

**City of West St. Paul
City Council Strategic Planning Meeting Minutes
March 6, 2021**

Mayor Napier opened the meeting at 8:00 a.m.

Present: Mayor Dave Napier
Councilmembers Wendy Berry, Julie Eastman, Lisa Eng-Sarne,
Robyn Gulley, and John Justen

Also Present: City Manager Ryan Schroeder
Police Chief Brian Sturgeon
Fire Chief Mark Juelfs
Parks & Public Works Director/City Engineer Ross Beckwith
Assistant Parks & Recreation Director Dave Schletty
Community Development Director Jim Hartshorn
Finance Director Char Stark
HR Director Debra Gieseke
Marketing & Communications Manager Dan Nowicki
City Clerk Shirley Buecksler

Dr. Craig A. Waldron, The Waldron Company

Mayor Napier thanked everyone for being here and introduced Dr. Craig A. Waldron of The Waldron Company.

Dr. Waldron asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Mayor Napier said he was born and raised in West St. Paul. He has sat on the Council since 2013 and this is his second term as Mayor. West St. Paul has everything to make it a beautiful city.

Councilmember Berry said she was elected to Council two years ago. She moved here from Minneapolis in 2015 and this is their first home.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said she was appointed to Council two years ago and elected last fall. She grew up in Maplewood and has now lived in West St. Paul for 11 years. She loves how people look out for each other here.

Councilmember Gulley said she is a newly elected Councilmember and has been on Council for a little over 60 days. She is excited to be here and to dig into strategic planning on how we can grow and evolve our community.

Councilmember Justen said he has lived in West St. Paul for 13 years but his family business has been here forever. He has been on Council for two years now, and there are a lot of good things going on.

Councilmember Eastman said she is new to Council, now for about 60 days. She has lived in West St. Paul since 1993. Before being elected to Council, she was active in attending all City Council meetings since 2018.

City Manager Schroeder said he is looking forward to Council developing a robust work plan for the next person.

Finance Director Stark said she has been here for 4 1/2 years. Her whole career has been in government and she is enjoying West St. Paul.

Public Works & Parks Director/City Engineer Beckwith said he has been here five years.

Assistant Parks Director Schletty said he has been with the City for 20 years and that he is one of the few employees who live in West St. Paul.

Marketing & Communication Manager Nowicki said he has been here 7 years.

Fire Chief Juelfs has been with the Fire Department for 23 years, with the past two years as Chief.

Police Chief Sturgeon said he grew up in South St. Paul and has been with West St. Paul for 33 years.

Community Development Director Hartshorn said he has been with West St. Paul 18 years as of yesterday.

Human Resources Director Gieseke said she has been with the City just over a year and a half, with previous experience in manufacturing in the private sector.

City Clerk Buecksler said she has been with West St. Paul for a little over 3 years and was previously with South St. Paul.

Dr. Waldron said he enjoys local government. He came from Iowa and went to Minnesota State out of Mankato. He has worked for almost every governmental entity. He won a Council seat for two terms in North Mankato, and did a stint with the Minnesota Department of Economic Development. While there, it made him realize how much more he preferred local government. He went to Roseville as the City's first Community Development Director. He was then recruited to Oakdale as the City Administrator. He thought he would be there five years but ended up staying for 21 years. He retired from there and went to Hamline full-time as a faculty member teaching strategic planning. He retired from there after four years. North St. Paul called and their Manager had left and they asked if he would come help for a bit. Two to three months turned into 18 months. Today, he is still adjunct at Hamline. He really enjoys these strategic planning sessions and

working with local government. It's a nice way to stay connected and still try to help communities get to where they're going. After 47 years, he said he was lucky to choose the career he did.

Trends in Local Government

Infrastructure

Infrastructure, particularly in first ring suburbs, is aging and it's a challenge to keep that up. Some communities are getting creative and may have tax increment debt that drops off and they don't cut the tax rate so they can reallocate that for other critical purposes. There are some interesting ways to get at that.

Housing

Affordable housing – are we able to provide it? How are we going to do it? Beyond that, how do we maintain our existing housing stock, partly as it ages? We are starting to see a supply problem with demand far exceeding supply.

Diversity and Inclusion

How are we as communities going to be more inclusive and reflect our population? Take a look at what we can do in terms of social equity. It's interesting how many Councils have been talking about this and are concerned about it. In the past six months, there has been much more discussion and interest in this issue.

Providing More Services and Opportunities

Councils feel that pressure and that need, yet you have a public that doesn't want to raise taxes. Communities are in a bind with a great request for services but people really watch their tax dollars and are very concerned. Some research shows the mistake we made in government. You kind of talk about taxes here as a separate entity and people don't like paying taxes. But when you survey people, they like your services and feel safe in their community. They support their Police Department but when you start talking about where their taxes are going, that creates a different circumstance.

Difficulties to Recruit Talented Staff

There has been a good battle for talent between communities and you will see a lot of positions crop up. Finance Directors are hard to find and recruit, for instance. The talent hunt has been a challenge for a number of communities.

Post-COVID Environment

Will things look different? Will we not have as many face-to-face meetings? One City was talking about decreased traffic because of more Zoom meetings and you don't feel compelled to drive to meetings. No one knows what it's going to look like, yet.

Environment, Sustainability

As a City, what are we going to do about our carbon footprint? More Cities are developing their environmental management commissions and so forth.

Communications

A challenge is how are we going to communicate with the less served groups in our community? How will we handle our responses when we're sitting in a Council meeting and tweets are going out before it's even adjourned? The social networking connection is becoming more difficult.

Policing

Hearing a lot in terms of policing with respect to recruitment and inclusivity. It's been a tough time for Police Departments. How do you respond and when do you respond? What are we really expecting from our police? Are we giving them mixed messages?

What You're Doing Today

Cities are becoming more involved in strategy and planning and trying to get everyone on the same page. There's nothing more difficult in moving a community forward if you don't all agree on what's going on. A lot of time going is put into strategy, and economic development and community development becomes part of that discussion, also. Tough work on strategy can create respect for each other on the Council.

Councilmember Gulley: One of the things we hear a lot about is that citizens want different kinds of businesses. We have a real diversity. Some want certain sit down restaurants. The focus is not so much what we can do on that, but building relationships that will help us connect with those interested in coming into our community. Another thing is they want more and better public spaces. We lost our YMCA this past year and we don't know if they will come back. A lot of people depended on that and are looking for ways to get that back into the community.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: Those trends sound right.

Dr. Waldron: I would like to hear from the Council now about what they think the biggest accomplishments have been in the past year or two.

Mayor Napier

2012 was a time where our economic engine, Robert Street, was failing and falling apart. Buildings were vacant. Parks were not doing well. Signal Hills and a bank building were vacant for years. Kmart was underutilized. Streets were being maintained but not at a level that was gaining any ground.

All of that has now come to fruition. Signal Hills is going to be developed this year, our parks are doing well and plans are in place, streets are being improved. They approved a half cent sales tax in the city that will allow us to do road construction, so they are improving at a good pace. What I'm proud of the last two years is that we have had record development in our city. This year, you cannot help but drive down Robert Street and see all of the big projects going on that will have a long lasting effect on our community. Our housing stock is one of the hottest on the market in the metro area. That helps by having a vision for improvements and providing grants for home improvement. I am proud of our financial plan that we have in place to create some stability for our taxpayers down the road. Lastly, I am proud of our Emerald

Ash Borer plan that was proactive and ahead of the curve, as well as our Inflow & Infiltration which was also ahead of the curve. Other cities are using it as a model. I am proud of so much that this community has done over the past several years.

People want to know why one business or another isn't coming in to town. You can make it beautiful but it's up to a developer to think it's the perfect spot. But we have businesses coming in, including another car wash, a fitness center, and more. All of us want sit down restaurants and small unique shops, and we hope to create that environment. It will come, but I think we are doing a lot of good things. I am proud of what we're doing. Robert Street was a huge risk but we capitalized big on the equity.

Councilmember Berry

Three years ago, I never would have thought I would be so proud of the sewer in this community. We are a model for other cities. The projects on Robert Street are numerous and are big projects. Those big buildings will bring more people here. I am excited to see that and am excited for the steps we are taking towards including and diversity. We have made some good strides in acknowledging Black History Month, Women's History Month, and things like that. The conversations we are having are good follow-up steps to it. We had hard decisions but nothing I would say we need to take back.

Both Fire Chief Juelfs and Police Chief Sturgeon have taken big strides in things that had to be done here, are open to talking and sharing, and we are lucky to have that.

Fire Chief Juelfs: On the strides we've made, a little back story from when I became Chief two years ago. I had a Captain and a Firefighter who came into my office, both with suicide plans. Shortly after that, unfortunately, South St. Paul experienced a suicide with one of their Police Officers. We brought in a psychologist to help assist. During that class with Dr. Margaret Gavian, Medical Director for the Minnesota Fire Initiative, I told her we needed to have something in place to catch these issues. She happened to be developing a program called PAR360. When you're on a scene, every 20 minutes, our dispatcher calls and asks if we have PAR (Personnel Accountability Report). The PAR360 program looks at the 360 degrees of your life and makes sure you have the tools and skills to deal with those, back to your mental health. It's more of a personal resiliency program. In addition, we modeled after what both South St. Paul and West St. Paul Police Departments are doing with mental health checkups. We have always done just the physical checkups in the past. What I am most proud of with that program is beating down the barriers and getting rid of the stigma. When I started 25 years ago in the fire service, if you went on a traumatic call and came back talking about your feelings, you would have been run out of the Department. Both of these Firefighters have been very vocal in talking about how they reached bottom. Now we have MnFire, a non-profit that lobbies and fosters mental health, heart health, and cancer prevention in Firefighters. Town Square Television did an eight minute story on one of our Firefighters, and they are using that program to roll out their training. I think we've made great strides by opening up the conversation and allowing all public safety personnel to talk about their issues, hopefully well before it comes towards suicide.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne

I used to work for Senator Jim Metzen and he would say, “For years and years you could shoot a cannon down Robert Street and now you might hit somebody.” I have a lot of things that I am proud of for what this group has done and the group behind those two tables. We all found ways to work during a pandemic and provided services differently to achieve goals.

The Robert Street tunnel, trails, and sidewalks are happening. We made it through emergency meetings and rallied the community in positive ways. We had peaceful demonstrations. Around the time of civil unrest, I held an event called “Skate Against Hate,” as a positive outlet during that time. I am proud of the team who made the digital happen. Marketing & Communications Manager Nowicki is a Swiss Army knife of marketing with video, survey management, branding, emergency communications, PowerPoints, sales brochures, I could go on and on. I am proud of our emergency services teams for their efforts around mental health. The City Clerk had to work around elections and the pandemic. We kept moving as a City and we adapted. A new playground was installed at Marthaler Park and it’s great. We received funding for our lift stations. A year ago we were at a Town Hall meeting and the room was packed, but things have changed.

Councilmember Gulley

I am really excited a lot of things Council has worked on in the past that will push forward. For example, all the work on Robert Street. There are a lot of complicated feelings in the city, but I think it looks great and we’ve done a lot of work to pull businesses up to the front so they look better and we don’t just see empty parking lots. There is a lot of work to do to make this a development center for our city. Smith Avenue – we have a cute neighborhood corner there with a lot of opportunity for continued development. The north end of Robert Street is really cool, especially by Councilmember Justen’s music shop. Transportation, the sidewalk plan, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), will all create a good opportunity for folks to come into West St. Paul. Parks – there is a lot on the horizon and I am excited about engaging the community in park design.

Engagement and volunteerism is so high in our community. They want to be a part of the discussion to make our community better. We are trying to figure out how to best utilize and take advantage of that. We are fortunate to be walking in this moment with this great opportunity. We have a lot of excitement about public art, and we have an art park. That is something we are excited to carry forward, as well, and our community is excited about it, also. We also received an email from a constituent who talked about the good work that was done on Emerald Ash Borer.

Councilmember Justen

I remember coming in and one of the thoughts I had was the unbeatable task set by the Met Council and the comprehensive plan to include an additional 2,400 residences. In the two years since I got on Council, we have reached that number. We have senior, affordable, multi-family, and townhome projects. I didn’t think we could have added this many in the ground by now to hit that number. I am incredibly surprised and impressed that we could do that. It ties into residents, tax base, restaurants, more community members, and community engagement. Specifically, I am proud of the work we did to put in sidewalks but residents

don't want to pay for assessments. We moved to a model that we are not assessing for sidewalks, at all. It makes it easier for residents to accept the project. That has changed a lot. The goal to get sidewalks was a strategic move and I am proud of that. When you find what's stopping you, you get it out of your way, and you can get things done.

Councilmember Eastman

One of the best things to show what is going on in West St. Paul is everything you hear on the national and state level about topics that are important to people and society, we are having those conversations here. Before being on Council, I was a part of a trend in our city and a welcome trend. A couple of organizations bubbled up – one is the Women of West St. Paul (WOW) and the other is the Residents of Color Collective (ROCC), and positive things a couple of years ago were the engagement and passion that happens in our community. I hope for the day after COVID when people can come back together again. It was fun having people show up. It was 'must see TV' and 'must be in the room' at Council meetings. People would applaud and welcome new businesses to the community. We are being talked about. I have heard from folks on a national, state, county level and different organizations such as the League of Women Voters and League of Minnesota Cities, as well as other cities, on how we did these things. They are jealous of us and our city that we have Town Square Television and are able to get the word out. One thing I heard is that Town Square TV thanked us for all the engagement because our ratings are through the roof for streaming and such.

We have engagement and partnerships with Met Council and Dakota County. They appreciate us and the things we are working on. The diversity of our neighborhood – for me, it was a great learning opportunity from campaigning this past year. We have a very diverse community, and it is going to grow because we are building all of these apartment buildings. Since the beginning of 2020, we are adding over 1,000 apartment and senior units. Brand new construction, two thirds of which is deemed affordable. We are getting to our 2020 estimates. We will reach that in 2023/2024. There will be some good things and some challenges out of that, which will press us further on how to handle that growth, with the right Staff and First Responders. Along with further diversification of our community, there is the demographic and economic indicators. In Dakota County, we are already one of the cities with the most rental population. We have more group homes, more seniors, and more senior care. We need to keep an eye out for needs in those community sectors.

I also want to give a shout out to our Police and Fire Departments. I have heard from people on the state and national level that have a lot of appreciation for the leadership expertise here in the areas of mental health. Also, our environmental movements that we've done with I/I, storm water, and parks. The things that we are doing and previous Councils have done to pass carbon pricing. That's a great leading thing our community has done, along with the work that is happening here at Thompson Park, all the initiatives going on at a local, county and state level. We are leaders in our community. Last year, the passing of the ban on conversion therapy was another impressive thing that talks more about our values and where we are going. The fact that we are so involved in the Green Step Cities process is another way, when you talk about diversity and access, of having those types of programs in place. Thank you to Assistant Parks Director Schletty.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne

Congresswoman Angie Craig has mentioned carbon pricing and the resolution we passed (Resolution 19-132 Approving Endorsement of Carbon Pricing in the U.S. Congress).

Councilmember Justen

We have developed an incredibly good working relationship with our State Representatives. That relationship has helped us receive lift station funding, even though it's not the most visible thing, but it's millions of dollars we may not have received without those relationships. It goes under the radar but is something we are really proud of.

Councilmember Eastman

We have a great relationship with county leaders, the Mayor – City Manager meetings, Chief Sturgeon's partnership with Dakota County Sheriffs and other Police Chiefs, this all helps. Financial excellence – we have a set a strong foundation for success going forward. And how much we've improved on transparency and building a trust foundation.

Councilmember Gulley

Finance Director Stark is doing an amazing job of getting us on the right track.

Councilmember Justen

This circles back to so many things we've talked about here. As we have improved our financials, we have been able to do these things, and it's a foundation for future success. There are so many initiatives that we have been able to do because of that financial shift. City Manager Schroeder should be given credit for this, as well.

Dr. Waldron: This next section on burning issues is the most difficult section. He asked Council to share issues that are bothering you or hindering your capacity that you want to get off your chest and talk about.

Councilmember Eastman

It's more of a state of what's going on. We had a couple issues in our community, especially following the George Floyd killing, positive and negative, engagement in the community, and peaceful protests. I participated in some of this and, when you're physically out there on the street corners, you get to see the people who are part of our community whether they live, work or shop here. We do have a much more diverse area than some may think. As we were dealing with this, along with a sign issue in our community that was not positive, I heard a lot of complaints on that and what we can fix or not fix. There is concern among our diverse community about safety and whether they feel welcomed here. This goes for our BIPOC and LDBTQIA members. I had reached out to some of my friends and neighbors relating to issues that were happening at work, at our local businesses, feeling safe, things like that. A couple of things I want to bring up. As we are building out new apartment buildings and things like that, we will have some rapid growth. On the Dominion site, the City will pay part of the pipeline. The projection of how many people will live there – it will be another 1,000 residents to that area, or about 4.5% of our current population on that block. It's a good thing to know

and anticipate what that growth will have an effect on – traffic, transit, and being able to welcome all of the new folks moving to our area.

Dr. Waldron: In terms of the diverse population here now and others we anticipate coming in, are we missing something, from your perspective, or do we just need to gear up our efforts? What is your sense of how people will feel more welcome?

Councilmember Eastman: We have so much opportunity and, from my experience campaigning last year, the good thing about campaigning during a pandemic, walking to all the doors and visiting with apartment complexes in my ward. Getting to visit those areas and meet people and see the challenges. For instance, housing safety. Some rental units are wonderful, some are a little concerning for those living there. Simple things like lighting and doors within the buildings were a concern. I felt people weren't safe. The opportunities we have is that multi-lingual has grown. We have Spanish speaking folks, others from Africa, Asia; multiple languages are spoken in this area. We lost the Southwest Review newspaper, so we lost some of those communications to access and invite people here. I am concerned about our large rental population post-COVID. I don't know if they will get hit with an increase in evictions. There is a lot of anxiety, and our families are dealing with COVID and job loss.

Councilmember Justen

With his public facing business, there is a low level anxiety of what's coming in when we come through the trail of Chauvin. We had peaceful protests but also some opportunistic activity. I had to board up my business. The Police Department did a great job of shutting that activity down. I've talked to a lot of people that are concerned. A trial like this is long-going, and we have to prepare ourselves. Our citizens and business owners just don't know what may happen. I don't think that will come from within our community, but there is concern that there could be flashpoints and it could happen at any time. We need to get our heads around it, and it ties into the same thing.

Dr. Waldron: Any ideas on how we deal with people's anxiety? What would you like to see happen in your ideal world?

Councilmember Gulley

We are a diverse city in a lot of different ways. I think we have this incredible opportunity, especially with really high engagement levels and groups that are organically forming, to take advantage of that and use it as a building block to make our city more representative for the community we serve. It is a challenge and a really good opportunity to grow and evolve and come into our own and become the city we represent on all levels. I want our City Staff and committees and every bit of our city to be representative of the whole community. When we're not, we cannot functionally address the different lenses that people bring. A friend in a wheelchair just got elected to Maplewood Council. The way she looks at sidewalks and bus stops is different than others. I cannot have the same way of looking at things anymore. We are not doing anything wrong, we have an awesome Staff but, at the same time, we have this opportunity to think creatively of how we can do things better and more powerful. Why not be leaders in that in the metro area? I have excellent relationships with two Universities that

have Masters programs with very diverse students that could go into government. I teach at Metro State and graduated from the University of Minnesota. Why not build relationships with their career development people? What if, as a City, we got other metro Cities to throw in \$5K to hire a recruiter for all Cities on a common application? These are ideas that are different from what we've done in the past.

Councilmember Eastman

If I had my magic wand of where to start, I think it is starting to adopt strategy and policies. We have some great opportunities, on the state and county level from the Dakota County Sheriff's Department and POST Board, of understanding a little about best practices of diversity, inclusivity, and racial equity to state where our vision is and what we want to get towards. Companies have done this for years, and everyone needs to do this. We are executing well in a couple areas. In the Environmental Committee, there are equity and access components of environmental work that we are doing or that we should be doing. One of the things is, what can we do in future Open Council Work Session? Perhaps bring in the Dakota County Sheriff and Police Chiefs for guidance on that. Ruth Richardson and the racial equity report. All those elements demonstrate that we are trying to do better.

Councilmember Justen

One aspect of this is more of a mind frame. We are in a strange spot, that we are in Dakota County and we relate ourselves to other Dakota County areas. But we are much more diverse than 90% of Dakota County. In the north end of town, unless you know the boundaries, you wouldn't know where West St. Paul starts. We are more urban than the rest of Dakota County. I think some of the work we can do on these issues is, although we may be geographically located, we are straddling the line between St. Paul. Hastings doesn't have to look at things the same way we do, for instance. They're probably 20 years behind us in diversity of their population. It's a shift that will trend everywhere. If we're looking for the resources of Dakota County, we're looking in the wrong direction. Perhaps we need to build those relationships with St. Paul representatives and look to how we do things to update them, as they are probably 20 years ahead of us. Focus on what we are and how we identify ourselves.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne

Our constituents have conflicting ideas around that, as well. There are plenty of people who like to think of themselves as living in St. Paul, while others feel more like a Woodbury area. In addition to the geographical aspect, we have constituents of who we are.

Councilmember Eastman

The reason I keep talking about the Dakota County Sheriffs and Police Chiefs is because of the experience of some of those members and the work they've done. Some used to be Minneapolis Officers, Chief McCarthy of Mendota Heights, as well as Sheriff Leslie. There was a program on WCCO radio last summer in the wake of the Floyd killing discussing the talk and the recognition of challenges that we have in this area. To the national conversation about what's going on, that is happening here locally in Mendota Heights, South St. Paul, and West St. Paul. Part of getting better is to recognize it and use the language of what is going on.

Councilmember Gulley

There are communities in the metro area that compare to West St. Paul. It would be more useful to compare us to Richfield than to Farmington, for instance. In some of the first tier suburbs, there are cities that look a lot more like West St. Paul.

Councilmember Justen

Newer residents to West St. Paul have an idea of living in St. Paul. They see this as an extension of St. Paul. For residents who have lived here a long time, they may think of it as the community that was less dense and the old Robert Street. There is a conflict there, but not that one side is right or wrong, and we need to develop a bridge to bring those two together. Part of it is time based. We are seeing a shift in the attitudes of people moving in here, and that will continue to work into all of this.

Councilmember Berry

The folks coming in to West St. Paul sometimes don't know where the West Side and West St. Paul ends, so they don't know they're moving into a suburb. For new folks, some use curse words and such as they pass my yard, but they're not young folks.

My magic wand would be to solve the equity issues. We have requirements from the state that we cannot override. With our Fire Department, we require EMT training and such. With other jobs, we require a Bachelor's Degree. In a perfect world, you wouldn't need all these things but experience could do the job without having a degree. I think that would help eliminate that. It's not a solve but a magic wand. The other thing is we are meeting people where they are. We are getting better with the Fire Department and Police Department events in the parts, which generated so many people to come out of their homes, including kids of color. We need to keep doing that and get the adults involved, as well. We need to figure out where they are and meet them. Same with people who have been here a long time and like to come to events. We still want to have that, along with people who are new to town and want to come.

Mayor Napier

For my magic wand, I would get rid of social media. It has given us a lot of headaches. A statement that should be very clear is that people who are active on social media in our community are not necessarily the voice of our entire community. It is important to know that people are willing to stir a pot. In the work environment, when someone is a negative, talking negatively about something going on or of an employee or supervisor and it starts growing in the company, it becomes extremely damaging. Social media does that in our community. I would love to say all of our social media outbursts should be solution-oriented. If we could do that, we would build a strong community. It can be a powerful tool to communicate and change things. But in communities across this county, it can be damaging. Next thing you know, a comment is steamrolling down the hill. I would like to see us tackle social media in our community to have a positive impact.

Councilmember Eastman

To that point, what I hope my magic wand is, when we're done with COVID and have community events, that will help drive that change because you see people that can throw in a

dumpster fire, but if you had face-to-face discussions with that person, they're not that way. They may think they're invisible on social media.

Mayor Napier

This was pre-COVID. A lot of my communication is not on social media. It's verbal, emails, and phone calls, and I hear a totally different story. I hear everything that is brought up and heard other things not brought up that are good things going on in our community.

Councilmember Gulley

I would like us to consider our communication and response strategy, which involves all of our City Staff. I would love to have a sense of, at what times we will communicate, what the messaging will be, the understanding and unpredictable outcomes we can see, and how we can get ahead of it. In our Town Hall meeting last week, I was talking about recruitment of City Staff and ideas on how to get creative and change the way we recruit, but there were some comments made against talking about diversity and inclusion. We need to talk about it.

Mayor Napier: I don't appreciate the way everyone handled that situation and there were some mistakes made that day that should be addressed. However, I would not want this conversation to go on without everyone present. We will always have Councilmembers who have their own opinion, but I would defend any one of you in this situation. Out of respect, I don't think it's appropriate here.

Dr. Waldron suggested that Mayor Napier have an initial sit down meeting to discuss the concerns, and being more aware and more careful on how we work together.

Mayor Napier: We will always have someone with their own opinion and not always agree. I like the idea of having a conversation with someone to say I know you're passionate and concerned about something. That's what should happen for all of us.

Dr. Waldron: I agree with Mayor Napier, and a reasonable approach would be for the Mayor to state that this came up and we have a couple of Councilmembers concerned about how they're being reacted to. City Manager Schroeder could be a part of it or not. Initially, I think that's a good first step. Sometimes the first step works and that can clear it up. Sometimes it doesn't, and you need to bring in HR folks and get everyone in the room to work through it.

Mayor Napier: I like that approach, and it would be the next first step. I have no problem having that conversation.

