of the community to remain in Maple Grove. Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom commented the Main Street parcels would be a great location for another senior housing project.

Councilmember Barnett suggested staff complete a segment with CCX Media to discuss the type of development occurring in the city and provide examples or reasons why development was of benefit to the community.

Councilmember Hanson thanked the community and economic development staff for their great work at the Territorial Road neighborhood meeting. She encouraged staff to reach out to Habitat for Humanity and other organizations to assist in providing more affordable housing. She asked when the city would be hearing from LifeTime Fitness on where they would be relocating.

Mayor Steffenson reported he would be meeting with LifeTime Fitness staff members on Monday and would learn more about their intent.

## **Building Inspections**

Building Inspection Services Director Jacklitch discussed how her department was facing staffing challenges. She reported it was hard to find inspectors with training and experience and noted she would be losing valuable inspectors to retirement in the coming years. She discussed how the housing and commercial codes had become far more technical and challenging over the years. She commented on how she was working to support existing staff with continuing education. She stated she

appreciated developing new inspectors and commented on how mentoring positively impacts all staff members.

Building Inspection Services Director Jacklitch described the challenges facing the construction industry. She explained this included material and labor shortages, along with a lack of experienced construction crews. She discussed how materials and technology were evolving. She stated she anticipated modularized wall panels and roof panels would become more common going forward.

Building Inspection Services Director Jacklitch discussed how she networked with similar cities for consistency and commented on the value of having strong relationships in place with other inspectors. She stated that while there are staffing challenges in the Building Department, she believed her staff were addressing these concerns head on.

## **Public Works/ Engineering**

Public Works Director/City Engineer Ashfeld stated he was proud of how well the City of Maple Grove worked as an organization. He greatly appreciated the leadership of the Mayor and all of the department heads over the past two years through the pandemic. He thanked the City Council for their continued support for the Public Works Department.

Public Works Director/City Engineer Ashfeld discussed the work that was being done on the street reconstruction program, noting several major trails would be completed in 2022. He reported a retaining wall along Weaver Lake Road would need replacement this year. He commented on the TH610 extension and noted the city has thus far been awarded/designated \$31M for this \$53M project. He discussed the multi-jurisdictional approach that would have to be taken with the TH169/Elm Creek Boulevard interchange.

Public Works Director/City Engineer Ashfeld reviewed the storm water improvements that would be completed and commented on the creation of the storm water fund. He reported on January 1, 2022, an organics recycling option was required by Hennepin County. He provided further comment on the recycling program noting commodity prices are beginning to show improvement, which was good for the community. He indicated he was proud of the participation rate in the city's recycling program (close to 90%).

Public Works Director/City Engineer Ashfeld discussed the city's facilities and thanked the Council for providing and properly managing its buildings.

## **Recess**

The City Council recessed at 10:17 a.m. and reconvened at 10:28 a.m.

## **Fire**

Fire Chief Bush thanked the City Council for their support. He stated there are two divisions within the Fire Department; the Operations Division and the Prevention Division. Current staffing is 92 paid on-call firefighters; there are also 11 career firefighters and two support staff. He stated Maple Grove's paid on-call model was working well. He commented on the numerous ways the Maple Grove Fire Department communicates with the public and described how he was working to provide his staff with more technology options (Halligan, Basecamp, and other apps) to assist with completing their work more efficiently in the field.

Fire Chief Bush reviewed the organization staffing model for the Fire Department and noted several valuable members recently retired. He indicated this led him to reorganize the staffing model for greater efficiencies. The average age and median years of service for the paid on-call fire fighters was reviewed. He discussed how a natural turnover was occurring within the department. Further discussion ensued regarding hiring, resignations and retirements the department would be facing.

Fire Chief Bush commented on the calls for service over the past ten years. He indicated calls were on the rise, which was to be expected due to the increasing population in the community. It was noted 400+ permits were issued by the Fire Department on an annual basis and 2500+ inspections were completed for commercial and residential properties. He provided further details on the certifications that must be in place for sprinkler systems along with the goals for the city's inspection program.

Fire Chief Bush reported he would be working to hire and retain new paid on-call firefighters this year with the focus being on daytime availability. He described the expanded ways the department has advertised for these positions. He indicated adjustments may have to be made to the weekend duty crews in order to keep the department fully staffed on the weekends.



Fire Chief Bush discussed the positive benefits of the city's educational outreach and efforts that were in place which included GLOW (Giving Little Ones Wisdom), work with seniors on smoke alarms, and work with the Osseo Area Schools. He commented on how he was working to right size the Fire Department's fleet and would be installing fire gear extractors (washing machines). He thanked the City Council for their continued support of the Fire Department.

Councilmember Jaeger stated she appreciated the tremendous service the Maple Grove Fire Department provides to the community. She asked what happened to the fire station that was going to be built on Vicksburg Lane. Fire Chief Bush stated this was Fire Station 5 and noted Plymouth opted not to share this station with Maple Grove. He commented further on how surrounding communities staffed their fire departments.

## **Police**

Police Chief Werner commented on how the Police Department has been impacted over the past two years. He stated he was proud of the great work being done by the traffic unit and noted over 11,000 traffic stops were made over the past year. He thanked his Patrol Officers for their collective efforts and for continuing to work diligently through a staffing shortage. He discussed the benefits of having the blue light program in place.

Police Chief Werner reported crime was on the rise across the entire metro area. He stated Part 1 violent crimes were up 60% from 2019 to 2021 and Part 1 property crimes were up 16% from 2019 to 2021 in Maple Grove; some of this increase is due to the transition of reporting systems. He commented further on the number of stolen vehicles, vehicle pursuits and car jackings that were occurring in the community, along with the number of car crashes and accidents with injuries.

Police Chief Werner reviewed the accomplishments of the department from 2020 through 2022 which included; continuity of service throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing unprecedented crime increases, preventing crime and disorder during civil unrest and a citywide curfew, continuous hiring, implementing 2020 and 2021 police reforms, addressing officer wellness, body-worn cameras, panhandlers/solicitors in medians, Student Resource Officer program support, North Metro Regional Public Safety Training Facility (NMR) expansion, bringing prosecution services in-house, and in-house

domestic violence advocacy. He thanked the City Council for supporting the body worn camera program.

Police Chief Werner indicated the priorities for 2022 through 2024 were to reduce crime which meant addressing narcotics and violent crime, concerning behavior at the Community Center, increased coordination with criminal justice partners and transparency in charging. In addition, the department would be addressing traffic safety, finding new strategies for hiring to find the best candidates, pursuing an imbedded social worker, in-squad camera system, complete NMR expansion, and the implementation of in-house city prosecution services. He commented on the planning that would have to occur for a fifth patrol zone as the city continues to develop. He anticipated this work would occur over the next year or two.

Councilmember Leith commended the Police Department for their tremendous efforts, especially during the social unrest. He requested further information regarding the traffic stops. Police Chief Werner reported these stops were for speeding, drivers running red lights, vehicle malfunctions and expired tabs. He commented on how out of control speeding was across the metro area at this time. He explained the traffic unit was working to address this concern noting traffic stops and enforcement would be occurring. He reported the goal would be to bring the level of speed down throughout the entire community.

Councilmember Jaeger thanked Police Chief Werner for all he does to keep the community safe. She asked how the K-9 officers were doing. Police Chief Werner reported both K-9's were doing very well. He indicated Calo was highly energetic and was doing great search work on behalf of the community.

## **Human Resources**

Human Resources Director Thul discussed the challenges the Human Resources Department was facing with regard to changes in the workforce. She commented on the demographics of the city's workforce noting most employees were between 30 and 50 years of age. She reviewed the turnover levels that occurred in 2020 and 2021. She described how there were changing employee expectations, along with a new work/life revolution post-COVID. She stated the city was working to be flexible for its employees in order to meet their needs.

Human Resources Director Thul discussed the policy changes that were made in the past year and how overtime was now

being paid after 40 hours to allow for flexing of hours. External job market trends were reviewed and it was noted there was fewer and fewer candidates available for open positions. She thanked the Council for the recently approved union contracts and for support of the compensation and classification study to be completed in 2022. She then reviewed the items she would be working on in 2022, which included focusing on innovations and workflow.

Councilmember Hanson asked how open the city was to allowing employees to work remotely. Human Resources Director Thul explained staff would need direction from the Council on this and noted strong policy language would have to be drafted and made clear that not all employees would be eligible to work remotely. She stated there would be management issues that would have to be considered as well.

Building Inspection Services Director Jacklitch noted she had two individuals that worked remotely during the beginning of the pandemic and those that require more supervision would have to work in the office. She discussed how a rotation type scenario may greatly benefit staff to allow them to work remotely and in the office. She encouraged the Council to consider allowing greater flexibility for staff to work remotely.

## **Recess**

The meeting was recessed for lunch from 11:49 a.m. until 12:10 p.m.

