

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Ramsey City Council conducted a work session on Tuesday, January 4, 2011, in the Lake Itasca Room, Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Bob Ramsey
Councilmember Randy Backous
Councilmember David Elvig
Councilmember David Jeffrey
Councilmember Colin McGlone
Councilmember Jason Tossey
Councilmember Jeff Wise

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis G. Ulrich
Deputy City Administrator/Dir of Comm Dev. Heidi A. Nelson
Finance Officer Diana Lund
Fire Chief Dean Kapler
Police Chief Jim Way
Economic Development/Marketing Manager Aaron Backman
Parks Supervisor Mark Riverblood
IT Manager Dean Busch
City Attorney William K. Goodrich

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ramsey called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:01 p.m. He noted the Council would have to break at 5:30 p.m. for a Special City Council meeting.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

3.1 Review Council Organizational Resolution

Mayor Ramsey noted that the City Clerk had emailed everyone an updated organizational resolution; however, he had made another suggested amendment and therefore, a paper resolution is being disseminated. He suggested changing the Public Works Committee membership by placing Jason Tossey on that Committee and moving Randy Backous to the alternate position for the Lower Rum River Water Management Organization.

Councilmember Jeffrey stated that he has served on the Joint Law Enforcement Council for a number of years and he would like to continue to serve in that capacity. He asked that he be added back in and to make Jason Tossey the alternate.

Councilmember Tossey stated he was fine with that.

Consensus was to move Councilmember Jeffrey to the Joint Law Enforcement Council and to move Councilmember Tossey to the position of alternate.

Mr. Ulrich stated that our City Code states the Council will vote on the organizational resolution at the first regular meeting of the month, which would be January 11. This resolution has been placed on tonight's special Council agenda for adoption but will be reconfirmed on January 11.

3.2 Review Consulting Services Proposal from The Tinklenberg Group

City Administrator Ulrich stated that based upon Council discussion, a revised consulting services proposal was submitted from The Tinklenberg Group. He noted the proposed work plan is attached to tonight's agenda. The City has had a contract with The Tinklenberg Group for a number of years and has used them for lobbying at the State, Federal and County level. He reviewed some of the projects The Tinklenberg Group has worked on. The work plan states \$6,000 total cost for federal funding coordination regarding 2011 appropriations with regard to the Armstrong Boulevard interchange project. Mr. Tinklenberg works well with Senators Klobuchar and Franken. Mr. Ulrich noted the charges to work with the State bonding are listed at \$18,000. He continued that this proposal puts us at \$42,000 total; however, this plan can be amended or we can have some more discussion with The Tinklenberg Group. He added that he feels they have been effective. He mentioned some of the other positions Mr. Tinklenberg has held which helps with his effectiveness. There may be other effective ways to work on the State level but there is a piece of this contract that is good for us.

Councilmember Wise stated that it sounds like we are getting something for our money with The Tinklenberg Group. He added that he is agitated with MnDOT moving our interchange. We did what the Met Council and MnDOT wanted us to do and we were "taken out to the wood shed".

Councilmember Elvig stated that since Tinklenberg is so connected with the DFL side and now with a DFL Governor, that might be a good influence. It may be a good idea to keep him in the capacity of working with the State – he would be effective.

Mayor Ramsey stated that the reservations he would have is he does not know what Mr. Tinklenberg actually really brought on his own with the Council. The City is probably more successful because the Council is so active. \$40,000 is a lot of money. He guessed there will be some changes at the Met Council and inquired if Council could put this decision off for awhile to see what changes happen.

Mr. Ulrich agreed this could be delayed a couple of weeks.

Mayor Ramsey stated he liked the RALF work done, but he stated he is somewhat skeptical going with this contract unless someone could see something Tinklenberg really has done.

Councilmember Elvig stated it seems there is something fairly urgent coming in the next couple of weeks.

Mr. Ulrich stated that the fiscal year appropriations would be the most timely. We want to keep our rail station in as an earmark.

Mayor Ramsey felt that enough had been done on that – there was enough incentive the way it is. We have enough contacts at the State level but he did not see a lot coming out of the Federal Government. He stated that barring anyone else’s discussion, he would be a “no” vote.

Mr. Ulrich asked if we want to go with this contract, look at a reduced amount, or look at other lobbyists.

Mayor Ramsey suggested entertaining a proposal from someone else, but even then, he would scrutinize spending money on a lobbyist.

