

CITY OF ST. FRANCIS
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
St. Francis City Hall 3750 Bridge Street NW
February 3, 2025
6:00 p.m.

1. **CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The regular City Council meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mayor Mark Vogel.

2. **ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Mark Vogel, Councilmembers Kevin Robinson, Sarah Udvig, Amy Faanes, and Joe Muehlbauer.

Also present: City Administrator Kate Thunstrom, Deputy Administrator-City Clerk Jenni Wida, Community Development Director Jessica Rieland, Assistant City Attorney Dave Schaps (Barna, Guzy & Steffen), Deputy Administrator-Public Works Director Paul Carpenter, Police Chief Todd Schwieger, Fire Chief Dave Schmidt, Finance Director Darcy Mulvihill, Liquor Store Manager Joe Pfeifer, City Engineer Craig Jochum (Hakanson Associates, Inc.), and City Planner Jason Zimmerman (HKGi).

3. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

MOTION BY: MUEHLBAUER SECOND: FAANES APPROVING THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL AGENDA

Ayes: Faanes, Muehlbauer, Robinson, Udvig, and Mayor Vogel.

Nays: None

Motion carries: 5-0

4. **CONSENT AGENDA**

A. City Council Minutes - January 21, 2025

B. Payment of Claims

MOTION BY: ROBINSON SECOND: UDVIK APPROVING THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL CONSENT AGENDA

Ayes: Faanes, Muehlbauer, Robinson, Udvig, and Mayor Vogel.

Nays: None

Motion carries: 5-0

5. **MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

Aaron R, 23514 Degardner Circle, came forward and said that he is with the Anoka County Elections Integrity Team (ACEIT) and they have been looking into the cost of the poll pads. He encouraged the City to keep looking into different kinds of poll

pads as the electronic ones are not as secure and accurate as they should be. He said he does not see where the controversy is with wanting election integrity. He stated that paper poll pads would take all of the guesswork out of the equation.

6. SPECIAL BUSINESS - NONE

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS - NONE

8. OLD BUSINESS - NONE

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Solar Energy Systems Zoning Code Amendment – 1st Reading

Ordinance 344 - Amending the zoning code to modify the standards for the establishment of solar farms

Community Development Director Rieland reviewed the Staff report in regard to amendments to the solar energy systems zoning code. She shared the Planning Commission's recommendation of approval.

Mayor Vogel asked if the energy that is produced by the solar panels will go back to the grid. Rieland explained that they typically gain credits by the power generated by the solar panels.

Mayor Vogel stated there is a difference between a private solar farm for someone's home versus a public solar farm. He asked if Connexus came to the City to request this amendment. Rieland said yes and explained that Connexus was the applicant who proposed the amendment to fit their use.

MOTION BY: UDVIG SECONDED: MUEHLBAUER TO ADOPT THE FIRST READING OF ORDINANCE 344 AMENDING THE ZONING CODE TO MODIFY THE STANDARDS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOLAR FARMS.

A roll call vote was performed:

Mayor Vogel	aye
Councilmember Muehlbauer	aye
Councilmember Robinson	aye
Councilmember Faanes	aye
Councilmember Udvig	aye

Motion carried: 5-0

B. Pioneer Days Donation Request

Thunstrom reviewed the Staff report concerning a request from the Chamber of Commerce for a donation to Pioneer Days.

Michelle Anderson, President of the St. Francis Area Chamber of Commerce,

came forward and shared that they are requesting a donation of \$5,000 for Pioneer Days. She explained that this funding would be used towards keeping the City clean during the event and renting things like tents and chairs. She also asked if the City would entertain a contract for this donation on an every three-year basis.

Udvig shared that she is in favor of giving this donation as the Chamber of Commerce does a wonderful job with this event.

Mayor Vogel shared that he is a supporter of the Chamber of Commerce; however, he is concerned with the optics as the League of Minnesota City recommends cities to not make donations to private organizations. He stated he does think that Pioneer Days deserves the City's support. He explained that he spoke with Finance Director Mulvihill prior to the meeting and he was informed that the City billed the Chamber of Commerce last year for \$4,700 for putting up banners and picking up the trash for the event. He suggested that instead of giving a donation, the City just pick up the costs of these services. Ms. Anderson said she would love for the City to pick up the costs of these services.

Muehlbauer asked how this would be coordinated. Thunstrom shared that there is typically a meeting before the event where the Chamber will meet with department heads to go over the services and responsibilities. She said a lot of this coordination is already taking place.

