



The meeting convened at 6:30 p.m.

Councilmembers present: Mayor Jake Spano, Tim Brausen, Steve Hallfin, Rachel Harris, Anne Mavity, Thom Miller, and Margaret Rog.

Councilmembers absent: None.

Staff present: City Manager (Mr. Harmening), City Attorney (Mr. Mattick), Deputy City Manager/Human Resources Director (Ms. Deno), CIO (Mr. Pires), Director of Community Development (Ms. Barton), Senior Planner (Mr. Walther), Building and Energy Manager (Mr. Skellet), Communications Manager (Ms. Smith), Sr. Management Analyst (Ms. Carrillo Perez), and Recording Secretary (Ms. Pappas).

Guests: St. Louis Park Nest Board Members; Katie Jones, Center for Energy and Environment

**1. Future study session agenda planning – July 15 and July 22**

Proposed future study session agenda topics:

- Return to reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at regular city council meetings

Mayor Spano opened the meeting, stated this is not a public hearing, and noted the council has not had the practice of reciting Pledge of Allegiance before a study session.

Mayor Spano noted there will be two proposals presented at the study session this evening that will be considered for a future study session agenda topic.

Mayor Spano presented his proposal, which would be to return to reciting the pledge. He noted the very strong response from the community in the past few weeks regarding stopping saying the pledge. This proposal would allow for a return to reciting the pledge. He noted the vote was a missed step and added the council should have discussed this with the community before voting.

Mayor Spano stated in his conversations over the last 10 days with community members, he has heard many like participating in the city's cultural norms, including reciting the pledge. He added as a council, they did not think this would be a big deal, but it is, and they may have missed the mark, and will need to go back to discuss it.

Councilmember Mavity stated all protocols were followed related to this vote, adding the Mayor missed all the meetings where it was discussed and voted on. She stated reducing how often we say the pledge has touched a nerve in St. Louis Park, and as a proud American she's appalled that our little towns' protocols have caused this issue. She stated she wants to be sure to focus on the issues that matter such as climate action and clean water.

Councilmember Mavity apologized to staff, noting they have been on the receiving end of horrible and hateful calls. She noted this was not the council's intention, but added the council fumbled by not being in conversation with residents, stating she wants to make sure they get it right this time, and be in conversation with residents.

Councilmember Mavity stated she proposes to use this moment to start a deeper conversation and discussion on what it means to be a resident of St. Louis Park, how to best express this, and move closer to liberty and justice for all. She hopes the outcome will get the community past "yes-no" only, and ensure the council creates a process to engage in conversations and listen deeply to one another instead of creating polarization. She stated she wants to make sure space is created to talk about this, and through this process, everyone will think of more ways to mark patriotism, adding she is confident residents can help do this.

Councilmember Rog stated she acknowledges the discomfort this caused for residents, adding this has hurt people across this community. She added this action has done more harm than good, especially since many thought the city council spoke for them. She stated the council needs to get better at thinking about unintended consequences of their actions. She noted she is the daughter and wife of veterans and did not realize until now how deep this is. She hopes this can be a teachable moment, that there will be gain from pain, and she wants to use this moment to engage the public and to listen and learn from one another. She stated she is in favor of putting this on a future study session agenda, for further discussion.

Councilmember Hallfin stated he feels the council made a mistake and would like to return to the former practice of reciting the pledge at the beginning of the city council meetings. He stated he would need to think about doing a deeper dive discussion, as mentioned by Councilmember Mavity, and is not necessarily in favor of that, adding a deep dive discussion won't help the council with city business. He added he would be open to further discussion.

Councilmember Miller stated he would be more in favor of Councilmember Mavity's proposal and more open discussion. He stated he has learned that this is not so much about the pledge itself, but about the core values the pledge represents. He stated he heard again and again that the council needs to do a better job of communicating intent, adding the local media filtered the information. He complimented the *Sun Sailor* coverage, noting it was balanced and truthful. He stated because of the media coverage, many thought the council was banning the pledge from meetings, but that is not correct. He stated the council had only decided to not recite it at every council meeting. He stated he wants to discuss this further at a future study session.

Councilmember Brausen apologized to staff also for the situation this placed them in. He stated this was a tremendous distraction to them and he is sorry this caused so much grief.

Councilmember Brausen stated the council wanted to change the way it starts its meetings and was looking for a way to make meetings more comfortable for a variety of residents. He noted the pledge is not required by state law or the city charter, and he was surprised the city and many across the country have reacted so violently.

