

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the regularly scheduled meeting of the Spring Lake Park City Council Work Session was held on January 20, 2026 at the City Hall, 1301 81st Ave NE, at 5:30 PM

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Nelson called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councilmember Ken Wendling

Councilmember Dircks

Mayor Nelson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Councilmember Barbara Goodboe-Bisschoff

Councilmember Moran

STAFF PRESENT

Chief Josh Antoine, Public Works Director George Linngren, Administrator Buchholtz

OTHERS PRESENT

Chief Dan Retka, SBM Fire Department

2. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. SBM Fire Department Update - Chief Dan Retka

Fire Chief Retka presented an update on SBM Fire Department operations, accomplishments, and strategic planning initiatives.

Chief Retka reported that 2025 marked the completion of the department's transition from a volunteer-based response model to a full-time duty crew staffing model, resulting in 24/7/365 staffing. He stated that this change significantly reduced response times, with average district-wide response times now approximately three minutes, well below industry standards. He explained that improved response times have resulted in increased life-saving outcomes, improved fire containment, reduced property damage, and enhanced firefighter safety.

Chief Retka stated that the department recorded zero lost-time injuries for the second consecutive year, attributing this to controlled staffing environments, reduced emergency driving risks, and expanded on-shift training. He reported that training hours have doubled due to hands-on, on-shift training requirements, resulting in increased accountability and preparedness.

Chief Retka reviewed fire prevention and community outreach efforts, noting expanded participation by on-duty crews and the Fire Corps. He reported that the Fire Corps has grown to 48 volunteers and is actively engaged in fire safety education across five school districts.

Chief Retka discussed refinements to the department's capital improvement plan completed in coordination with the Cities of Spring Lake Park, Blaine, and Mounds View. He stated that strategic equipment management and staffing efficiencies reduced projected capital expenditures by more than \$2 million and that the department currently operates with a fully cash-funded capital plan, avoiding bonding for major equipment purchases.

Chief Retka reviewed the completion of the Centennial collaboration, under which SBM now provides fire and emergency services to Circle Pines and Centerville. He stated that Centennial's newer equipment was incorporated into the department's fleet, allowing aging equipment to be retired and replacement cycles to be extended. He further reported that Station 4 was closed and operations were transferred to Centennial Station 1, which is now staffed 24/7, improving overnight coverage and reducing the need for apparatus to leave Spring Lake Park.

Chief Retka reviewed internal organizational changes, including the addition of full-time captains and battalion chiefs assigned by shift. He stated that this structure ensures experienced leadership is present on all responses and improves operational accountability, all within the existing budget.

Chief Retka reported that the department has assumed responsibility for the Anoka County Fire Academy and now provides fire and EMS training for departments throughout Anoka and Ramsey Counties. He stated that this improves regional consistency, enhances firefighter safety, and generates revenue to offset operational costs.

Chief Retka stated that workforce retention remains strong, with only two separations over the past year despite significant growth. He noted that the department's focus in 2026 will be on stabilizing operations, improving employee morale, and strengthening long-term retention.

Chief Retka also provided an overview of the strategic need for a future fire station in northeast Blaine. He stated that current response times in that area range from seven to eleven minutes and described those response times as unacceptable given continued residential and commercial growth. He reviewed preliminary concepts for a purpose-built station intended to address response-time deficiencies, overlapping call volumes, and space constraints at the current headquarters. Chief Retka outlined next steps, including confirming project scope, commissioning architectural plans, determining estimated costs, and evaluating funding options.

B. Anoka County Flock Camera Pilot Program (*Antoine*)

Police Chief Antoine presented information regarding a proposed countywide pilot program involving FLOCK license-plate recognition cameras and first-responder drones.

He explained that the program would expand camera coverage in Spring Lake Park and provide access to countywide drone response capabilities. He stated that the first year of the pilot would be provided at no cost to the City, with the second year funded by the County Sheriff's Office. Ongoing costs would be evaluated prior to any long-term commitment, with a non-appropriation clause allowing the City to withdraw if funding cannot be resolved.

Councilmember Dircks inquired about data privacy and access. Chief Antoine addressed data privacy and access concerns, stating that data ownership remains with individual cities and that access would be limited to Minnesota agencies to ensure compliance with state data practices laws. He explained that audit procedures, access controls, and public transparency measures would be implemented.

Chief Antoine requested preliminary direction from the Council regarding interest in participating in the pilot and offered to arrange a formal presentation for a future council meeting.

CONSENSUS OF THE COUNCIL is to express preliminary support for participation in the Anoka County Flock camera and first responder drone pilot program, subject to further review of data privacy protections, governance controls, and long-term funding impacts. Council further directed staff to continue coordination with Anoka County and return with a formal presentation and recommended next steps prior to any long-term commitment.

3. REPORT

A. Council/Staff Reports

Administrator Buchholtz reported that the RISE building was purchased by Optimize Physical Therapy for a Physical Therapy and Elite Sports Training facility.

4. ADJOURN

Mayor Nelson adjourned the work session at 6:50pm.

Robert Nelson, Mayor

Attest:

Daniel R. Buchholtz, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer