

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, July 19, 2011, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

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

Member Absent: Council Vacancy

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Deputy City Administration Heidi Nelson
Public Works Director Brian Olson
Finance Director Diana Lund
Senior Planner Tim Gladhill
Management/Planning Intern Patrick Brama

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ramsey called the City Council Work Session to order at 7:20 p.m.

APPROVE AGENDA

Case 2.5 moved to Case 2.1. The agenda was approved as amended.

COUNCIL TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Case 2.1 Update on Resident Survey for Long Term Road Maintenance

Himle-Horner representative Chuck Tombarge was present to go over the key findings and review some conclusions and recommendations:

Mr. Tobarge stated they started the survey with some general questions to get them into the issue. The first question was how you would rate the quality life in Ramsey. Ninety-three percent considered their life here in Ramsey either excellent or good.

Another question, what they most like about living in Ramsey, was an open ended question and 30% responded rural open spaces, quiet and peaceful, small town feel of the city.

Another open ended question was; what do you think the most serious issues are facing Ramsey. Thirteen percent responded street maintenance; The COR project was about the same. Other issues were high taxes, lack of business, budget problems, from city decisions to crime, all of which received low percentages.

They also tested value of City services. When asked would you consider taxes paid to the city of Ramsey and the quality of services how do you rate the value - 59% excellent to good. 35% fair, 3% poor.

Mr. Tombarge stated then the questions were switched to streets and roads. When asked about 5 separate components, most felt strongly that the width of the streets are good. The overall quality of roads rated fair. When asked about the quality of streets compared to neighboring cities, this rated positive. Also when asked about the City responsiveness to resident needs, most felt the City was responsive to needs. Safety features such as signage, lighting sidewalks were an overall good impression of streets and roads.

When provided a description of current challenges and asked do you think there is a need for developing a long term policy and funding policy, 73% strongly responded yes.

When asked if a dedicated property tax were to pass for this purpose, 42% were in support, 50% responded they were not in support.

When asked about the assessment option, 19% support it, 77% do not.

Mayor Ramsey's observations is they understand the needs and the problems and if he was to answer these questions, if he didn't know what he knows now, he would answer the same way.

When asked about a property tax levy based on property value payable for a long term. 39% responded they support it, 57% were in opposition.

The strongest support, 52% feels Ramsey offers an excellent quality of tax.

Councilmember Backous asked about the numbers surveyed and does this allow them the confidence that these are true across the City.

Mr. Tombarge responded generally yes, the reason why they choose a 300 number sample and the way they managed the sample, should give them a good amount of certainty among the demographics.

When asked about the franchise fee: 49% support it, 47% oppose it.

Mr. Tombarge stated the strongest level of support was the franchise fee over the other two options.

When asked should the City install sidewalks when reconstructing the roads, 61% responded no 37% responded yes. 12% were strongly opposed.

Mr. Tombarge stated the next section of the survey they begin to test some of the key reasons for supporting and opposing of five potential arguments that could be used by us.

The statements of support did pretty well. 74% felt insuring the safety of pedestrians and drivers.

69% thought a good reason was to spread out the costs.

68% thought a good reason was to reduce the delay and avoid higher cost.

67% agreed it was important for attracting residents, businesses and jobs.

64% felt fairly distribute costs to all property owners

Mr. Tombarge explained they then tested statements that could be used in opposition of the policy.

The most compelling against the policy was, because of the economy, residents just can't afford to pay more.

53% felt the streets are fine the way they are.

51% feels the city should focus on other priorities.

46% believes the city should be better using the existing money they have.

42% believes a policy would take away the power to petition or stop projects.

The final question they asked before they got into the demographics was how residents get information of what the City does; this was an open ended question. 54% responded the City Newsletter, local newspaper 19%, City website 7%.

Mr. Tombarge explained, in conclusion, what does this survey tell us in terms of this policy and communication needs.

First of all street maintenance is a concern for residents. The majority feel good about existing roads and maintenance. There is strong support for creating a long term policy. The short coming is the funding options have sizeable opposition with the franchise fee having the strongest support. The safety statements were among the most convincing.

Councilmember Wise had an observation that the phone survey had about a 12% opposition in some categories, when we go to public meetings it is not the people in favor of someone showing up and being negative, when we take the next step, that has to be measured.