Councilmember Brausen stated he cares about veterans, the military, and his country, adding the council shows up every week to work on issues such as climate change, racial equity, and affordable housing. He added he heard from 150 people nationwide on this issue, and the majority of national sentiment was responsive to hearing the pledge be banned by the council. However, he added, many are offended that the council is playing with their hallowed traditions.

Councilmember Brausen added he also heard from 50-60 St. Louis Park residents who 2-1 want to reinstate the pledge, and he understands this is a good opportunity to talk and understand what real patriotism is. He stated the council made this change to welcome a diverse population, including fellow citizens that are atheist or agnostic, or who were traumatized in the military as soldiers. He noted a letter he received from a disabled vet who said he does not need to say the pledge, because he is living it every day.

Councilmember Harris stated she also received messages from many residents and folks across the country. She noted in the ward she represents in St. Louis Park, half of the people she heard from were in favor of the change, and half were opposed, while some were indifferent. She stated there is a need to hear more from residents in the community and have an open dialogue. She added her position on the original vote was that as a council member she took an oath to uphold the constitution and the constitution speaks to the separation of church and state – noting that the Pledge of Allegiance does contain the language, “one nation, under God”. She stated she is, however, in favor of reinstating the pledge at this time.

Mayor Spano stated part of the reason he is not interested in a deep dive discussion of this is that the city recently spent over a year on a visioning process and deciding on 5 strategic priorities for the city. He stated we don't need to discuss this as the community told us what they want us to work on. He suggested the council move quickly on reinstating the pledge. As this relates to process, he noted he did miss the meeting when it was voted on, but understood this item was set for a future study session review and discussion, and at some point, it was put forward for a vote. He assumed if it was moved forward for a study session topic that would have included a discussion with the community.

Councilmember Mavity stated the topic was placed on the agenda for a vote by a majority of the council and process was followed. She noted it was on the agenda that councilmembers are all supposed to read.

It was the consensus of the council to bring this topic back to a future study session in order to revisit it, have discussion about further community input, engagement and conversation, and then make a decision as to how to proceed.

The council took a 10-minute recess.

## **2. SLP Nest annual report and funding request**

Ms. Barton noted last year the council approved \$25,000 in matching city funds to support the work of the Nest in their first fiscal year of operation. At tonight's meeting, the Nest board members will provide a recap of what was accomplished and learned in the Nest's first year,

and explain plans for year two. The Nest has raised approximately \$39,000 toward their year two campaign goal of \$95,000 and is requesting matching funds from the city of \$20,000.

Board members presenting included: Ellen, youth coordinator; Rachel, mental health committee; Nisha, mental health committee; Estelle, programming committee and Cole.

The board members presented a video and noted creation and renovation of the space, with coffee shop, and event space. They stated they developed a weekly schedule and community partnerships, presented music, concerts and student council and Roots and Shoots events and meetings as well. Ellen stated the space is a welcoming teen-centric space, serving a diverse community. The group added they want to work on making their leadership/board group more diverse as well, and want everyone to know they are welcome at the Nest.

The board members stated they work on building life skills, professional and leadership development and creation and promotion of mental health programming. They noted students lead all meetings, and fundraising is crucial to the program as they are a 501 c 3 nonprofit organization.

Councilmember Harris asked what sort of partnerships would benefit the group in year two. Ellen stated hosting SOAR meetings, where students work against racism, along with doing peer to peer training. Councilmember Harris encouraged the group to reach out to Debbie Rose in family services, and also asked if adults meet at the Nest. Ellen stated a couple adult groups meet regularly.

It was the consensus of the council to support the Nest with the \$20,000 matching funds request for year two of operations. Mayor Spano praised the group on their example of youth leadership, adding the community is proud of them all and thanked them for their dedication and hard work on the Nest.

### **3. C-1 zoning district retail and service use restrictions**

Mr. Walther noted this report is a follow-up from the March 11, 2019 council discussion of the planning commission recommendations. He noted staff seeks direction from council on whether this topic should proceed with the formal public hearing process for the ordinance as recommended by the planning commission, or if the council has amendments to the proposed ordinance.

Councilmember Harris asked about allowing a Global Market type of multi-vendor complex in C1. Mr. Walther stated that scale of business would not likely work in C1 because none of the city's C1 properties are large enough to accommodate that use. He added a more common multi-tenant use in the C1 district might be a small strip mall.