Muehlbauer said he would support the City covering the services instead of giving a cash donation.

Faanes noted that she also would like to help the Chamber. She added that she needs to learn more about how donations are handled at the City level. She asked if some more information about donations could be added to an upcoming Work Session.

Udvig suggested they move this to a three-year contract for these services.

Robinson asked how this will be put into the budget. Mulvihill explained that there is already a budget line item for Pioneer Days that this can be added to.

MOTION BY: MUEHLBAUER SECONDED: FAANES TO DIRECT STAFF TO MAKE THE IN-KIND DONATION OF \$5,000 A YEAR TO THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOR SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CITY FOR PIONEER DAYS FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS.

Ayes: Faanes, Muehlbauer, Robinson, Udvig, and Mayor Vogel.

Nays: None

Motion carries: 5-0

10. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC - NONE

11. REPORTS

A. Community Development Annual Report 2024

Rieland reviewed the 2024 Community Development report. She reviewed the Community Development organization chart and highlighted each role and how they play into the organization. She shared that there were many new developments on Bridge Street, including the new City Hall Fire Station, the property located at 3731 which has a letter of intent from a developer for an apartment complex, the purchase of the Rum River Inn, the property at 3518 Bridge Street was listed for sale and 3503 Bridge Street was purchased in 2024 and the construction of commercial phases and an apartment complex will begin in the spring of 2025. She explained that Staff is continuing to work with various partners to enhance economic development in the City. She shared that they hosted an Anoka County regional economic development and ACRED meeting in November. She added that they were featured in *Business View Magazine* and the *Anoka Area Chamber Resource Guide*. She explained that in 2024 Midco had two large projects that expanded fiber optics throughout the City. She shared that the EDA held a lunch and learn event in December with guest speaker Shane Bader who is the VP of Marketing and Sales for Iceberg Web Design. She stated that he taught local business owners how to set up their digital presence for success and the event received very positive feedback. She noted the Farmers' Market finished its second season with record-setting attendance with 300 to 400 visitors each week. She shared there were 33 registered vendors, 10 registered food trucks, and seven community groups who participated. She added that they have already started planning for the 2025 Farmers' Market season. She shared that according to the St. Paul Area Association of Realtors, housing inventory remains constrained in most segments of the market due to low inventory of homes and high interest rates. She said they did see an increase in the median sale price of homes in St. Francis by 5.4% to an average sale price of \$350,000. She noted that surrounding communities also saw increases similar to St. Francis. She explained that Staff is continuing to provide technical assistance to housing developers including the Bluffs at Rum River, Eagle Point/Vista Prairie, Rivers Edge, Turtle Ponds, Serenity at Seelye Brook, and the development at 3731 Bridge Street. She shared that there were also many commercial developments in 2024 including AutoZone, the City Hall Fire Station, Select Urgent Care, and the Opp Medical Building expansion. She added that the Planning Commission met six times in 2024 and reviewed 11 code updates. She shared that there is a vacancy on the Planning Commission due to the sudden passing of Commissioner Daniel White. She noted that building permit revenue continues to fluctuate with the City's growth and development patterns. She stated 2024 was the City's largest year for the number of permits issued with a total of 659 building permits. She added that there were 26 new homes built in 2024. She explained that in 2024 the value of improvements made in the City increased significantly for commercial construction and new residential construction but

decreased slightly for residential improvement construction. She shared that Staff worked with 72 property owners on code enforcement concerns, only 15 of which received citations. She noted the top three code enforcement complaints that they received were vehicle parking issues, tall grass, and work without a permit. She reviewed the transition to BS&A, which took place in 2023; however, they are still in the final stages of implementing the online permitting system. She shared that there was an increase in rental housing licenses in 2024. She noted that there were five new registered vacant properties for 2024. She explained that after moving to the new City Hall, they had to update all of these forms to keep everything up to date for residents.

Robinson asked if the City will collaborate with Midco for any grant opportunities or if Midco will do this entirely on their own. Rieland explained that Midco will apply on their own and the City will not be involved in the grant process.

Robinson asked if there are areas that Midco wants to target with fiber optics. Rieland said they have not discussed areas of coverage; however, there is a map that shows areas that have already been completed and where they hope to lay fiber optics in the future.

Robinson asked if there are any people who are crying out for help in certain areas for fiber optics that they could use to help secure grant funding. Public Works Director Carpenter explained that Midco works with Anoka County on this as it would be more of a County project than a City project.

