

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 November 18, 2024 at the Able Park Building, 8200 Able Street NE, at 5:30 PM.

1. CALL TO ORDER

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councilmember Ken Wendling
Councilmember Goodboe-Bisschoff
Councilmember Lisa Dircks
Councilmember April Moran
Mayor Robert Nelson

STAFF PRESENT

Public Works Director Linngren, Administrator Buchholtz

VISITORS PRESENT

Megan Helling, Ashley Riddle, Ann Olson, Nick Coughlin, Aaron Zellhoefer

2. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Discussion of Humane Pet Store Ordinance (Dircks)

Administrator Buchholtz initiated the discussion, noting that the proposed ordinance aims to prohibit the sale of dogs and cats sourced from puppy and kitten mills. He acknowledged that not all scheduled speakers could attend due to unforeseen circumstances and suggested listening to the speakers who were able to attend and then continuing the discussion in a future session to ensure input from all perspectives.

Councilmember Dircks noted that she initially brought this proposed ordinance in July. She stated the consensus of the Council at that time was to schedule the issue for a future City Council work session where all viewpoints on this issue could be presented.

Nick Coughlin, a local advocate and marketing professional, stated that this is not a partisan issue and that both conservative and liberal voices agree on the need to address the cruelty of puppy mills. He shared data from the World Pet Association indicating that pet stores operating under humane models outperform those selling animals.

Megan Helling, an impacted consumer and former business owner, recounted her experience purchasing a sick puppy from a pet store. She also relayed the story of a Wisconsin pet store owner who transitioned to a humane model, emphasizing how this shift increased customer support and reduced business risks.

Aaron Zellhoefer, representing the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), addressed the Council regarding consumer protection issues related to pet stores sourcing animals from

puppy mills. He highlighted deceptive sales practices, such as misleading claims about breeders and withholding breeder information from consumers. Zellhoefer also discussed violations found in breeding facilities supplying Minnesota pet stores, including inadequate veterinary care and poor living conditions for animals. He emphasized that even USDA-licensed breeders often fail to meet humane standards, advocating for the enactment of a humane pet store ordinance to protect both consumers and animals.

Ann Olson, Executive Director of Animal Folks, highlighted the physical and psychological harm endured by animals in breeding facilities. She shared examples of inadequate veterinary care and poor living conditions in puppy mills, stressing the need for stricter regulations.

Ashley Riddell, with the Animal Rights Coalition, discussed the lack of transparency in pet store operations and the financial and emotional burdens placed on consumers purchasing unhealthy animals.

Mayor Nelson shared his personal perspective on the issue of pet sales and humane practices. While he expressed strong opposition to puppy mills, calling for strict accountability and enforcement against unethical breeders, he also raised concerns about limiting consumer choice. He emphasized the importance of creating safe spaces where seniors and families could interact with pets before purchasing, rather than relying on unregulated or unsafe transactions.

Mayor Nelson highlighted issues such as fraudulent pet sales, recounting his own experience of being threatened during an attempted purchase. He advocated for stronger governmental oversight and enforcement to hold unethical breeders accountable, suggesting jail time for those who mistreat animals. While supportive of efforts to address puppy mills, he cautioned against sweeping regulations that might negatively impact responsible breeders or limit legitimate consumer options. His comments reflected a nuanced stance, balancing animal welfare with practical considerations for residents.

Councilmember Moran supported the ordinance, stating that the ordinance is a proactive step to prevent unethical practices from taking root in our community. Councilmember Dircks noted that the proposed ordinance does not prohibit pet stores; it ensures that any pets sold come from humane sources.

Mayor Nelson thanked everyone who came to speak and noted this item will be scheduled for a future work session.

B. 2025 Public Utilities Budget Proposal (Buchholtz)

Administrator Buchholtz presented the proposed 2025 Public Utilities Budget proposal, which addresses water, sanitary sewer, and stormwater utility operations. He stated that a 5.75% increase in revenues was driven by rate adjustments. He stated the 5.75% increase in expenditures is due to wage and benefit increases and increases in Metropolitan Council Environmental Services wastewater treatment charges. He said the budget also reallocates a Public Works employee's role to focus on utility maintenance, freeing up funds for contracted

custodial services at City Hall. He noted that the budget continues contributions to the Utilities Renewal and Replacement Fund to support long-term capital improvements.

Mayor Nelson inquired about the financial impact of the salary shift of the Public Works employee to the General Fund. Buchholtz stated that the shift will be cost-neutral, as funds from the General Fund will offset the custodial contract.

Councilmember Wendling stated that he appreciates the budget's investment in the utility infrastructure while keeping rates competitive.

CONSENSUS of the City Council was to review and approve the proposed budget in an upcoming regular meeting.

3. REPORT

A. City Council and Staff Reports

Administrator Buchholtz provided an update on upcoming public hearings including the 2025 Fee Schedule ordinance, 2025 Truth in Taxation, the 2025 Street Improvement Project Hearing, and the MS4 Permit Annual Meeting. He stated that public hearings are scheduled for two ordinances, the Cannabis Business Registration ordinance and the Sight Triangle ordinance, in front of the Planning Commission on November 25, 2024.

4. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 6:35pm.

Robert Nelson, Mayor

Attest:

Daniel R. Buchholtz, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer