

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NOVI  
SATURDAY, JANUARY 6, 2024 AT 9:00 A.M.**

**Mayor Fischer called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M.**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ROLL CALL:** Mayor Fischer, Mayor Pro Tem Casey, Council Members Gurumurthy, Heintz, Smith, Staudt\*, Thomas

**ALSO PRESENT:** Victor Cardenas, City Manager  
Danielle Mahoney, Assistant City Manager  
Thomas Schultz, City Attorney

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

**CM 23-12-153 Moved by Casey, seconded by Smith; MOTION CARRIED: 6-0**

**To approve the Agenda as amended.**

**Roll call vote on CM 23-12-153**                      **Yeas: Casey, Gurumurthy, Heintz, Smith,  
Thomas, Fischer**  
**Nays: None**  
**Absent: Staudt**

**AUDIENCE COMMENTS:**

Joe Bertera, 130 Rexton, said he noticed all the honoring of past politicians in the City. He said that was great, but he was trying to figure out why they don't honor what the leaders did in 1986 when the Lakefront Protection ordinance was passed. He said Mr. Fried, the attorney at the time, stated this ordinance does not have any application to existing subdivisions, or multiple dwellings. He said this ordinance was meant for future development. He said somehow the city is now using this lakefront protection ordinance to sue one person in his neighborhood to get their dock out of the water because of a complaining neighbor. He said if you honor people and run a campaign based on your history in Novi, but you're saying the history from 37 years ago saying this ordinance doesn't apply to existing subdivisions is being ignored. HE said you can't pick what history to honor and what not to honor. He said they want to segregate his neighborhood and it's not fair. He said this world lately is about inclusion, but what they're doing is tearing apart his neighborhood over a boat doat.

\*Member Staudt arrived at 9:04 a.m.

**PURPOSE OF THE MEETING**

**1. Outline and framing of the day – Victor Cardenas and Jaymes Vettrano**

City Manager Cardenas said they have a packed agenda with a lot to discuss. He said staff is present to provide support. He introduced Mr. Vettrano who will help facilitate the day's events.

Mr. Vettraiño said he has a small consulting firm and helps cities with facilitation and recruitment. He explained that this was a goal setting session, and it was important to honor people's opportunity to share ideas about short- and long-term goals. He spoke about how the City Manager – Council form of government and what is within Council's responsibility and what is staff's responsibility. As you're thinking about goals and priorities, think about the high-level things. He said he will keep them on track and reminded Council that they were not looking at vision and purpose during this meeting. He said they would be focused on strategic goals and some priority action items that were predefined. He said to make sure that the goals are narrow in scope and clearly understood, as well as measurable and time based. He explained that even though something may become a lower priority for Council, it doesn't mean that it's lost. He said priority is what was most important and for them to express the things they are most concerned about for the next 12 months and beyond. He said they have the guidelines for the day, and they will be strategic goals and priority planning.

## **2. Initial City Council Member Roundtable Thoughts – Mayor Fischer**

Mayor Fischer explained they were moving into the initial roundtable thoughts and thanked City Manager Cardenas and Mr. Vettraiño. He said he remembered sitting down with City Manager Cardenas and thinking about what goal setting would look like and there were two main reasons he wanted to have it on a Saturday and have a longer discussion. He said one is because they have a relatively new Council. He thought having a long session would give everyone the opportunity to have some dialogue and think through the goal setting process. He felt it was more appropriate given the makeup of Council. He said the other piece is that they are going to talk about transformative projects, which is a new moniker. He said the idea was that they've talked about things like ITC expansion, redoing ITC, Beck Road, senior centers, senior housing, recreation centers, fire stations, police stations and they have a lot of ideas out there. He said they are probably talking about \$50 to \$150 million in projects. He said they need to start thinking, as a Council, about narrowing that down and prioritizing. He said they don't want staff feeling like they're aimlessly wandering or spinning their wheels. He said they weren't making decisions on those things today, but it will give an opportunity for Council to have one-on-one discussions with staff members and the subject matter experts. He explained they've been given a plethora of data, hundreds of pages on these topics. He said it's time to start advancing those and give prioritization and clear direction. He said on the flip side, he would like staff to give them direction as they talk about goals, economic development, and safety, which of those they think are also going to accomplish. It needs to be a two-way discussion.

Mayor Fischer said moving into the goal setting piece, his initial thoughts were that they used to have seven buckets of short and long term and he found that to be overwhelming. He said a few years ago they went to the NOVI moniker with short and long term, which was eight buckets. He said today they were trying something different and narrowing the buckets down to 3 and looking at it from a short- and long-term basis. He viewed it as a working document, as a working process, and they need to continue

to have these discussions. He asked City Manager Cardenas to continue to keep them updated.

Mayor Fischer said thinking about the goals he's put forth and the goals he would support, there are three things he wanted to mention. He said he's looking for things that are realistic and attainable. We've done things in the past, like acquiring 50 acres of wetlands in a year. He said if you think about it, it would've been \$2.5 to \$5 million in purchases in a year. He said he's never met a resident that would have wanted to spend that much money on just preserving wetlands. He said given budget constraints, he was looking for realistic and attainable goals. Second, he was looking for a unifying goal that would get the majority of Council member's support. He said they've done a good job in the first two months of working together, compromising, and trying to move things forward. He wanted to continue that, and he thought the goals should represent things they can all support. Last, he said he was looking at value proposition. He said they can't be everything to everyone. He spoke about the concept of what is a core city service, what is something we can do tangentially for quality of life. There are a lot of other entities, like the county and state, that have a lot more money than we have, more resources than we do, and maybe we leave some things to them. He said he's looking for things that he thinks the residents of Novi want us taking our limited staff resources and limited budget resources and doing. He said for his parting comments, especially for the newer Council members, was that not everything has to be a goal to be advanced. Even if something is a good idea, they can still fit it in the budget discussions or Mayor and Council Issues. Just because something doesn't become a goal, doesn't mean we can't continue to have discussions about it. He said he looked forward to good discussions.

Mayor Pro Tem Casey thanked the Mayor, City Manager Cardenas, and Assistant City Manager Mahoney for recognizing that they need to have this process and they need to take it seriously. They need to be having the conversation so they can start moving the city forward. There's a lot of work to be done. She said the Mayor mentioned accountability and she didn't feel that Council and City Administration have held themselves accountable to meeting the goals. They have provided long lists of goals and sometimes they don't get done for various reasons, but they don't talk about that. She said she was looking forward to getting quarterly updates from the administration about what they talk about at the table and understand what's being done and what's not being done, and why. She said there are probably very valid reasons why things don't get done. She said she's looking for that measure of accountability where they look at each other and hold themselves and staff accountable. She thanked the city team for presenting ideas and brainstorming for them and provided an employee survey. She appreciated hearing from the staff and getting their perspective on how things are working in the city as an employee. She said there are things they may be able to address as a Council and there are things that will be on administration to address. She thanked her colleagues in advance because she knew they took a lot of time to do this. She said she looked forward to being overwhelmed by the number of ideas that they would see and the conversation they would have. She said what was new this year was the idea of talking about transformative projects. She said she spoke to a lot of residents about these projects, and they have a lot of work ahead of them. There are a lot of big

ideas that have been talked about and then nothing ever happened. She explained the piece of this transformative project that she was eager to make sure they incorporate is understanding how we might start engaging our residents in seeking their prioritization. She said there are some big numbers, and they need to understand how the residents want them to prioritize. They can't do all \$150 to \$250 million worth of work tomorrow or even the next year. They need to prioritize what gets done first, and when. She said she really looked forward to understanding what kind of person, what kind of survey, what kind of focus groups, what kind of open houses, we can have to hear from residents to get their perspective on how they might prioritize getting the work done. She said it's incumbent upon them to understand in what order they need to get them done.