Councilmember Mavity wanted clarification on C1 and C2 zoning districts and what conditions are allowed or need to be met for 20,000 square feet and if there are any specific proposals under consideration. Mr. Walther stated there are no current proposals and the city would need to rely on its current code text for any new applications that the city receives.

Councilmember Mavity stated she has concerns about a 20,000 square foot development in a C1 district and wants to be sure they proceed cautiously. She asked to see a map of the C1 districts and land parcels or hubs where changes would occur. She added the council is trying to promote small and local businesses, and she has concerns about offering large scale big box retailers the opportunity to come into neighborhoods and small business areas that are meant to be walkable and are adjacent to residential. She added this is not a good fit and is not consistent with the comprehensive plan goals.

Councilmember Mavity asked if the Historic Walker Lake area is C1. Mr. Walther stated no, it is a combination of C2 and Industrial Park zoning. He said the small area plan for the Historic Walker Lake area recommended the city consider an overlay zoning district for that area. He shared a map of the areas of the city currently zoned C2 that the planning commission and city council have previously discussed rezoning to a different zoning district. He added that 73 parcels around the city are being rezoned in order to begin implementing the comprehensive plan which includes some of the current C2 parcels.

Councilmember Rog agreed and stated she does not approve of the 20,000 square foot limit.

Councilmember Miller agreed with both Councilmembers Mavity and Rog and asked if any properties will be grandfathered in to the new limits. Mr. Walther stated this would need to be researched to determine which and how many parcels would become legal, non-conforming uses, and those sites, and buildings and uses would be allowed to continue as long as the property uses are not abandoned for a period of time.

Councilmember Harris noted staff's streamlining process and added the 20,000 square foot limit may need more conversation; however, she is in favor of a smaller footprint.

Councilmember Brausen is supportive of the planning commission's changes. Councilmember Hallfin agreed and stated he supports the planning commission's changes as well.

Mayor Spano stated he feels like the 7,500 square foot maximum for retail and service uses allowed administratively is agreed upon by the council, but there is still concern around the 20,000 square foot limit.

It was the consensus of the council to recommend the 7,500 square foot maximum for administrative approvals, reduce the 20,000 square foot limit to 10,000 square feet, and send this back to the planning commission for formal consideration. The council also agreed to look at other options after the ordinance is adopted, if the planning commission wanted to continue to support allowing 20,000 square feet for retail, service, and large item retail uses with conditions that give the city adequate control through the conditional use permit process.

#### **4. Efficient building program (benchmarking ordinance)**

Ms. Jones from the Center for Energy and Environment presented the report. She is working closely with Shannon Pinc on this process. Ms. Jones explained the program would increase awareness and encourage energy conservation in larger buildings in the city and be a step toward achieving the city's climate action plan (CAP).

Ms. Jones added St. Louis Park is currently a pilot city, as it relates to the benchmarking process. Once the policy is passed, the city must inform building owners that benchmarking is an ordinance in the city.

Ms. Jones stated meetings will be conducted with stakeholders including business owners in the city, and outreach will be conducted, along with one on one meetings and public meetings. Afterwards, there will be feedback sessions with the Environmental and Sustainability Commission and the Planning Commission, before bringing this all back to the council for a study session.

Councilmember Mavity asked if other communities are currently doing this within Hennepin County. Ms. Jones stated St. Louis Park is a pilot city and Edina also just passed this measure. Also, Minneapolis has been doing this since 2013 and has had a high compliance rate at over 90%.

Councilmember Miller asked if other large companies are on board, such as Target, Home Depot, and Costco. Ms. Jones stated yes, they generally are.

Councilmember Miller asked what will happen if buildings don't conform to the ordinance. Mr. Harmening stated the ordinance will have enforcement remedies and a misdemeanor charge would be enforced, if needed.


Councilmembers Brausen and Harris stated they are supportive of this initial step.

It was the consensus of the council to support the benchmarking ordinance, and proceed with the public process, ordinance development, and budgeting for an efficient building program.

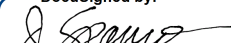
The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Written Reports provided and documented for recording purposes only:

5. **Project update: Louisiana Avenue Bridge replacement – city project 4018-1700**
6. **Comprehensive plan related zoning map amendments**

DocuSigned by:  
  
[REDACTED]

Melissa Kennedy, City Clerk

DocuSigned by:  
  
[REDACTED]

Jake Spano, Mayor