Councilmember Eastman: One of the challenges we've had in these meetings is because it's just us in the room and not the constituents. You kind of forget that people are watching television and reacting in real time. The other part as a new Councilmember and the outcome from COVID, I feel a lost opportunity, especially with OCWS because we have them in the Chambers and on television. If there was a way to get to know each other, like when the OCWS were going on in the Fishbowl conference room. Talking about EDA plans or commission appointments, this Council and our predecessors, papers were being exchanged and conversations being had, that I miss. I thought everyone knew what was on the agenda

before everyone else, but I quickly found out that you didn't. I didn't understand as much of the restrictions about Open Meeting Law. I thought people knew each other better. When I went to the Foundation Training at the League of Minnesota Cities, there was conversations with other cities. A couple of Mayors said that their past practice is that they would, once a month, have a time together before OCWS over a meal with the City Attorney so they knew City business wasn't discussed. They talked about their families and jobs and other things going on, which helped build relationships.

Mayor Napier: This is a great point. OCWS done at a roundtable, basically. There's a reason for that. It's different. I always said that sitting in the Chambers having OCWS, which is an absolute get down in the weeds work session, is more effective at a table across from someone. There is a piece you're missing out on that was an important piece. It wasn't about the lack of transparency, but the fact that it was so much more lifting, and something about a roundtable makes it flow better. It's so difficult to sit at the table in a line.

Councilmember Justen: When I was elected, I ran against Anthony Fernandez and then we were both at the same table. I had some anxiety about that I had lost to him two years before. That OCWS scenario totally diffused anything we were both worried about. I attribute that to the feeling of informality and that we both figured out that we wanted to get the sidewalk thing fixed. We started finding connections and ways to do things together. If we had come in during COVID, I don't know if it would have taken six months to get there. It's such a different feeling. It's wonderful that they're televised, but if we could have a camera in the Fishbowl, I think all of these issues would be fixed by that. I think that's a big component.

Councilmember Berry: I did not know what to expect with former Councilmembers Fernandez and Pace and then Mayor Napier set me between them. If it wouldn't have been for those closer tables, I think the awkwardness would have been extended. It made it easier to connect in that room.

Dr. Waldron: I'm a great believer in roundtable sessions and having a meal as part of it. Over the years, I saw the constant approach for policy, and strategy went from Council to Council, Mayor to Mayor, over 21 years in Oakdale. I think a lot of it was the result of the positive work session. You get to know the other person when you're having a hamburger together. They always treated each other with respect. I think this is a good idea if you can figure out how to get back to that. You get better decisions and, most importantly, better relationships.

Councilmember Gulley said to City Manager Schroeder, I'm sorry for the way it came across. I hoped it sounded like friendly banter, but it clearly didn't. Councilmember Eastman and I have been in this job for 60 days and not having the support of the Council in this is really hard. It felt like a lot, and I would like some backup when it comes to things like that.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: Most of us chose not to touch this on social media and I would take position to go to the Neighbors page, but I don't think that's constructive, so you won't find that from me. What would backup look like then?

Councilmember Eastman agreed: If there is anything we can do and have an opportunity in some way for Council to move on, we're a team and we are all here trying to do the right thing. A lot had to do with stability, respect and acknowledgement. We don't always agree, but I think we can all do better in recognizing tone and things like that.

Councilmember Justen: The subcommittee made every effort to explain to the City Manager candidates that we have an incredibly aligned and unified vision on the Council. That makes the whole thing sting a little bit more. We have tons of shared ideas and vision, so it hurts even more to see it degenerate a little more into personal disagreement. Whenever there was a chance to talk about it, I said that everyone on the Council is fantastic and great. Our approaches might be different, but I was being honest with them that they have the opportunity to come to a City that is very active and shares so many of the same goals and visions. When this happened, the citizens don't see the same as I see. That we have two years of full forward momentum in front of us and everyone is committed to that. It's so essential. Mayor Napier had division and warfare between the two sides during his time but he kept the respectful tone at that time. It troubles me deeply to field those phone calls and texts and try to explain what was happening. It was an unfortunate incident. We are in such a great position, and I cannot let us derail that with an increasing problem. I think these ideas are great, and getting people together will help alleviate everything.

Mayor Napier: I will make a commitment to do better and have one-on-one conversations with Councilmembers. My role is how can I create synergy on the Council? I think I can do that with one-on-one conversations. Some Councilmembers reach out to me more, and I love that and will commit to do more of that. Reaching out to Councilmember Gulley after that meeting to ask what's going on, which will help me create some synergy for all these people here to do their job. I will commit to that today. If I haven't done it to the level that is needed, I am sorry.

City Manager Schroeder thanked Councilmember Gulley for her comments. I appreciate it. The team here is focus forward, he said. The point is, if everyone starts with... 'this is my teammate,' whomever that is, then what do you do with your teammate? You support your teammates. You may disagree with your teammates, but you always support them. I would suggest if we keep that in mind, the rest will fix itself.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: Sometimes when a meeting has been more challenging or there is challenging blow-back after a meeting, I will call Mayor Napier myself for counseling because he's not able to read our minds. He's a great leader, so give it a try.

Dr. Waldron: That will go a long way. Are there any other issues we need to talk about before we break for lunch?

Councilmember Justen

This may be more into the discussion we will have later. But one thing I think is a burning issue is that we have items coming forward from the Planning Commission or the Environmental Committee and we're trying to codify some of their approaches so they will have more freedom to be able to work on things without continually having to specify that they are pollinator friendly or such. I am starting to see a little bit of concern on the part of

committee members that they are not being fully embraced for their recommendations. We just had an item with the Charter Commission regarding the number of people on this committee. I've heard from some of the Planning Commissioners that they put forward items to Council but it wasn't fully considered. One, in particular, that came up recently was the parking minimum they pushed forward to us but that kind of died at the table. So I think we have to be cognizant in making sure that our volunteer committees feel fully respected and that their voices are really heard. Some of that will be through taking action. Not all of their recommendations will be right, but I've seen some concerns from long-term Planning Commissioners, as well as short-term Planning Commissioners, that why should I do this job if nothing I do gets done? That's a concern.

Councilmember Eastman: I think that may be a future opportunity for us. If we plan a joint work session with some of our bigger committees like Planning, Environmental and Parks & Recreation, we could hear from them and get their guidance on some of these things.

Dr. Waldron: I've seen this happen all the time in every place I've been. Where the commissioners work hard on an issue but the Council takes a different position. The commissioners do tend to get upset. The solution that I've seen is, first of all, when you're bringing them in and interviewing them, remind them that they are an advisory committee and you appreciate what they do, but the Council has a different role with difficult decisions. The other piece, as Councilmember Eastman said, is having a work session with these commissions and talking about things, how you work, why you make certain decisions and, again, reminding them that, as Council, you have to make tough decisions and look at these things from a different perspective.

Councilmember Justen: I think it's less about that we're holding down things they want to do. It's more of things they want to do that never get to a point where it becomes an action item. That's the frustrating part for them. We have participated in votes where we went completely against the Planning Commission's recommendations and I think for good reason, with legal reasons behind it. I think they understand that it will not always go their way, but the concerns I'm hearing is more that it's not getting to the point where they're even getting their day in court, if you will. I don't know how you change that.

Dr. Waldron: You have a full plate here right now. It does get difficult to get certain issues, to get things timed out, and then you have COVID on top of it that pushes things off.

Mayor Napier: I think what has really helped me is by watching the committee meetings. For me, watching the work they do, the thought process that goes into it, and some very good questions, it actually has helped some of these items pass through Council without a hiccup. It may seem weird for Council to not have a lot of discussion on an item. But because I watched the Planning Commission meeting, I watched all the questions they had, and all of my questions were answered, that I can comment on it. I usually say that the Planning Commission did a great job, I thank them for all the work they did, so I have no questions on this item, and I think they're on the right track. I would encourage all Councilmembers to watch the committee meetings. It will help you to know that they are doing their job. We aren't always going to agree with their recommendation, but they need to know that we respect them for

what they're doing. And that we represent all of our community members, we respect their due diligence and, at the end of the day, we vote on how it is best for the community as a whole. And sometimes it's not the same. I think if we communicate with them and report at the table, Councilmember Justen is the Planning Commission Liaison, so we look to him for insights on the meeting. I think we just need to respect their role. They are a volunteer committee that believes passionately in their community and they are going to give it what it takes. We put people on committees that are very good. I think we should be having regular conversations with the Planning Commission Chair, even when there's not an issue, as well as the other committee Chairs, just to have those conversations. The Planning Commission Chair and I talk a lot, so I don't see an issue there. With the other Chairs, having a regular conversation to get a feel for what's driving them and what passions are happening on the committee will help.

Dr. Waldron: The thing you talk about in terms of showing respect is really critical. Private meetings with the Chair or having everyone together to express support for the commission and how important they are, can really make a big difference. Any other issues that you'd like to touch on before we break?