## **Parks and Recreation**

Parks and Recreation Director Stifter reviewed the successes over the past two years. He noted the city has over 50 amazing parks and 270 miles of trails. He discussed the programs and new park amenities that were brought into the community which included story walks in the parks, Crokicurl, a cricket pitch, snowshoe rentals, outdoor ice rinks, pickleball, and the Fernbrook fields. He described how the city continues to create and engage the community through the farmer's market, Town Green performances, the Central Park skate loop and Maple Grove Days.

Parks and Recreation Director Stifter commented on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programming the city was pursuing which included intergenerational garden programs, sensory Santa at Town Green, African drumming, and Black History Month activities.

Parks and Recreation Director Stifter discussed how the Parks Department was working to recover after COVID. He explained there was a steady return of participants to activities, but noted seniors have been slow to return. He reported revenues were good at this time. He then discussed the operations that were occurring at the Community Center. He noted pool and ice rentals have been doing well.

Parks and Recreation Director Stifter reviewed the organizational staffing changes that occurred within his department noting there has been a reduction in clerical staff. He commented on how the renovation of the Community Center would be a growth opportunity for the city. He stated he was excited to be bringing on a new leader for the Community Center as this would bring about a fresh perspective for operational management.

Parks and Recreation Director Stifter commented on the challenges his department is facing which included staffing recruitment and retention. He stated his department was also working on public education and the design for the Community Center renovation and expansion. He was pleased to report bids came in at \$14.9 million for the Gleason Fields reinvestment project with the majority being funded through park dedication funds. He then discussed the other park projects that would be completed in 2022.

## **Finance**

Finance Director Sticha reviewed the Finance Department's goals for 2022. He stated long-term planning was important to the organization along with the creation of a capital improvement plan (CIP) document. He commented on the process that would be followed to formulate a CIP document noting this document would assist the Council in making long term financial plans. He reported staff would be reviewing all aging buildings in order to include future maintenance expenditures in the CIP.

Finance Director Sticha discussed the city's recent capital commitments with the Council which included the North Metro Regional Public Safety Training Facility, the potential purchase of LifeTime Fitness and the reinvestment at Gleason Park. He then reviewed the projected level of unencumbered funds the city had on hand within the CIP Fund, Long Term Development (LTD) Fund, Improvement Project Financing Fund and future General Fund surplus amounts.

Finance Director Sticha discussed the budget document enhancements that would be completed within the 2023 budgeting process. He stated he would like this document to be more robust and detailed with strategies and goals from each department. He explained he would like major special revenue funds and enterprise funds included in the budget cycle.

Finance Director Sticha discussed the improved policies that were put in place for financial management stability. He noted staff recently completed a purchasing policy and adopted a debt management policy. He commented on how these documents will assist with the city's financial rating.

Finance Director Sticha reviewed the upcoming levy pressures the city would be facing which included recent and upcoming market wage adjustments, the road construction levy that will need to increase beyond \$1.2 million in coming years, the Community Center renovation/expansion project that will require an additional \$1 to \$1.5 million in subsidy transfer as well as addressing aging city buildings that will need either continual General Fund surplus dollars or be incorporated into levy in the future. He reported he supported a consultant being hired to complete a study on the city's buildings that can be used to assist with capital planning for the next five to ten years. The levy increase items for the next five years were discussed along with how these increases would impact the median value homeowner. He reiterated that these numbers were projections and adjustments would be made through the budgeting process.

Mayor Steffenson asked if there were any other capital items that should be considered by the Council. Finance Director Sticha reported the maintenance of the city's buildings would have to be considered over the next five to ten years because the General Fund surplus would not be able to sustain this work. He reported there were other infrastructure items, such as the Weaver Lake Park reinvestment project, that would also have to be considered.

Councilmember Barnett asked if the \$1 to \$1.5 million needed for the Community Center was a one-time increase. Finance Director Sticha reported this would be a one-time increase that would be an on-going increase in the levy each year going forward to fund operational expenses at the Community Center. The current subsidy of the Community Center operations is \$800,000 annually.

Councilmember Barnett questioned if any additional revenues were taken into account at the renovated Community Center. Finance Director Sticha stated this was taken into consideration, but noted operational expenditures were also projected to increase.

Mayor Steffenson asked if one to two new FTE's was added within these projected numbers. Finance Director Sticha explained this was included.

Councilmember Jaeger requested further information regarding the city's General Fund Reserve. Finance Director Sticha stated the city's General Fund was very well funded in terms of reserves. He indicated the one-time use Capital Funds that were available to the Council were dwindling. Further discussion ensued regarding the city's tax rate and how it has steadily declined over the years.

Mayor Steffenson requested further information regarding the CIP replacement fund. Finance Director Sticha discussed how the replacement fund would project revenues and expenditures over the next 10 years.

Councilmember Jaeger asked if the city's largest expense was salaries. Finance Director Sticha reported 70% of the operational budget was spent on salaries.

## **Recess**

The meeting was recessed from 1:00 p.m. until 1:10 p.m.

## **Review survey responses & information presented**

City Administrator Nelson briefly reviewed a summary of survey responses from City Council, directors, management, and supervisors within the organization. The common themes from the surveys were reviewed in detail with the Council. She then opened the floor for discussion of these themes and topics.

Fire Chief Bush recommended a commercial/industrial maintenance code be considered.

Councilmember Hanson suggested the Council receive training and that a plan be in place in the event a city meeting were to experience protests within the Council Chambers. She stated the Council could consider changing the format of the open forum portion of the meeting.

**Identify and  
discuss  
priorities for  
2022-2024**

City Administrator Nelson further summarized the main themes that were brought up which included a rental housing policy and a potential rental license moratorium.

Councilmember Leith expressed concern with the fact that the longer the city waits to put a moratorium in place, the projects already in the pipeline would be allowed to proceed.

Councilmember Jaeger stated she supported a moratorium.

Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom anticipated it would take three to six month to evaluate the rental housing policy. He supported the city looking at its inspection and licensing fees within the rental program. He discussed the cap the City of Anoka put in place for rental licenses.

Councilmember Leith commented on how he appreciated the work staff did on the rental housing study and stated the data from this study was extremely valuable.

Councilmember Barnett believed there was validity in waiting to put the moratorium in place until June. She questioned if the city should also consider putting a moratorium on townhouses. Community and Economic Development Director Hogeboom stated the conversation to-date has been to have the moratorium on rental licenses only. He explained it may benefit the city to have staff complete a segment with CCX Media on rental housing.

City Administrator Nelson stated staff would gather information and provide the Council with further information on a rental license moratorium in the next three to six weeks.

Mayor Steffenson commented on the theme of allowing employees to work remotely. He anticipated there were some departments that would be less able to work in this manner than others. He questioned how the city could determine who could and could not work from home, and how would the directors evaluate and oversee the work that was being done from home.

Building Inspection Services Director Jacklitch discussed how her department logged their work weekly when COVID first started. She noted the front staff supervisor worked mainly on the phone and computer and there was little interaction with the public because processes have been put online. She stated she

would not want her employees going strictly work from home, because she valued face-to-face time with her employees as well.

Councilmember Hanson asked if this request was coming from the directors or the employees. She indicated she has been working from home for quite some time and she has reports to complete each week in order to measure her work level. She believed it was good for the retention and recruitment of employees to allow some employees the flexibility of working from home.

Public Works Director/City Engineer Ashfeld stated people were on different sides of this issue and noted there were certain jobs that would not allow employees to work remotely. He anticipated job descriptions would have to be amended to reflect this change.

Police Chief Werner discussed how the support staff functioned during COVID and noted work logs were needed from employees. He was of the opinion that his employees need to be in the office most of the time, but he could support some flexibility on this topic. He indicated the younger employees were working to live, not living to work.

Fire Chief Bush commented on how staffing shortages have impacted the review and approval of plans. He stated greater flexibility between office/home work schedules would be appreciated for his department.

Human Resources Director Thul discussed how the city could specify which jobs could be remote versus those that could not. She indicated each job description would have to be updated specifying what percentage of the job could be done remotely. She noted the performance management requirements would not change if employees were allowed to work remotely. She indicated some training may have to be offered to directors on how to manage a remote work staff.

Police Chief Werner encouraged the Council to consider some small level of flexibility for certain employees in order for the city to keep its departments fully operational.

Mayor Steffenson asked by show of hands, how many department heads wanted the Council to consider this further. The vast majority of the department heads raised their hands.



Human Resources Director Thul explained allowing some employees a certain level of flexibility would require further consideration and training for department heads on how to manage the new situations on an ongoing basis.

Councilmember Barnett stated she was hesitant to allow this because she feared employees would not be working as efficiently if allowed to work from home.

Councilmember Leith indicated he has been working remotely for the past 35 years. He commented if the city were to move in this direction there would have to be certain checks and balances in place.

Mayor Steffenson stated he worked every day in his office for the past two years, unless he was sick. He explained this was the manner in which he was most efficient. He indicated the city would have to determine what positions could have some flexibility and then further consider how to manage employees who are working remotely. He stated he did not support employees working remotely five days a week.

