

COTTAGE GROVE CITY COUNCIL

12800 RAVINE PARKWAY SOUTH
COTTAGE GROVE, MN 55016

August 30, 2024

EMERGENCY MEETING - COUNCIL CHAMBERS - 9:00 A.M.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Bailey called the August 30, 2024, City Council Special Meeting to order.

2. ROLL CALL

City Clerk Tammy Anderson called the Roll: Council Member Khambata-Arrived after Roll Call; Council Member Olsen-Here; Council Member Thiede-Here; Council Member Garza-Here; Mayor Bailey-Here.

3. AGENDA

A. Declare a State of Emergency

Staff Recommendation: Receive an update on the August 29, 2024 Storm Event and Declare a State of Emergency.

Mayor Bailey said obviously, as Council is aware, we had a significant storm last evening that went through our community. So, on our agenda today is we're going to be declaring a State of Emergency; our staff will first give us an update, and I know County Commissioner Karla Bigham is here and she will also update us on the County's support of the cleanup in our community.

City Administrator Jennifer Levitt stated last night you were notified that a storm had hit the City of Cottage Grove at approximately 5:15 p.m. At that time, initial reports had indicated that we had wind speeds over 45 MPH, and we had over 2.5-to-3 inches of rain. I will let you know that the National Weather Service is still evaluating and assessing damage, and so we don't have all of the reports as to the significant events that hit our community; but between the high winds, the rain, hail, we sustained significant damage. As a result of that, our resources were exhausted.

As you know, when our resources are exhausted, that means we have to declare a State of Emergency to receive support from Washington County, the State, and the Federal government. At this time, we will provide you a situational update on where we're at in those efforts and our partners that have brought us to this point, but do know that our resources last evening were exhausted, and we're anticipating that to carry forward into our cleanup efforts. With that, I will turn it over to Captain Brad Petersen to provide you that overview of last evening and our situational update.

Captain Petersen stated as you know, it's been a long and stressful evening for our residents and our team here, the City staff. We had the severe thunderstorm roll through town at about 5:30 last evening, causing severe damage. We know that it's been a stressful event and a stressful night for the public, but gratefully and thankfully we can say that there were no injuries and none of our critical infrastructure was damaged. So, that is some good news that I can report. Our Public Safety team and Public Works crews have been working diligently through the night, in addition to the rest of our City staff, to make sure that our services have been restored to the City, and cleanup measures are continuing.

Here are some of the details that I can provide for you: At 5:30, the storm hit, causing localized flooding, downed trees, downed power lines, power outages, and other Public Works concerns. Several roads were blocked, there was a lot of wind damage to public and private properties, with most of the damage being centralized in the Grove side and Thompson Grove neighborhoods.

Our Public Safety team jumped into action and began assessing the damage and assisting our community members. We responded to 78 911 calls for service, including 29 calls for downed live power lines and small fires. We quickly activated our Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which came online at about 6:40 last evening, and our EOC logged about 165 Public Safety and Public Works incidents. So, as our crews began to triage those incidents and mitigate the hazards and restore services, we recognized that those impacted neighborhoods were experiencing very dangerous conditions. Our Public Safety team cordoned off those neighborhoods just to make sure that the public wasn't in danger; so, from about 6:00-or-6:30 p.m. until about 11:00 p.m., those neighborhoods were closed to public access so we could remove the downed trees, mitigate the live downed power lines, mitigate the flooding, etc. By 11:00 p.m. last night, both of those neighborhoods were opened up.

I'll give you a rundown on some of the damage, as we know it at this moment:

- We had about 132 reports of downed or broken trees, many of those were blocking roadways, on power lines, etc. At this moment, all the roadways have been opened, and the trees that were on power lines have been mitigated.
- There were about a dozen homes that we know of at this point that were damaged by falling trees and branches.
- There were many homes that lost power; at this moment, there are still about 4,000 homes without power.
- Numerous other Public Works concerns, including damaged streetlights, displaced manhole covers, etc.
- All the flooding seemed to resolve itself for the most part, as time passed; so, we don't have any flooding concerns at this moment.

As I said, by 11:00 p.m. the roadways were opened, critical services were restored, and we felt like it was a good time to close the EOC and send the staff home for the evening, knowing that today would be a long day of cleanup.

So, I just want to thank City staff and our mutual aid partners for the long work that they put in last night. Of note, I want to thank the Washington County Sheriff's Office and their emergency management, the Woodbury Police Department, fire departments from St. Paul Park, Newport, Woodbury, and Lake Elmo. I also want to thank Public Works crews from Washington County, as without their assistance we would have been here all night and we'd probably still be working to mitigate some of the damage that I've briefed to you. I'll now turn it over to Director Ryan Burfeind to give you an update on the ongoing cleanup crews, then I'll stand by for your questions.

Director Burfeind said on the screen here we have our Emergency Management web tracking app that we use to report and track all the situations that we have as we go through the cleanup process. It's an efficient way for us to do that, so you can see on here it's mostly trees, with the 132 trees that Brad had mentioned, and these are really trees blocking a road in some manner, private tree, boulevard tree, whatever it may be. Also, the flooding and the downed power lines, so yesterday evening we had a full callout of our whole department, with Parks as well. All staff, non-union staff, and our GIS staff were in helping to deal with the issues last night, and that went really well. Our main focus last night was just making roads passable, so you probably saw us cutting trees off and pushing them off to the side, our main goal was to get that done. As Brad mentioned, we reopened neighborhoods around 11:00 p.m. and our crews were here until about midnight last night, wrapping up, and they were back in before 7:00 a.m. this morning and we are hard at it again.

We also have four additional Washington County crews this morning, so a huge thank you to them with the equipment that they have and the dump trucks, that's going to be a huge timesaver today to get our efforts done. So, today we're really focusing on cleaning up those roadway corridors; all the stuff that we just pushed off to the side last night, we want to make all the roads safe and passable. As we go into the weekend, we'll also be clearing off driveways as we have a lot of boulevard trees that were blocking driveways last night that we could not get to. So, that's our main focus today. You can kind of see the two areas on here that have the most reports of damage, we're starting on those, and then we'll be working our way out to the remainder of the City. The north part of town and the east part of town weren't hit so

bad, but there were periodic reports of damage; so, you'll probably see us there later in the day as we can get to those areas and get them cleared.

In terms of what we're doing with the trees, we are hauling everything down to Rumpca's compost site; we have an area of City-owned land that we've opened up and kind of created a pad to dump everything. We talked some about private debris, so we are going to be doing curbside pickup of private tree debris that residents can place at their curblines through October 1. They don't need to schedule anything with Public Works, we're just going to be making periodic trips throughout the town to get after that. If you see it sitting for a day or two, it is an effort for us to go around, there is no need to call it in and report that. We will continue to go through the City through October 1 and pick up that debris, but we do need it moved out to the front; we won't be doing any work on private property at all.

If you have a situation where there's a City-owned boulevard tree that's fallen on your house, on your shed, or on your car, that is a situation where you do have to work with your insurance; it's important that residents do that for their own liability reasons to get that cleared off. If they have a contractor do that, that contractor doesn't have to haul it away so they can stack it by the curb and we will then haul that away as we would all the other tree debris. The compost site is off of 95th Street and Jamaica Avenue; if residents do want to bring it there themselves, just to get it done and get it off of their property, they can do so, and there will be no charge. They just need to indicate that it is from storm damage cleanup and they'll be directed to where they can drop it.

That's where we're sitting today, and our goal is really to get all of this done today if we can from a road standpoint and then kind of move into the weekend. Folks will be seeing a couple things that we weren't able to catch last night, like leaning trees; there's a lot of leaning trees out there that are going to have to be evaluated on their risk, they will all be coming down. Hangers, too, if you're seeing a branch that looks like a real problem, make sure to call those into Public Works at 651-458-2808. We can make that evaluation then on the need, if it comes down today or can it wait until a later day. With that, I'll turn it over to Commissioner Bigham.

Washington County Commissioner Karla Bigham thanked the Council for the opportunity to be here today. I want to let you know that the County is providing a lot of staff but also three skid loaders, a frontend loader, and about eight-to-nine tandem trucks to help. We just really appreciate the partnership and collaboration that we have with Cottage Grove. During these times, it's just really important to be able to do this with the community and the strength that we have together. We really appreciate your Public Works staff, our Public Works staff, and emergency services staff dispatched throughout the County; Cottage Grove wasn't the only community hit very, very hard. I know our staff at the County level is evaluating the level of damage throughout the County to see about an Emergency Declaration ourselves, but I just wanted to come and say that we're here to help and be a partner. I can answer any questions, but I just really wanted to thank your staff and obviously our County staff, too, for the extra work that they have to go through. But our communities are resilient, and this is what we train for and this is what we do; we come together during these times and we'll get through this.

Mayor Bailey thanked Commissioner Bigham. I know in chatting with you last evening, too, and being at the EOC, the emergency management person from Washington County was there coordinating things with your County officials. So, I want to say thank you for that.

Mayor Bailey asked if the Council had any questions for our staff at this point or Commissioner Bigham.

Council Member Olsen said first of all, thanks everybody for all of the hard work and effort last night. Commissioner Bigham knows that we have a former County Commissioner who used to describe South Washington County as the heart of the County, and I think that proved to be true last night and it certainly proved to be true in the past when we faced situations like this. I want to give great thanks to City staff. I know that we had Public Works, Public Safety, and building officials. I see Inspector Andy McLean is here this morning, they were out making sure that buildings were safe. Everybody really came together and held hands, including Washington County, to make sure that our residents were being well taken care of and that we could create a safe environment for people to move around town after such a devastating storm. So, we're very grateful for all of the help and support.

My question is this: Last night we had a direction that we put out for the public about if they had issues to dial 911 so those could all be logged. I saw when Captain Petersen was presenting that we had over 100 different items listed that came in through Dispatch; I'm just wondering are we still asking residents to do that this morning? The reason I ask is I personally have had several text messages, phone calls, etc., as I'm sure the rest of the Council has as well from people that we know in the community who are waking up in sunlight and seeing things that they didn't see last night, including trees down on people's homes and garages. So, how would you like that best communicated?

Captain Petersen replied at this point, operations have returned to normal across the County. So, I'm not concerned that 911 operations are going to be overtaxed, so they can call 911 as they normally would. If they don't want to call 911, they can feel free to call our front office, and those calls will get directed to us. Really, any way they get hold of us, whether it's 911, our nonemergency number at the front office, social media, or you call a cop you know, we'll take care of it.

Council Member Olsen asked Ryan, I know you mentioned you wanted calls to Public Works to go through the Public Works switchboard; is that true throughout the weekend or how do you want that to proceed?

Director Burfeind replied yes, that's a good question. I think if it's a nonemergency situation, if it's like a tree down, reporting that type of issue, definitely call Public Works at 651-458-2808. We have extra staff on the phones today, and we do have the ability to have the calls answered throughout the weekend; so, they can call that number and then have it evaluated if that's something that's an emergency or nonemergency. We have staff on call throughout the entire weekend who can address that. So, that's definitely a number they can call 24/7 throughout the weekend.

Council Member Olsen said okay, perfect, great. Thank you very much because I'm sure there will be people who maybe have been on vacation who come home to discover something, and it'll be Saturday or Sunday afternoon and they're not going to be quite sure what to do. So, maybe we need to put that out via social media as well just to give people that little bit of extra reassurance that we'll be there for them all weekend long. Thank you.

Commissioner Bigham said, mayor, I just wanted to end with saying thank you to the residents for their patience. During times like this, this is why neighbors shine and we just really appreciate their patience during these times, too.

Council Member Garza asked if there are residents in our community that would like to volunteer and help clean up anything, are you guys looking for any of that, or do you want people just to stay away so that you can get it cleaned up? Because I'm sure there are a lot of people that want to help.

Director Burfeind replied that's a good question, Council Member Garza. I think in terms of all the work that we are doing, I think with our staff and all the County staff, I think we have a good handle on that. I haven't heard of any other kind of private groups starting up for volunteers, that's more of a grass roots kind of effort, but in terms of all of our work, I think we're staffed appropriately where we wouldn't need volunteers.

Mayor Bailey said I would share, especially last evening when the roads were all blocked, having people going through and gawking or checking things out wasn't the best of things to do because there was significant road blockage over there. But now that that roads are all open, if you know of people who live in Cottage Grove, I did see on social media, which can be good and bad, but on the good side people were checking on other people that live in other parts of our community. So, in those kind of situations, I think it would be good to check on your friends and family in other parts of the community to make sure that they're okay, and if they need any help with cleanup or tree removal or whatever, there is an option and ability there.

With that being said, and it's been said already, but I want to just reiterate it, I'm very, very proud of our Public Safety team, Public Works, and City staff. When I showed up last evening, after going and looking at some of the damage, they were hard at it here in City Hall, worked late last night, and are back in here again this morning. But at the same time, I also want to thank the citizens; when I was out looking, checking out the damage, there were a number of people who were checking on their family members or

neighbors. I did an interview just a little bit ago with Channel 5; one of the things I thought was interesting is we have one home that's been condemned, and I happened to drive by that shortly after the storm. Thank goodness they were not home, because the tree was so significant that went through the house I'm sure if they would have been in their kitchen or their living room, they probably would have died. But there were neighbors immediately going over to that home, with myself getting out of the car, ready to call for help from Cottage Grove if they were in there to find out that they weren't and they had just left so they were not in the home. And that's amazing, and I saw that time and time again where there were people walking the neighborhoods, not to gawk, but to check to make sure everybody was okay and if anybody needed help. The chainsaws were already out, and I know Public Works was out clearing the streets, but I literally saw citizens with their chainsaws clearing the streets; they were trying to get some of the trees and branches off the street, knowing that our safety teams would need to get through in the event that something were to happen. So, I just wanted to again reiterate what's being said up here, and I know by the rest of the community, thank you to our staff, thank you to the citizens. It makes me proud, and I'm sure I can say that for our Council that we're proud of our staff, but we're also proud of our community coming together when something like this happens.

Motion by Council Member Khambata to declare a State of Emergency in the City of Cottage Grove; second by Council Member Thiede. Motion passed: 5-0.

3. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Council Member Olsen to adjourn; second by Council Member Garza. Motion passed: 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 9:21 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Judy Graf and reviewed by Tamara Anderson, City Clerk.