Councilmember Elvig stated that when we made trips out to Washington D.C., and those trips were successful, that was all set up for us. He wondered if someone else will be able to do that for us.

Mr. Ulrich replied that a Washington lobbyist in particular has done all of that for us when we have gone there. On the State level, that’s a lot more individual efforts by our staff and the City Council. Local officials are more accessible.

Councilmember Jeffrey stated we have a couple projects on line that are dependent on the rail station – the VA is very dependent. He asked if anyone has talked to Mr. Deal – maybe he would be willing to put some money in on this. Part of this project we are looking at is to secure Federal and State funding and he was not sure we have the time to wait.

Mayor Ramsey inquired if this is an all or nothing. He tended to agree that stakes are high enough - that \$6,000 is not too much to spend but the rest of it he would let go. Looking at past track records, it’s hard to say if the money is well spent. He added that he feels it’s such a slim chance we will get the \$3 million on an earmark – he just did not feel anyone would be that effective – he feels it’s a waste of money.

Anoka County Commissioner Matt Look stated that the \$3 million has already been appropriated for expansion of the rail – not phase II – but expansion. The \$3 million can qualify for the Ramsey stop.

Mayor Ramsey stated he thought it was not yet appropriated.

Commissioner Look stated it has to be defined of being applicable here.

Councilmember Wise stated he would be in favor of spending the money if the appropriations are there.

Mr. Ulrich stated that our agreement with Jim Deal in the past was based on his land ownership and he’s been paying 20% of The Tinklenberg cost. He noted he would get that clarified.

The City Council work session recessed at 5:25 p.m. to go into a special City Council meeting.

The City Council work session was reconvened at 6:10 p.m.

Consensus was that staff should work more on this and bring it back to the next City Council meeting.

3.3 Review Public Purpose Expenditures

City Administrator Ulrich stated this item is on the agenda for discussion and to clarify what our policy is in terms of using City money for dinners, etc. He noted the City's policy was attached to the case as well as the investigative report on the City of Brooklyn Park. He stated this sets the standard because it has the Attorney General and the State Auditor's opinions. Currently, these types of meals (Council dinners for meeting nights) would be allowed because the meeting is beginning at 5:00 p.m. and extending through the evening. That is consistent with our policy. He expressed concerns about exceeding the budget and recommended we try to adjust a budget and have cheaper meals – cut back as much as possible. He talked about the use of credit cards for lunches. That will be limited to when you are traveling or you are talking with a potential client – that's when this type of expenditure could be allowed. This policy would prohibit when Councilmembers and staff or staff and staff meetings will not be allowed to be a public expenditure. Therefore, we will discontinue that. We will be saving money but not cutting meals completely or other authorized expenditures.

Councilmember Tossey stated that it seems to him that the City should not be supplying meals for the Council. This is a service – we asked our public to vote for us – not feed us.

Councilmember McGlone stated there is a purpose for this – the object being that a lot of Councilmembers will come directly from their other jobs.

Councilmember Tossey stated he works downtown and he eats before he gets here.

Mayor Ramsey stated he did not have a problem with the City supplying meals for meeting nights – but he did want to cut back on the amount of spending.

Councilmember Elvig stated he wanted to go on record as being against the City providing meals for the Council too. He stated he will go with whatever Council decides but he is not excited about the City paying for Council meals.

Mr. Ulrich suggested that maybe staff could do more exact ordering – referring to the number of meals as there are times when there are quite a few extras.

City Clerk Thieling responded that she orders 15 meals per meeting for Council and staff. She could cut the amount down but it's difficult to get an exact count as the attendees change from one meeting to the next.

Councilmember Jeffrey stated he is not opposed to eating the meals but he agrees that it would be impossible to figure out an exact count – it would take too much time. He added he is not opposed to cutting back but please do not have staff have to chase people down for a count.

Mayor Ramsey brought up trips to the capitol, etc. where it's an all day deal – meals and mileage expenditures should be paid for by the City.

Councilmember Tossey stated he would agree with that but that he would like to have that number be as low as possible.

Mayor Ramsey stated that other expenditures we should discuss are the golf tournaments. There is a public purpose to attend these tournaments but we need to talk about how many should go and to which tournaments.

City Administrator Ulrich reported that many of the golf tournaments are funded through the Economic Development Authority. He listed a few of the annual tournaments and reported that \$3,356 was spent on those last year.

Councilmember Elvig agreed this needed to be discussed. It's a real opportunity for us to be out there. City officials should be at these – spending time with business owners is a great thing to be doing.

Mayor Ramsey asked if Council should limit the amount that gets spent.

Councilmember McGlone stated we have a lot of staff participating too.

Councilmember Jeffrey suggested reading through the policy and coming back with suggestions.

Councilmember Wise suggested maybe a shared cost.

Councilmember Jeffrey stated he is not opposed to staff going and Council too as he feels connections need to be made. Staff are great community stewards. He recommended coming up with key tournaments – 50/50 staff and Council – limit the number and bring back to a work session for review.

Councilmember Tossey suggested talking about what kind of influence we can have and what the benefit is for the City.

Mr. Ulrich clarified staff will determine key tournaments, number of golfers and split 50/50 with City Council and staff and come back to a work session.

Deputy City Administrator Nelson stated that the EDA has typically budgeted money for these and invite the business owners. She asked if this will be for outside the EDA budget – Council responded yes.

Councilmember Elvig stated he would like to see Economic Development Manager Backman out as much as possible.

Councilmember Jeffrey stated that with the EDA and the HRA doing both, we need to be careful how many teams we bring in – look at gaps so there is representation where there should be.

Mayor Ramsey stated gas slips, etc. can be turned in for reimbursement.

Finance Officer Lund reported that some of the discretionary spending has changed such as recognition of employees. We should not be using public money for our party but we are combining it with commissioner/volunteer recognition.

Mayor Ramsey stated he will be presenting the State of the City Address at the party. He added that he has always been an advocate of a way to have a better party for the employees.

3.4 Discuss Sister City Relationship with Loudi, China

Mayor Ramsey stated he thought we had already discussed the Sister-City relationship with Loudi, China and directed that the relationship be terminated.

City Administrator Ulrich stated this case is a follow-up to that discussion. Attached to the agenda is a draft resolution formally severing the relationship. He asked for Council review of the resolution.

Councilmember Elvig asked if anyone thought there was any merit in looking at other cities to be in a relationship with. He pointed out some of the benefit discussed with sister city relationships like economic development, cultural exchanges, etc. He suspected there were some fast-growing cities we could hook up with.

Mr. Ulrich stated that it was generally set up to be international.

Councilmember Elvig wondered if there are grants for sister city relationships.

Economic Development Manager Backman stated that one aspect of the relationship is related to telecommunications – the City could look for a relationship with a community that has been an early adopter of technologies.

Mayor Ramsey stated he feels it would have to be with a democratic society – that is his issue with China.

Councilmember Backous inquired how much staff time this takes.

Mr. Ulrich stated it's hard to say because it would vary.

Mayor Ramsey stated he was in favor of formally getting rid of the sister city relationship with Loudi, China.

Staff will place the resolution formally terminating the relationship on the next Council agenda for adoption.

FUTURE TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Placing Items on an Agenda

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the City's policy has been that if at least two Councilmembers say they would like an item to be talked about, staff will place it on the agenda for discussion. Staff will develop a topics list and slot it in – and we can move the item up on the agenda if Council desires.

Commissions

Mayor Ramsey stated he would like to see Commissions be more proactive rather than just reactive.

Strategic Planning Sessions

Deputy City Administrator Nelson stated that annually, staff schedules a strategic planning session, which includes Department Heads and Council. The session is usually over a two-day period and the object of it is to see what Council is looking for over the course of the next year. It's tremendously useful from a staff perspective – it helps to guide all departments. This year's event is scheduled for January 24 and 25. She asked if the Councilmembers could come as early as mid-afternoon – beginning at 3:00 p.m..

Council agreed they could come at 3:00.

Ms. Nelson stated the hours would then be 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Monday and 3:00 to 7:00 on Tuesday. She described some of the processes that take place at this planning session.

Council Committees

Councilmember Elvig talked about trusting the recommendations of the Council Committees. So many times it seemed redundant to spend all that time with the Public Works Committee for example and then more time on the City Council level.

Mayor Ramsey agreed that we need to start trusting our committees. There is no need to sit and debate things over again.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember McGlone, seconded by Mayor Ramsey to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried. All voted in favor.

The Council work session adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Jo Ann M. Thieling
City Clerk

Minutes drafted by Jo Thieling, City Clerk