Councilmember Gulley

We talked about creating some new committees, and I would like us to spend some time on this. We have a lot of creative folks ready to step up, and we have some opportunities that exist. Three that we talked about are diversity and equity, a human rights committee with more legal teeth, and a public arts committee. There may be others, as well.

City Manager Schroeder: I mentioned this to Mayor Napier recently. Any City Manager should immediately respond as to whether we have the additional resources for it. That's an issue to think about when creating committees.

Mayor Napier: We need to let the creative juices flow first before we say no. The bottom line is the discussion will be healthy and strong and maybe something will come out of it that makes us better, but I would never expect anything less than Schroeder putting a dollar amount to it.

Councilmember Eastman: Maybe as we have these conversations, we can merge some of these things into a subcommittee or a work group and have a better way of accepting their work and feedback on a City level.

Mayor Napier: I have some ideas, and I am sure everyone else has ideas. Perhaps we can address those in a way that won't impact our budget.

Councilmember Justen: Because we have three ideas for committees, I think we also need to look at prioritization of what is the most crucial need and what is the most realistic. I don't think we can launch three committees simultaneously. I think that would be a disaster in the making on a lot of levels. Of course, functionally, this ties back to issue one that we talked about with the first amendment, human rights piece. Those are very inter-related in what we're talking about.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: One thing in our current and previous initiatives, is that Chief Sturgeon is talking about doing a Police Chief roundtable discussion group. That is still on the table but on hold because of COVID. Also, pulling something from the proposal we received on Thursday goes to what Councilmember Eastman was trying to get at, as well: “Formalizing this work in a way, structure or process to provide additional structure and create a deliberate process for addressing complex issues before they flare into public controversy.”

Councilmember Berry: We talked earlier about a public arts committee. I did a lot of research, and one of the concerns of the Parks & Recreation Committee is that there is no budget. We have no money to do public art, so what does it look like from there? Does that mean we need to find money Or only bring it up when someone recommends it? We are depending on people to donate to these projects. That’s how we were fortunate enough to get our current public art project. The financial piece is important to stay committed to these committees.

Councilmember Eastman: In some of these, maybe it is something where it has a shorter lift span to get started until we have the finances for it.

Dr. Waldron: One of the difficulties I’ve had is I always like strong committee structures and planning commissions, economic development commissions and so forth. The difficulty can come up, also, if you move aggressively in some of these areas. The commissions start driving the boat, and they want this done or that done but it doesn’t always flow with the Council’s priorities. So there are times that Staff needs to figure out what to do because their plan has nothing to do with the Council’s policies or strategies. The Chair is pushing them this way, but the Council wants to go that way, so it’s another thing to watch and be careful of with those major committee structures. Some can be happening in terms of what Councilmember Justen was talking about. They want to go in this direction and get stuff done, but it’s not on the top of Council’s priority list and commissioners get upset.

Councilmember Justen: I am very happy that we have this sculpture in the park but, when it came in front of us, I voiced it at the meeting. That I’m supposed to accept a grant for something that – we already picked out an artist, we already chose what we’re going to do and where it’s going to be, but the first time Council heard of it was when Council was supposed to accept it. But where we are at the table, if we had ten different ideas, or the community had different ideas, we had this art park and choices were already made. That would fall into what you’re talking about, and it is a valid concern. At the time, I wasn’t sure how to vote on the grant because I didn’t understand how it got this far ahead of Council. It’s a reality, that’s for sure.

Councilmember Berry

As we are creating affordable housing, my worry is that as we add all these thousands of units, which are really nice, but the ones that are more affordable have less standards and continue to go downhill. Those apartments are affordable for people who live in West St. Paul right now, to stay in nice quality apartments, but it’s an issue. People may live in a two-bedroom apartment now and the apartments coming in are the same, but they won’t be able to afford them. I want to be sure, in some way, that we have affordable housing based on West St. Paul standards.

Councilmember Eastman: I did get some information on affordable housing, information about Dakota County that I shared with City Manager Schroeder. One thing I still have a concern about is that it talks about rents paid, the AMI range, and things like that. But what concerns me, and what I've heard from constituents and some others, is that we keep digging down. Because, for instance, when we talk about AMI, one of the challenges we have in West St. Paul is when we are renovating lower end AMI in our city compared to the metro AMI, we're already lower. When we do these housing developments, it's based on the metro level. 53% is quite a bit higher than the West St. Paul AMI. We have affordable housing going in but, when I had conversations with my constituents who are renters, one of the things is it's talking about your gross income. And we have a lot of people who are in our area that are paying over 60-70% of their income for housing costs. The other thing is how this gets figured with rent. The rent figure might be affordable but they pay rent and they also pay fees for storage, garage space, and pets. They also pay the normal power bills and some are being charged for water and trash. Unfortunately, I also heard of cases in the rental community (apartments, rental houses, etc.) that people, whether it's because they're on a lower level and they're making lower income, but they are getting taken advantage of in some cases and getting secretly charged for more things. Such as, if you pay me in cash and a very high amount, we will look the other way that you're an undocumented worker. Those are big concerns I have.

Councilmember Gulley: Literally, the term 'naturally occurring affordable housing' sounds like a good thing and you actually build these but a lot are not being kept up. Sometimes the intercoms haven't worked for years. And a lot of things that we expect, that are considered amenities or considered a part of the rent for this building, they're not kept up. Councilmembers Eastman, Justen and I have had conversations about going to those apartment buildings and seeing what's happening in our city and what we can do about it.

Councilmember Justen: There is a particular block of apartments in Ward 2. They're all nearly identical buildings from the outside. But when I went in to door knock, I could literally see the difference in which were managed by this company and which were managed by another company. The difference in walking through the same structure, the lighting suddenly drops, the security doors were not locked, the carpet has never been cleaned. The craziest thing of all is, in one building, there is community and the residents are in the hall talking with each other. But in another building, it's like a graveyard. There's no community interaction. Spaces create or destroy community. I get a lot of calls from people in rental units with difficulties, whether its security doors or whatever, and it's always tricky to explain that our ability to get inside an apartment rental unit is very different than our ability to deal with a problematic house. We can use City Code immediately if a garage is falling down or for some other dangerous situation or if the appearance is not up to par. We don't have that same hand inside our rental properties. And there were a couple I went into that I was thinking – I am not happy that this is in my city or for the people that live here. But I know they live there because it's naturally affordable and they can keep their rents down because the maintenance is poor. The less the maintenance, the less the rent, the less people stay in there, and the more turnover you have. I start to hear about a lot of crime in their building and these things are all inter-related. It's disheartening to tell someone that you need to complain to your management company or contact the City. But by the time the City can get there, hopefully it's been fixed. There's not any real repercussions and, the next time, it's the same thing over again.

Councilmember Eastman: Some of the conversations with Dakota County Community Development Agency, Matrix Housing, etc., I don't have a good handle on the insecurity here in our community, and that's likely to grow. I had a conversation with a constituent who is a high school teacher. Though not in our community, but it is indicative of students who are homeless, in transitional housing, and moved around to get on those housing lists. Dakota County has a waitlist of 10,000 people. They've been taking more names for the waitlist but cannot get to it to vet it. It's a problem.

Councilmember Gulley: I'm excited for the City survey. As we predicted, we had a very low response from non-homeowners and it doesn't give information for those who did not complete the survey. How do we get to them? We have to figure out how to get into our whole community.

Councilmember Berry: The demographic now allows us to get that information from the survey.

Dr. Waldron moved to the strategic initiatives developed by Staff for possible modification.

Branding

City Manager Schroeder: Over the last two Strategic Planning sessions, Staff has come sort of empty handed to the meeting and Council created initiatives. This time, however, we didn't. Back in September/October, Councilmember Justen started the conversation with "I don't like the word 'like' in the initiative," so this is where it started. While we were responding to that, we thought we could look at all of them and tweak them in some fashion. That's how this document was created back in October. If Staff were to recommend that Council reword these initiatives, assuming you would stay with the same initiatives, how would you do that? The way this document is organized is to show your initiative then, in bold, some possible alternative wording that may be better suited. We created two additional initiatives, such as one on infrastructure and another on facilities. There has not been an initiative on public safety, and we thought there should be, so we added that additional one. Council may toss it out completely or amend what you have. We are here to listen to you, so this is just a recommendation.

Councilmember Eastman: We talked about the nine goals or 'bubbles' on page 18 of the 2020 City Council Actions document. Are these the right nine bubbles or should some be removed, substituted or edited? As we are trying to decide, is there something that is too much for Staff? Are there certain titles that cause more work or reprogramming, for instance?

City Manager Schroeder: We are looking for your initiatives that are general in nature.

Councilmember Gulley: I've been trying to think of a new tagline for the city. Is that what you want?

City Manager Schroeder: Our question is, is that topic an important topic? Not what should the tagline be, but is the development of the tagline important? We've heard where we talk about West St. Paul being "closer to it all," that shouldn't it be talking about what is here and not just what is closer? But the real question is the topic, such as branding.

Councilmember Justen: We need an initiative attracting higher quality or different businesses. Identify development portfolio, #12.

Council agreed to keep branding.

Councilmember Eastman: Suggestion - how do you feel of having the bubble being about communication or marketing, of which branding could be a subset? Councilmembers Justen and Gulley agreed.

Councilmember Gulley: Communication is about communicating with a lot of different people, and branding is a part of that. Part of it is really looking at what we want to convey about our city.

Mayor Napier: As much as I don't think the tagline does enough for our city, it is huge in attracting people to our city. I hear about how wonderful geographically it is to get to anything around us. The airport or 20 minutes to the Twins game. It's unbelievable how close we are but with that small town feel. We have it all...but we don't have a Wendy's, yet, so we don't have it all.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: At the agency, we create messaging hierarchies. What is our main message and sub-messages? I'm hearing a lot of those here. Branding is not just a logo. What our story is, all the things you're saying, and it would be used to sell the city.

Councilmember Eastman: I still think that's a subset. Our messages are part of that.

Dr. Waldron: I think communication and marketing captures it all.

Councilmember Justen: Branding and identity is the story of what we are.

Invest in Infrastructure and Public Facilities

Councilmember Berry: I like the idea of separating these.

City Manager Schroeder: On this one, whether we talk about the infrastructure, facilities, or money, one thing I really wanted to talk about was the idea that we mention from time to time. We would like the Council to get started or adopt what we do as we pay down debt. Do we just pay down debt? Do we reduce the tax levy? Or do we spend it on items that provide value? We are recommending that three quarters of it go to infrastructure and facilities, as we reduce the debt, and a portion of it be returned to the taxpayer. How that would work is that a portion would go to operations so you don't have to levy for that portion. In some fashion, we are suggesting, if we spread it out, the spreadsheet in Council's packet would show how that would look. Spread it to buildings, neighborhood streets, alleys, pipelining, and sidewalks. And if you happened to look at this in detail, what it shows you in the exhibit is, as you pay down debt, it's a moderate return to early years. Over the first ten years, you make a little headway. Beyond that, it really starts picking up. If you can get to 2036, the dividends are amazing at that point. In the meantime, we have a stated goal and memorandum of raising a certain amount of money for buildings. About ten to 12 years out, we've raised enough using current dollars. Same with pipeline and alleys. As you get to the point where you have cash in each of those categories, you no longer need cash in those categories, so you spread it. What's exciting by the end of the table, you've created \$3 million a

year towards streets and sidewalks. That kind of solves a lot of problems. In the meantime, the sales tax will be one and done about that same amount of time. On the one hand, if the sales tax goes away, you have a little more money than what it generates. But I would also suggest that the Council may need to evaluate whether you attempt to extend that sales tax. There are two sides to that. It's revenue that's not property tax dollars. As someone mentioned at a Town Hall, it's generated from people in town but also from people outside of town. I would really like to see Council say something on this debt savings plan. Such as we adopt as a Council in policy. So finance and infrastructure people all know that, if we pay off this bond issue, that will result in this, and they can plan on it.

Mayor Napier: Does that plan have a name, such as the "Schroeder Legacy?"

City Manager Schroeder: "If you watch your dimes, your dollars will grow." If the organizational culture is patience, adopting the plan and sticking to the plan as it relates to these sorts of things, the dividends will be dramatic, just not immediate.

Councilmember Gulley: From my perspective, what people are paying in taxes right now, that's a pain they already know. To get \$200 back on my taxes every year will make no difference in my life. It will make a huge difference to me to see improvements to our infrastructure and our parks. We have these tax rates, they are familiar to us, so take that money and put it into great services. Communicate so people know what we're doing with their money and the investments we're making in our community.

Councilmember Eastman: It could be a bubble, a mission statement, whatever, but that we strive for excellence in our city operations that is managed and wise in fiduciary responsibilities.

Mayor Napier: City Manager Schroeder wants the future Council to not go crazy, so we as a Council can set that. I believe strongly that we should get that down so it's not just what we're passionate about, but it's a policy for our city.

Councilmember Justen: I would like to make a motion to adopt this. I fully support it and would love to see "continued investment in infrastructure and continued investment in facilities." Reflect that we are maintaining, rather than creating, that investment.

Councilmember Gulley: All of these say kind of the same thing. Maybe all could include the word "continually," such as "continually improve recreational..." etc. Everyone agreed.

Councilmember Justen: Reflecting what we've done and what Councils before us have done, as well. But we're not the first to do some of these things and that should be recognized, as well.

City Manager Schroeder: The last three years, this Council really has accomplished things that not a lot of cities have accomplished fiscally.

Councilmember Eastman: I've heard that, statewide, some cities are just getting to this infrastructure in their older cities and wish they were where we are today.

Dr. Waldron: What you're doing with this Schroeder Legacy plan is one of the trends I mentioned. Cities are getting requests for facilities and services but residents don't want to pay for them. You're already paying this amount and your residents are comfortable with it. Down the road, you'll be able to do so many things. This was a good decision and bodes well in terms of policy and the future. I'd love to be the new City Manager and have that in place. What a nice thing to have.

Councilmember Gulley: Identify opportunities to bolster...outreach. We are already a diverse city. The points should be about engagement with everyone. Unless the point is to bolster the city and recruiting more diversity to our city. Wordsmithing this one would be helpful. I would like to add something about environmental sustainability in our city.

Councilmember Eastman: Increase maintenance for parks and improvements. We could make it environmental. For what they're trying to codify with the Environmental Committee and the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: I would support this.

Councilmember Eastman: Renaming the parks and recreation one to a broader environmental.

Councilmember Berry: I would rather have two bubbles on this. One for parks and one for environment. Environment seems like sustainability and power.

Councilmember Justen: Is everyone okay with separating infrastructure and facilities?

Councilmember Eastman: Is even the broader bubble about fiscally managed City operations? And then a chunk is facilities and a chunk is infrastructure. Maybe we need to keep things separate but putting the plan in that our goal is a strong discipline in City operational management that includes thoughtful fiscal investments in those elements.

City Manager Schroeder: Infrastructure and facilities are similar. Probably every place I have worked, infrastructure is important. Conversation on facilities, talking about City Hall or the Public works facility, why would we need to do anything better than what we're doing for Staff? Or the conversation that they should be happy to have a job. To split it out is to identify that we have infrastructure but also take a new approach to facilities. Every ten years, you know you'd have to remodel the interior of a franchise, for instance, to keep things fresh. Same as a City Hall. You build a brand new City Hall but that's the last time you think about it until about 30 or 40 years later. If you haven't fixed the roof or replaced the carpet or it wasn't maintained, you may need a new one. If there had been ongoing investments in the workspaces, you would have happier people. But Cities don't think in those terms. What is intended here, there is a concept of how a rehab of the general portion of the government building could be done. I have issues with some things it, if we were going forward with a rehab. So don't take the document in your packet as the concept. But why it's in this packet is to reinforce that we do need to put some asset investment into our people, and that means you fix things up occasionally. Since I've been here, I have had Staff coming to me saying we need a new City Hall and I know you can build it. They were so excited about that. But my response was, there is nothing wrong with this building, it's just not

designed appropriately. The window in the conference room was to show that it could be done. We fixed the roof and the HVAC. I think the City should assess that language. We are doing enough, but we are setting money aside so that, in the next decade, we can rehab the general portion of City Hall, the administration portion of the Fire barn, and upgrade the systems at Public Works to get that done in the next ten years. We can do this with a little more investment and hope in five years or so from now it could be done on a cash basis like we did with the Police Department remodel. Some folks may be subscribed to that, others may be disappointed because they want a new City Hall. But I think you just need to maintain the current one better. The dividends would occur in many different ways. It's a goal I think City Council should have, to work towards that approach, and that, yes, we are going to invest in existing infrastructure.

Mayor Napier: There is so much to what City Manager Schroeder has said here. I appreciate the fact that we were able to do some renovations, but the general government area just doesn't show that we care.

Councilmember Gulley: We are all really invested in the idea of maintaining our infrastructure and resources. I would love to see a long term plan on how our infrastructure should be updated. We know when things will time out, such as the HVAC system, but having a plan for a date when we need to start planning for replacements would be really helpful so we can do the right thing and maintain our existing facilities. I would like to see a bubble on economic development. Investing in this idea of how we can build relationships, not just with developers but with businesses.

Councilmember Justen: One of the nice things as we talk about City Manager Schroeder's plan, not only does this create what we want, it is fiscally responsible. We are trying to do that without the burden on taxpayers. Things don't get cheaper if you wait. Or, in economic collapse, it will cost more to replace than if we do it earlier. I like everything about that, and it's a great goal to emphasize.