Robinson asked if they have received any concerns with internet access from the public since a lot more people are working from home now. Rieland said she has not received any feedback from residents on the internet.

Udvig noted that she sees people talking about internet concerns on Facebook. Muehlbauer noted that it is typically from people who live on the west side of the City.

Robinson asked if they have received any more complaints from the nuisance property on Patridge Street since it was cleaned up. Rieland said no.

Robinson asked about the status of the nuisance property at University Avenue. Rieland shared that they are still working on getting this property cleaned up. She explained that there was a lot of Staff time that went into working with this property owner last year to get him to clean up his property, which was only about 50% cleaned up.

Robinson asked how things are going with the 3731 Bridge Street property and if they are taking the wetlands into account for what can be built on this property. Thunstrom shared that there is some need to correct the right-of-way on the corner of this property. She added that they are working to get the road behind

the EDA lots to get the access out on top which would help with any future development along Ambassador. She said they have some initial designs for this road that they are working on the two outlets.

Robinson shared that his family has used the new urgent care and it has been great to have in the City.

Mayor Vogel asked about the property at 3518 Bridge Street and if they have had anyone interested in this property. Thunstrom shared that they have not been aggressively marketing this property; however, they did have some early conversations with a few housing developers although the property is not zoned for housing. She said they would be looking for something with a mixed use or commercial.

Mayor Vogel said he would like to have a map of all EDA and City-owned properties. Thunstrom said they have this map available and can share it.

The Council thanks Rieland and her Staff for their great work in 2024.

12. COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS

The Council shared the meetings and events they attended in the past few weeks, as well as highlighting upcoming events. They thanked Staff for all of their hard work in putting together the City Hall Fire Station Open House.

Muehlbauer shared that he wanted to address the complaints he has been seeing about the shared services agreement. He explained that while the taxes did go up due to the City Hall Fire Station, the shared services are for helping their neighbor cities in need of emergency services which generates revenue to compensate for these services. He encouraged residents to educate themselves on these things before complaining.

Mayor Vogel shared that he attended the Local Government Officials meeting hosted by Anoka County. He explained that a big topic of conversation were the voting poll pads. He said he has concerns with the poll pads. He shared that he was very disappointed with the County stating that they will not be asking the cities for any money for these poll pads when they get their dollars from taxes. He added that they were told the poll pads would cost under \$100,000; however, now he is being told that they will cost around \$271,000. He said there are a lot of unanswered questions about these poll pads. He noted he is still looking for answers to how long these poll pads will last when the last ones only last three years and if there will be more grant money available when they have to get new ones again. He added that the County is saying these poll pads are very secure when there is evidence that there is not. He said he imagines they will be talking about these poll pads a lot in the future.

Muehlbauer asked if they only use the poll pads for primary elections. City Clerk

Wida said no and explained that the poll pads are used during every election on election day.

Mayor Vogel shared that he attended a meeting in Oak Grove, and he is working on keeping a good relationship with them. He added that he also attended the Anoka County Protection Council meeting, and they will be voting on this budget in which all items increased significantly. He said if the budget is approved, they will see an increase in dues.

Fire Chief Schmidt shared that there are some initiatives that the Fire Protection Council is looking at, including the fire investigation trailer, amenities for the hazardous materials response team, and equipment for the special rescue team. He added that there will also be an automatic \$200 increase in due for 2026 and he is not sure how they came up with this cost allocation. He said they will continue to keep their eye on this budget.

Mayor Vogel recommended that at least one member of the Council attend the Local Government Officials meetings and will ask another Councilmember to attend if he is unable to make it so they can ensure the City is being recognized at these meetings. Thunstrom said she can send out a list of all of the dates for the 2025 meetings.

Mayor Vogel shared his deep appreciation for Staff and all the hard work that they put in every single day.

13. UPCOMING EVENTS

February 13 - Parks Commission - 7pm
February 18 - City Council Regular Meeting - 6pm
February 19 - Cancelled - Planning Commission Meeting
February 24 - City Council Work Session - 5:30pm

14. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY: MUEHLBAUER SECOND: FAANES TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.

Ayes: Faanes, Muehlbauer, Robinson, Udvig, and Mayor Vogel.

Nays: None

Motion carries: 5-0

There being no further business, Mayor Muehlbauer adjourned the regular City Council at 6:53 p.m.