

MINUTES  
TONKA BAY  
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION  
ZONING REVIEW  
JULY 8, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

The work session was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present: Mayor Jennings and Council Members Eckland and Wischmeier. Also present were City Administrator Holl, City Planner Johnson, and City Attorney Nason.

3. DISCUSSION TOPICS

**15 Brentwood Zoning/Comprehensive Plan** – City Planner Johnson provided an overview of the zoning and land use complexities surrounding 15 Brentwood Avenue, which includes three parcels owned by J and L Development. Parcels A and B are zoned C-2 (General Commercial), while Parcel C is zoned R-1b (Single-Family Residential) but is designated as Parks and Recreation in the City’s Comprehensive Plan. This dual classification has caused confusion. Parcel C, the primary concern, requires a land use amendment for any development due to its Parks designation. Although it is zoned for residential use, the Parks classification would prohibit typical development without an amendment. The City has received various inquiries for potential uses (e.g., warehouse, dog daycare, apartments), but all were informed that a land use amendment would be necessary. Johnson noted the origin of the Parks designation is unclear, as it predates current staff and is inconsistently documented in past comprehensive plans. As the property owners look to sell, they are seeking clarity from the City on whether Parcel C is intended for future park or trail use, and if so, what steps will be taken to formalize that direction.

Johnson shared that she reached out to Three Rivers Park District, which confirmed they no longer hold a corridor in the area but expressed interest in potentially securing right-of-way at the corner in the future for pedestrian improvements, such as a bridge or trail connection. Currently, the property owners are seeking direction from the City so they can respond appropriately to potential buyers. The planner emphasized that while the City could be open to a land use amendment, such action should be tied to a specific development or concept plan, not pursued in advance without a proposal. Any amendment would require Met Council approval, a process that could take three to six months.

Johnson advised that the City should remain open and flexible but wait for a concrete proposal before moving forward. They added that any future development would require rezoning, and potentially variances or a Planned Unit Development (PUD) due

to the narrow shape of the lots and existing setback limitations. While development is feasible, it involves multiple applications and steps and would take time to complete.

The goal of the discussion was to determine whether the City is open to removing the Parks land-use designation from Parcel C while maintaining its R-1b residential zoning. The City Planner and Council agreed that they are willing to consider a Comprehensive Plan amendment to remove the park designation, pending a development proposal. Council emphasized that any changes would still need to follow the formal Met Council review process and a public hearing. The consensus was that, since the parcel is already zoned residential, it makes sense to remove the park designation to simplify future development steps, without pursuing rezoning at this time.

*Council Member Anderson arrived at 6:25 p.m.*

**EFD and SLMPD Budget Update** – Mayor Jennings provided a detailed update on the proposed 2026 budgets for both the Excelsior Fire Department (EFD) and the South Lake Minnetonka Police Department (SLMPD), expressing significant concern over the budgetary impact on the residents of Tonka Bay. Jennings highlighted those concerns.

Fire Department Budget Concerns:

- The EFD is requesting a 33% increase to the overall budget.
- The fire operations budget alone represents a 14.53% increase over the previous year.
- When including Tonka Bay's share of the chiller and SCBAs, the total impact from EFD could raise the City's levy by 7.42%.
- The SCBAs, which are required safety equipment, expire in February 2026, and although the chief was aware for years, no funds were set aside in previous budgets. The City is now forced to absorb this cost.
- The chiller, a major expense, was also not accounted for in any capital plan. Neither the police nor the fire departments have capital reserves for shared building infrastructure.
- The Chief is proposing the addition of management positions, creating a top-heavy department without a clear rationale, or supporting justification for the need.

Police Department Budget Overview:

- The SLMPD budget increase is more modest and largely driven by labor costs.
- Including Tonka Bay's share of the chiller, the SLMPD budget could add another 5.47% to the levy.

Overall Impact:

- Combined, the fire and police departments are requesting approximately \$317,000 from Tonka Bay, which alone would equate to a 17.2% levy increase, before factoring in any other City expenses or staff costs.
- If nothing changes, the overall City levy could exceed 20%, higher than last year's 17.5%.

Mayor's Position & Proposed Action:

- Jennings believes the fire budget is unsustainable and lacks proper planning and accountability.

and accountability.

- Jennings intends to call for a joint meeting of fire board members and mayors to have a larger, strategic conversation about the department's structure, financial planning, and future direction.
- He questioned the need for additional management staff within EFD, noting there was no increase in call volume and a record number of volunteer firefighters (50).
- If the budget is not adjusted, he wants the Tonka Bay City Council to consider vetoing the fire budget, which requires unified Council support.

Conclusion:

Mayor Jennings emphasized that while public safety remains a top priority, fiscal responsibility is equally important. He advocated for a more disciplined approach to budgeting, increased transparency, and improved long-term planning from the fire department, noting that a unified City Council would help reinforce this message.

Council recessed the Work Session Meeting at 6:59 p.m. Work Session to resume after the Regular Council Meeting.

Council reconvened the Work Session Meeting at 7:35 p.m.

*Council Member Ottum joined the meeting for this portion of the discussion.*

Code Enforcement Update - City Administrator Holl provided an update on code enforcement efforts. When a citizen concern form is submitted, it triggers the start of a case. Staff, including Lori, Andrew (from WSB), and CJ, review complaints, send notification letters, and work with property owners to resolve issues. Holl noted that the process is going well. Andrew was praised for his calm and respectful approach when interacting with residents. Johnson emphasizes flexibility, working with property owners on realistic timelines rather than imposing rigid deadlines. A key goal of the current process is to resolve longstanding issues, some of which have been open for years. Holl reiterated that submitting the concern form is essential, as it provides the necessary information to begin follow-up and action, and the process has been working very well.

Holl reviewed Planning and Zoning expenses, noting that costs are currently spread across three different budget areas, creating confusion. Although spending appears on target over the past three years, escrow-funded work (~\$46,000) is included in expenses but actually reimbursed by applicants, making the City's true costs lower. Holl emphasized the need for clearer budgeting categories going forward, including separate line items for code enforcement, city planning, and escrow-related work. Additionally, Holl noted an option to complete pending zoning code work for about \$12,000, which had been paused. He also mentioned that the 2024 street improvement project is expected to come in well under budget, freeing up funds in the general fund.

DDA Comparative Cities - Holl explained that the City is working with DDA on a Wage and Compensation Study to support upcoming union negotiations and to establish a


pay scale for non-union staff, which currently does not exist. A key first step is identifying benchmark cities for comparison. A list of comparable cities was proposed, which aligns with those used in Deephaven's recent study. The list includes data on population, number of employees in general government and streets, and property tax capacity. The goal is to compare the City's wages for positions like City Clerk, Treasurer, Administrator, and Public Works staff to see if current compensation is at, above, or below market.

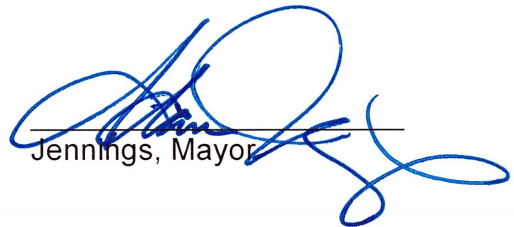
Holl also mentioned an option to include "spotlight cities" like Hopkins, Chanhassen, or Minnetonka for informal comparisons outside the formal dataset. Hopkins was identified as the preferred choice if such a comparison is made.

Council provided feedback on the proposed cities discussed whether any should be added or removed, before proceeding. Council asked to add Long Lake to the list.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Attest:   
Gildemeister, City Clerk

  
Jennings, Mayor