Councilmember Eastman: I wholly support the pay as you go plan. Do we need to state that more strongly?

City Manager Schroeder: It's actually in a few different places on purpose, but we will come back and amend the policy that will reinforce it.

Dr. Waldron moved on to the next goal: Improving accessibility, walking, biking, wheelchairs

Councilmember Berry: It should definitely stay.

Councilmember Eastman: On accessibility, do we need to talk about accessibility as a bit of a social injustice of the broader sense of access? It could be a subcomponent of diversity.

Councilmember Justen: More words can muddy what you're trying to say. We want people to be able to walk around. So accessibility is important, but it's not the whole of that concept. The way it's worked now, it's a much more visionary concept than what it states.

Councilmember Gulley: We could say improve accessibility and equity? As in equitable access looks like physical, infrastructure, different ways to get around or interact with the City.

Councilmember Berry: Equitable access.

Councilmember Eastman: If we know part of accessibility is the physical access things, and then you have other things such as translation services, closed captioning, newsletters in multiple languages and such, you could count it against that goal.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: Does the equitable piece move into the mission? Council agreed that the mission statement is the place for 'equitable.'

Next goal: Blighted properties.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: Does it need to stay because it's used in state and federal funding?

Councilmember Justen: Even so, it doesn't need to be in the big bubble. No one wants to be told their property is blighted.

Councilmember Eastman: It could fall in the economic development bubble.

Councilmember Justen: Could be 'maintain quality of housing stock.' With the implementation that our housing stock is good and we want to keep it good. Goals should be positive whenever you can.

Councilmember Berry: Did we include businesses in that?

City Manager Schroeder: There is housing and there is economic development.

Councilmember Eastman: What if we say 'maintain or support quality housing' which could be homes or affordable housing. 'Execute quality housing.'

Parks

Councilmember Gulley: "Increase maintenance and improvement of parks."

Councilmember Justen: We are actively improving, so we should be reflecting the momentum from when we created these goals.

Councilmember Gulley: Prefer that it is an active sounding goal.

Councilmember Justen: Would like to reflect that we're known for a fantastic park system.

Councilmember Berry: We should continue pushing forward, as well.

City Manager Schroeder: I think what this Council wants to do, in a proactive way, is to plan for what each park, neighborhood, or community needs and create an action plan to accomplish that

in a reasonable timeframe. That's what I am hearing. We are coming to you in March with what our thoughts are, so you will have it in front of you.

Councilmember Justen: "Build on our strong park system and plan for further improvements."

Council agreed with Councilmember Justen's suggestion.

Recreation

City Manager Schroeder said this City has made significant strides since 2012 and has improved its park infrastructure. We have resulted in some debt we still have, but in the last few years, we have been building fund capacity in the parks area, particularly with park dedication fees. We are pretty comfortable that the Marthaler trail system will go in this year and, after that, it should be fairly straight forward for the rest of Marthaler in 2022-2024. Our hope is that we focus on that, with minor other improvements that need to occur, and then get into the next stage of neighborhood parks, including redoing Harmon.

Recreation for all ages and abilities

Councilmember Justen: I would love to see about partnerships with Dodge Nature Center and our School District.

Councilmember Berry: Partnerships to enhance our recreation.

Councilmember Justen: Recognize that we have great partnership. When we're talking recreation, we have to include the lucky aspect that we have Dodge Nature Center and our schools. The playgrounds are part of our recreation. It doesn't need to be the main bullet point, but it's important to include that.

Councilmember Eastman: "Deliver recreational opportunities with partners."

Councilmember Gulley: I had a conversation with the School District and they were interested in partnering with the City.

Councilmember Justen: Schools are listed under initiatives and opportunities but we should add Dodge Nature Center.

Mayor Napier: The partnership that has been growing in the past five to six years is great. There is an opportunity there and we should have it as one of our goals.

Councilmember Justen: It's the first place I take out of town visitors to.

Councilmember Eastman: Some of our recreational opportunities could also be community type events. Even with recreation, it's Police and Fire.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: The relationship with Dodge – we briefly touched on the West St. Paul Days, Winter Fun Fest. How can we expand in our roles to help enhance those programs. They go hand in hand.

Councilmember Gulley: Dodge has such a great relationship with the schools. If we're looking for models on what that partnership would look like, that would be a place to start.

Councilmember Justen: Remove 'golf course' from management of recreational facilities.

Dr. Waldron: We have a strategy relating to economic development listed. Do we want to modify that?

Councilmember Justen: We would be remiss if we didn't get responses from the survey into the bubbles. Given all the limitations, we have to be careful of what we promise here.

Councilmember Gulley: We should talk about Walmart. We need to find a way to work with them.

Councilmember Eastman: Agreed, but deeper, are they still under TIF funding? Or did that retire?

Finance Director Stark: They are still under that TIF.

Councilmember Eastman: For future consideration looking at TIF opportunities for development, what are some requirements as a City perspective? You want our help with financing, here are operations or management or acknowledgement of our practices and policies.

City Manager Schroeder: I don't know much about the history and Walmart has been unresponsive.

Police Chief Sturgeon: I talk to the Manager on a weekly basis, so I can make sure it happens.

Councilmember Justen: It's not a Robert Street problem, it's a Walmart problem. Target and Hobby Lobby are cleaner than the Walmart parking lot.

Mayor Napier: You can go to a Walmart a few miles away and it looks like a totally different store, so there is no reason for it.

Dr. Waldron moved on to the strategic initiative regarding diversity.

Councilmember Gulley: We are already a diverse community, so the goal that I would like us to have in mind is how we engage everyone in our community. How do we go to them and bring them in?

Mayor Napier: I like the word bolster.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: The issue is we are all reading this differently.

Mayor Napier: What if you say ‘expand’ instead of ‘identify?’

Councilmember Justen: The word bolster may not be working.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: “Identify opportunities to bolster outreach around diversity and inclusion.”

Councilmember Berry: I would prefer ‘expand’ not ‘identify.’ Others agreed.

Suggestions:

“Expand opportunities to bolster outreach around diversity and inclusion”

“Expand and bolster outreach”

“Culture”

“Expand and bolster outreach for the purposes of diversity and inclusion”

“Expand and strengthen outreach for the purposes of diversity and inclusion”

“Expand and strengthen outreach”

“Strengthen engagement with all communities”

Councilmember Eng-Sarne asked Marketing & Communications Manager Nowicki to take this away and come back with suggestions on wording.

Councilmember Justen: The key word is emphasizing outreach because outreach is that piece to go to where they are. I want that word to jump out to them.

Councilmember Eastman: Let’s ask Nowicki to research. I will ask others, as well, if outreach is a welcome term or if it is a weaker term.

Dr. Waldron asked Nowicki to provide five options.

Councilmember Justen: We need to be sure the words match the statement we want to say.

Public safety

Councilmember Eastman: Some additional words in the first sentence: “Build relationships and trust with our public safety programs.”

Mayor Napier: Where improved community awareness came from is we do a lot of public safety outreach. Trying to get the word out – look what we are doing and we want to do more.

Police Chief Sturgeon: We do 220 outreaches a year, prior to COVID.

Mayor Napier: We weren’t even aware of how many you are doing.

Council added this as an additional bubble.

Councilmember Justen: There is a fair amount of our community that would like to see a statement about preserving our high quality public safety organizations. There are some that came into my shop asking if we were defunding the Police. We need to reflect that we are not. If we have a public safety piece, we need to talk about that we are continually supporting the good work of our public safety.

Councilmember Eastman: On positive mental health programs, being a leader, sharing that stuff, people pay attention and appreciate it.

Councilmember Justen: “Improve community awareness” is good but the other part sounds like we’re coming from behind.

Councilmember Eastman: We have comments on the survey about that.

Councilmember Justen: I don’t want anyone to read that we are undermining our Police and Fire. There’s something about getting everyone to understand your goals and, if it can be read two different ways, you will confuse those who have a lack of confidence. We don’t want others to think there is a lack of confidence.

Mayor Napier: “Improve community awareness of public safety programs.”

Councilmember Eastman: “Continue to build.” “Expand community awareness of public safety programs and community outreach.”

Police Chief Sturgeon: I start off some of my reports and talking to others with “maintain and improve upon.” It’s all about marketing and partnerships. When we have community outreach events, the more that Council is involved, it strengthens the whole organization and all of City government. In the Hispanic population, we’ve made great strides in their trust. With your partnerships, they don’t have the trust of the elected officials. Where they come from, elected officials and the Police, they don’t talk to them. We’ve done great efforts to do that. Council and City government need to make that effort. Making a team effort is important.

Councilmember Berry: We need to be partnering with public safety.

Councilmember Justen: We talked about EDA but we didn’t talk about that.

Mayor Napier: We need to clarify it somewhere in our initiatives.

Dr. Waldron: You have the economic bubble and the effort to higher quality businesses part of it.