Councilmember Jaeger anticipated the taxpayers wanted to see staff members still working at the Government Center conducting the business of the city.

Human Resources Director Thul agreed employees should not be working full-time from home but stated there would be a benefit to offering some level of flexibility.

Information Technology Director O'Donnell discussed the benefit of employees using certain tools from home for the continuity of operations.

City Assessor Mitchell stated he was more reserved when it came to this topic. He discussed how important it was to him to maintain a high-level of customer service for the residents of Maple Grove. He commented on how the workforce was shifting and noted his way of thinking does not align with his workforce at times. He recommended that if the city were to move in the direction of allowing more remote work, that the scope start small.

Fire Chief Bush discussed how the paid on-call fire fighters were benefiting from working from home, being more available for fire calls.

Finance Director Sticha reported the work in his department could easily be done remotely because it was computer work. However, there was not a single position that he would recommend for more than 50% working remotely. His expectation would be that he would like his employees to work from the Government Center 50% of the time.

Mayor Steffenson discussed how the directors would have to manage this new responsibility in assessing how well employees were doing while working remotely, or calling them back to the office if employees were abusing the situation.

Public Works Director/City Engineer Ashfeld asked if parts of the flexibility being offered would allow employees to flex their hours to something other than 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Human Resources Director Thul reported city office hours were 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. She did not recommend the city allow employees working remotely to work outside of regular office hours to continue to be available to residents and internal customers.

Mayor Steffenson stated he could support the city moving forward with remote working with the understanding the department heads would be responsible for managing this situation.

City Administrator Nelson asked if there was Council consensus to support staff drafting a remote work policy.

Councilmember Hanson supported staff moving forward with a policy.

Mayor Steffenson requested staff bring forward a list of staff members that would be eligible or would qualify to work remotely.

Councilmember Jaeger explained she would like to understand more if the city had any liability for employees working from home.

City Administrator Nelson thanked the Council for this feedback. She then discussed the staffing needs for the city going forward.

Mayor Steffenson suggested the directors consider their staffing needs in order to assist the Council with creating a budget that works. He recommended the directors take into consideration

the staffing needs for the next 10 to 15 years as the city grows. He encouraged the directors to consider how the city functions on a day-to-day basis post-COVID.

Finance Director Sticha reported the budget projection can absorb one to two employees a year going forward. He commented additional employees beyond that would require budget adjustments.

City Administrator Nelson questioned how the Council wanted to address code enforcement concerns.

Mayor Steffenson recommended the City Code be reviewed in order to put certain commercial and residential maintenance standards in place.

Public Works Director/City Engineer Ashfeld discussed the benefits of having maintenance standards in place for the city's commercial/industrial properties.

Councilmember Hanson stated the shopping and retail areas in Maple Grove would benefit by having specific maintenance standards in place as well.

Further discussion ensued regarding the city's ability to take electronic payments.

City Administrator Nelson asked if the Council wanted to put a cap on off-sale liquor licenses in the community. She noted the city had 12 license holders at this time and following the state formula for first class cities, 14 licenses would be allowed.

Councilmember Hanson stated she would support the city capping the number of off-sale licenses at 14.

Councilmember Jaeger asked if the city had any requests under consideration. City Administrator Nelson stated the city currently had no formal requests, but inquiries do happen from time to time.

Councilmember Leith questioned if the cities of Eden Prairie and Bloomington had caps in place. City Administrator Nelson stated she would investigate this further and report back to the City Council at a future meeting.

City Administrator Nelson inquired if the Council wanted to reconsider the liquor compliance check system and offer a

reward to businesses that pass the checks. The Council did not support offering a reward.

Councilmember Leith suggested the city look into offering the alcohol compliance training online for employees that are not able to attend the city's training classes in person. Police Chief Werner stated he would look into this further noting there were online training options available.

City Administrator Nelson asked if the Council was in favor of banning flavored tobacco. The Council recommended this issue be skipped at this time, but requested staff background the issue.

City Administrator Nelson questioned how the Council wanted to address email requests. She inquired if the Council would prefer that staff respond to operational requests.

City Administrator Nelson commented she would keep the same process in place and would wait to hear from the Council if they need assistance.

**Closing by  
Mayor  
Steffenson**

Mayor Steffenson and the Councilmembers thanked staff for attending the meeting and for their dedicated work on behalf of the City of Maple Grove.

The City Council/staff strategic planning session adjourned at 2:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Heidi Nelson  
City Administrator