Member Thomas thanked everyone who put the schedule together and she was happy to have the opportunity to discuss these goals. She said they have a lot of information and it's hard to comprehend all the many different things that must be understood in detail. She said as she entered goals, she did so with the thought of what the community needs, and things she heard in talking to residents. Also keeping in mind, the businesses that make Novi their home and how important these things are for everyone. She said she felt goals should be measured. She said she was hoping for feedback from staff about what might be achievable. Sometimes goals are wonderful but not achievable. She said she would like to get feedback from residents and know if they were willing to take the tradeoff for certain things. She said she wanted an open discussion with feedback that if the goal is not achievable, what compromises can be made. She said there are so many things she wants for the community to keep Novi a world class community in reach.

Member Heintz said he was excited to be there and have the opportunity to help contribute and brainstorm. He asked how we differentiate long term and short-term goals because sometimes it's easy to implement something, but we want to maintain it as well. He said it's a blend of easy, short term to get going, but also the long-term continuity and maintenance of that item. He said he was excited to have the discussion and looked forward to learning from everyone and contributing ideas. He said he liked how a previous member said just because it might not be a defined goal, doesn't mean they can't work on and continue to make progress with it. He said he appreciated that being acknowledged because they will be limited to so many goals and can still make progress in other areas.

Member Gurumurthy said she was looking forward to learning, listening, and contributing as much as she could. She thanked staff for onboarding her so quickly and providing all of the information. She said she appreciated the surveys that were conducted, and the reports shared. She based most of her goals on the survey data. She said one key thing she wanted to bring forward is seeing that goals are backed up by data, facts, etc. She said she appreciated Member Casey bringing up tracking the goal, but also wanted to make it available for citizens to easily track the progress they make. She said some of the goal may be easier to measure and some of the goals they may need to set measurable targets like percentages or such. She said was looking forward to contributing and learning from this.

Member Smith said he thought this would be a great session. He said they talk internally about what the goals are and then we see if those goals meet the reality of what the customers need and it's a constant feedback process. He said they need to make sure they are not only setting goals but tracking them and making sure they continue in the right direction. He said he was excited, and it was going to be a good day and they will do some good work for the residents of Novi.

Member Staudt said years ago when they had goal setting sessions, the idea was to provide staff some ability to understand what Council's priorities were prior to putting a budget together. He said as time went on; it became a meeting that was planning the survival of the city. The years 2009 to 2011 were full of unbelievable challenges and difficult decisions. Goal setting back then was a preamble to providing the City Manager with an opportunity to understand what Council expected to cut during budget time. He said we are now into 2023-2034 and we are a vibrant city and things are going well. He didn't think we would see an economic tsunami coming. We have some high-ticket things that we have to consider, and it will be interesting to talk about the transformative projects because they're all important and we can't afford them all. He said a previous Council member said we need to talk about our needs, not our wants, and he disagreed with her. He said now there are a lot of needs that need to be considered. He wanted to impart some wisdom as being the old timer. Don't worry about whether we can pay for good ideas. If we had done that, we wouldn't have the ITC Trail or a lot of things we ended up getting. They had no idea when they made those goals how they were going to pay for them, they were just good ideas. They were something they needed time to figure out how we were going to pay for them but it's not their job to do the goals of staff. The City Manager provides his staff with goals. He said a lot of the time they think they need to tell the City Manager or his staff what their goals are, but they need to provide vision and innovation. He said they don't need to tell them what they need to do within their jobs. He said let's step outside the box and do things that are big picture, exciting, visionary but if it has to do with somebody's job within the city, let the City Manager give them that goal and hold them accountable. He said Council doesn't hold individual department heads accountable, they hold the City Manager accountable. He said he was looking forward to hearing the ideas. He said he has one important goal down the road and that is figuring out how we can improve our city in a way that we can afford.

### **3. Early Budget Input (Short- and Long-term Exercises) – Victor Cardenas & Jaymes Vettrano**

City Manager Cardenas said he appreciated all the remarks. He said they resonate with him and summarize why they are all present and what the goal is. He said most importantly, this was for staff to receive Council's input and feedback on what they want to see in the annual budget. He said they already summarized it, but he was looking for clear direction that staff will take and report back with whether we can do it or not. He said as we look into some of the goals that were populated, there are a lot of things that we've worked on in the past. He reiterated that we have a fantastic and dedicated staff, but their resources and time are not unlimited. There are limits to all of that and we need to be able to prioritize. He said we have done a lot of work on these different issues and

there is a ton of data that can be provided about Public Safety, infrastructure, sanitary, wetlands, woodlands, and all of that. He said they are using a platform to input goals.

Mayor Fischer said to summarize, they will go through "Operate" short term and Council will be able to see all the goals that have been put in and can change them or add more. Then they will move to the next bucket and so on. Then they will take a break from the process and move into some different discussions while the goals are reviewed and grouped if similar. City Manager Cardenas confirmed that was correct.

There was discussion of both long- and short-term goals for each of the categories: Operate, Build, and Invest.

#### **4. Transformative Project Introduction and Financing Questions – Jaymes Vettrano**

Mr. Vettrano said the goal is to take some time outside of this space to talk about those transformative projects that the city has had on it's agenda for several years. It also gives the City Manager and Assistant City Manager time to go through the goals. He said this is one of the most important activities they will do throughout the budget process. He said they will move into those transformative projects. They will have the opportunity to sit with the subject matter experts to ask questions or to better understand the prioritization or difficulty. He said it was important to take time to directly engage elected officials with the talented employees the city has. He explained there were five projects: Beck Road, ITC reconfiguration, older adult needs, public safety building needs. He said there will be 5 tables in the atrium and they will be able to visit each to talk with the subject matter experts to ask questions and staff can provide information. There will be a note taker at each to take notes and keep track of any outstanding questions Council members may have.

City Manager Cardenas said Finance Director Johnson was available to speak about the funding piece in terms of process or a financing mechanism if there were any questions. There were no questions.

Break – Small Group Discussions

#### **5. Goal Setting Discussion and Voting – Cardenas and Mahoney**

Mr. Vettrano said the next exercise is the early budget input exercise and the transformative projects. He complimented staff and Council members for being prepared and asking great questions.

City Manager Cardenas said they went through the goals and moved some into more accurate buckets and grouped goals. He went through goals they grouped to ensure Council agreed. There was discussion of both long- and short-term goals for each of the three categories. The Council then ranked the top goals (see *attached*).

Mayor Fischer said the next steps would be for these goals to be brought back to Council for final review and approval. He said they also expect "red box" updates in the admin packets and a presentation from the City Manager potentially in six months.

City Manager Cardenas said they will have a component on the website that would track the goals and progress of goals as well.

## **6. Transformative Project Priority and Funding**

Mr. Vettraiño said they are looking for a temperature check on the transformative projects. City Manager Cardenas had sent them an email with a link to transformative ranking to provide a comment on each project. He said the goal is to provide staff with direction on each of the five projects in terms of whether it's something to continue to invest staff time in as a top priority or possibly it's not a top priority. He said this is a ton of money being discussed but they should remember it requires a lot of staff time. That, by nature, means other things won't get invested in by staff. He said to use that as a discerning mechanism so staff can prioritize their time based on this temperature check. He said this will help staff think about these projects appropriately in planning. The Council then ranked the transformative projects.

Mr. Vettraiño said the City Manager and Assistant City Manager will review that feedback and provide a summary back to them.

**ADJOURNMENT** – There being no further business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned at 12:59 P.M.

/s/

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Cortney Hanson, City Clerk

/s/

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Justin Fischer, Mayor

/s/

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Transcribed by Deborah S. Aubry

Date approved: January 22, 2024