Councilmember Justen: It needs to be the visible part, so they need to see it specific in the bubble document. If we say ‘actively.’

Mayor Napier: “Establish economic development goals that retain and attract desirable businesses.

Councilmember Justen: Agreed. We just need to make it visible to the public. It’s crucial to have it front and center.

Councilmember Gulley: We are not a tourist city, so we don't have a tourist bureau, but we could have a map with little pull-out bubbles, including our small restaurants or all of them.

Mayor Napier: That would be a Nowicki initiative. It's a great idea. It has been a moving wheel. We are at a place now that it would be great. When I was younger, they had a layout of West St. Paul.

Councilmember Gulley: Print and have them available at City Hall.

City Manager Schroeder: Anything printed would have to be updated fairly rapidly.

Councilmember Justen: A dedicated page in every West St. Paul mailer. Update it every time it comes out.

Mayor Napier: It could be a balloon of a new one.

Councilmember Gulley: Highlight different kinds of businesses. In this issue, we highlight all the local independent businesses, next all the taco places, etc.

Councilmember Eastman: In EDA meetings, we could take an area a week and talk about restaurants as a "Did you know?" piece.

Councilmember Gulley: There are more opportunities than just restaurants.

Councilmember Justen: There are a ton of really cool businesses. If you have a categorical list and a map and change it every three months, that would change the perception.

Mayor Napier: One thing we learned in every survey and the meeting over the last eight years is they read the newsletter. It's the most popular way to communicate than things printed in the lobby. We also used to do packets that were put together for new homeowners. Councilmembers would hand deliver them. What was cool is that businesses contributed to it. Free guitar lessons, \$5 off Starbucks, and all this stuff for new homeowners. Councilmember Armon put that together and it was great.

Councilmember Justen: That's an easy first action item to attract and retain desirable businesses and, right out of the gate, we promote those businesses.

Councilmember Gulley: It would be a nice bonus to give a call to those business owners and let them know we're going to be highlighting their business. It would go a long way in partnership with those businesses.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: I love the fact that we're having this discussion. What I'm hearing is removing this blighted section out completely with new language to 'retain and attract desirable businesses.'

City Manager Schroeder: Councilmember Eng-Sarne is correct that the economic development bubble does talk about blighted properties.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne will email her suggestion to Schroeder.

Dr. Waldron: The important thing you did was move forward and advance your financial policy. If you did anything today, that was outstanding and bodes well for the future. To close out the day, think about everything we've talked about and the issues. In terms of getting where we want to go, think about the strengths and opportunities to help us get there. What are our strengths for opportunities to help us get this critical stuff done?

Mayor Napier: High quality staff. We have a really good team of staff members. And with that, we haven't had a lot of turnover, so they are invested.

Councilmember Eastman: We are starting from a good foundation of quality. We are not inventing from scratch. We are launching from a good place.

Councilmember Justen: It's a good sign that what we are largely talking about is changing the perception, rather than changing the realities. We are doing a lot of these things, but the public is not as aware as we want them to be.

Mayor Napier: It's a huge advantage for Councilmembers now at the table, that their perception is different.

Councilmember Eastman: We have an engaged community.

Councilmember Gulley: We have a lot of passion and enthusiasm for our city. That goes for Council, Staff, the community, volunteers, committees and commissions.

Councilmember Justen: I want to bring commissions and volunteers into a totally separate bullet point. We are lucky to have them.

Mayor Napier: To lose our leadership and, as tough as it is, we are positioned well financially and can bring in new leadership with good expectations.

Councilmember Justen: The position we are in gave us the opportunity to have exceptional applicants, 32 of them, and a difficult process to whittle it down to four finalists. Other Cities with things on fire would not get that many applicants. We should pat ourselves on the back that we have a functional, visionary, and aligned Council.

Dr. Waldron: That is huge to have everyone operating with the same vision and on the same page. That doesn't happen and is really critical. Do you all feel good that City Manager Schroeder's successor will be able to take a look at this and figure out where you want to go? Everyone agreed and said yes.

Councilmember Eastman: Call out that we are operating across many areas with extreme excellence. Cities should be envied. Our City Engineer, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, First Responders, they want to steal you guys.

Councilmember Justen: Someone should be head hunting our Financial Director, as well.

Councilmember Eastman: But we want to keep them all.

Councilmember Gulley: We have great staff in West St. Paul. Great businesses, schools, parks and amenities. It's a great place to live.

City Manager Schroeder: The partnerships with the School District, Dakota County is a huge partner. When I got here, there was a lot of conversation about the County. But in the past four to five years, especially, they have been such a good partner for this community. I think they were perceived as not to be trusted. But thank God they are our big brother.

Councilmember Justen: The County built us a tunnel and made it the greatest I've seen.

Councilmember Gulley: We may want to look at what Dakota County has done. We could take some lessons from them and how we communicate with others. The biggest area of growth is communicating and sharing with people. It's an area we need to continue to grow in.

Councilmember Eastman: 'Accessible.'

Councilmember Gulley: 'Transparency.'

Councilmember Justen: Representative Rick Hansen and Senator Matt Klein, our two Legislators. They have worked hard for us on the lift station bonding bill, local sales tax, and much more.

Dr. Waldron: The last piece: Problems.

Councilmember Berry: We don't have unlimited funds.

Councilmember Eastman: COVID is an obstacle. Perceptions could be an off-shoot of COVID. Social media. Loss of our local newspaper. Hurdles to overcome.

Councilmember Justen: Zoning alignment with some of our visions for how we want development to go. Zoning sometimes contradicts the understanding of our comp plan.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne: Increase in political polarization.

Councilmember Eastman: Isolation.

Mayor Napier: Aging infrastructure. We have a plan but some of the rough streets are not on our list for a few years. People need to understand that it has to be paid for and there is a rating of pavement. It just doesn't get fixed overnight. Our pool needs work. We are slowing getting there but, in the meantime, do people understand that we are a first ring suburb with aging infrastructure?

Councilmember Eastman: For perception, it's perception-expectation problems.

Mayor Napier: Social media. People thinking we have an impact on what businesses come or don't. It's a huge roadblock. It's time to overcome this misperception.

Councilmember Justen: General mistrust of government. They inherently don't trust government. And think there are backroom deals for contractors.

Mayor Napier: Understanding Council's role as elected officials and uniting to accomplish all of our established goals. It's easier said than done, and it's a challenge that we face and need to address. We are no longer just a resident of the community. We have a duty to uphold to all of our constituents.

Councilmember Gulley: Strict rules on how we interact as a Council. Taking away less formal interactions is really challenging.

Councilmember Eastman: It's a restriction or a limitation as an elected official. We won't talk on social media or comment or attack someone.

Councilmember Justen: There was a hockey booster thing where Mayor Napier, Councilmember Vitelli and I went to Tappers. We had a great conversation, not City business and we cannot do that, even if we stay under the limits of Open Meeting Laws. We used to be able to do that. It's a healthy thing, but it's an obstacle.

Mayor Napier: Three can get together.

Councilmember Justen: But COVID is creating a situation that even that outlet doesn't allow us to.

Dr. Waldron: Transition won't be easy.

City Manager Schroeder; It's an opportunity.

Dr. Waldron: It's both. It's new blood and a new transition, but not easy on anyone.

Councilmember Eastman: Access. You can watch Town Square Television, but you can only watch if you have access to those local cable channels or only if you have internet.

Councilmember Gulley: Internet didn't show up on the list of goals, but we need to think about it with new development.

Councilmember Eastman: That is also a point on accessibility. Same as for isolation in our community. Even though there are tools and technology that the schools have given, sometimes it isn't working in their home. Or lower funding and they don't have it to help their kids.

Councilmember Justen: Those who are barely making rent, the first to go is internet. The flipside of an engaged community is the unengaged community. We are hearing the voices of some but not of others. But it's an obstacle to get that to them and get their concerns in front of you.

Councilmember Eastman: For Marketing & Communications Manager Nowicki, I heard from some asking if the surveys could be mailed or if we could include the survey in the newsletter with a return envelope.

Dr. Waldron: I think you're in a good place, and I enjoyed working with all of you today.

Councilmember Justen: Could we do a mini version of this meeting with the new City Manager? Perhaps an hour?

Mayor Napier: That's a great idea. We may not need to bring in Department Heads, but just Council and the City Manager.

City Manager Schroeder: How far in? He may want to get his feet on the ground first.

Councilmember Justen: Let him have some time with Staff first.

Mayor Napier: Thank you, Dr. Waldron, and everyone for spending the day with us. We are hopeful that we are nearing the end of COVID and can come back a little closer to normal and allow us to get out in the community. I am looking forward to summer, to our new City Manager, the strengths in our system, and new Councilmembers with new energy. Thank you.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shirley R Buecksler
City Clerk