Councilmember McGlone stated people commented favorably on roads, sidewalks and such would be very good for the local economy and kind of offsets this in his mind.

There was discussion that the survey shows that the roads seem fine now, but how are they going to be ten years from now. The discussion continued with keeping photographic evidence, video.

Councilmember Backous feels it should be about educating the residents.

Mayor Ramsey stated the survey is good but he thinks there is a certain amount of the 300 residents that were surveyed may not necessarily care because they may not plan on being here in 3 to 4 years.

The final recommendations of Himle Horner is first suggesting to select a range of options and goals, perhaps 2-3 options and a do nothing option. Formulate clear descriptions of these options.

Third prepare and implement a public communications and outreach plan.

Fourth review public comments and input and formulate a decision on a City policy.

Mayor Ramsey wanted to know is there a breaking point and how much do you involve the public.

Mr. Tombarge responded that they take that into account when they develop a plan.

Councilmember Backous commented he is afraid that we are going to put too many options out there, he would prefer to educate the people, he thought this survey should be used to fine-tune what we have.

Councilmember McGlone stated the current policy is the do nothing policy, so we can limit it to three with that. It is kind of the same anyway. The other one he saw was the franchise fee.

Mayor Ramsey stated because 54% of the people read the Ramsey Resident newsletter he would like to make it more enticing for them to read the articles we want them to read.

Councilmember Tossey thinks the people that were commenting that they feel our roads are fine are not being backed up on Ramsey roads; they are used to driving the busier roads.

Councilmember Wise suggested maybe a Charter Amendment; he would like to see it being rock solid money only used for road reconstruction.

Consensus was in agreement with the Himle Horner recommendations. No final decisions will be made at this meeting.

Finance Officer Lund discussed the franchise fee.

Mayor Ramsey would like to see a plan, prior to what we are going to do. He would like to inform the residents of how much we will bring in by doing all this.

2.2 Review City Owned Land Inventory

Management/Planning Intern Patrick Brama reviewed in the staff report four map areas for review.

Councilmember Elvig asked about the open space map and the large parcel over along the west.

Senior Planner Gladhill responded that is the Trott Brook Greenway corridor.

Councilmember Elvig stated we don't have control over it and asked if it is dedicated for non construction.

Director of Public Works Olson explained some were acquired in combinations of tax forfeit, with federal grant LCMR, all of them are wetland. There are trails in certain locations.

Mayor Ramsey asked could we also do an analysis of land that we don't maintain and will this be important in the future.

Councilmember Elvig stated what he is most interested in is what is a buildable piece of land that holds most value that we are not utilizing.

Management Planning Intern Patrick Brama reviewed the next map being wetland, which may answer some of the Council's previous questions.

Public Works Director Olson reviewed on the PowerPoint map that with a pond, that is a buildable site, but one would have to relocate the pond.

Public Works Director Olson stated that a lot of time has been put into this by the Management Planning Intern, but a lot of work still needs to be put into this, and to first identify those properties that are available for sale.

Management Planning Intern Brama proceeded with the tables available in the packet. With the lowest restriction, that table has about eight properties in The COR area. Second category reviewed has some restrictions and the third table had foreseeable restrictions.

Management Planning Intern Brama began discussing dedicated vs. undedicated property.

Mayor Ramsey asked about one of the little parks on the map and felt it is not even a developable piece.

Senior Planner Gladhill asked are we going to go after dedicated parks and do you want to go through that process and from there, would you like that other parcels be identified for future study.

Mayor Ramsey asked even though it is dedicated park could we use that for wetland mitigation.

Public Works Director Olson responded even though it is dedicated he doesn't think we couldn't use it for wetland mitigation.

Councilmember Wise stated he does like the idea of some of these lands are owned as dedicated parkland maybe some of the neighbors would want to purchase these.

Councilmember McGlone discussed when you have your dedicated lands, somewhere in the law it has to go back to who dedicated it to you and it may not be feasible.

Councilmember Backous stated we have to decide what steps to go through in deciding dedicated.

Deputy City Administrator Nelson asked Mayor and Council if there is a desire to liquidate properties and how do we go about doing that and how soon do they want to act upon this.

Councilmember McGlone asked about the statues about liquidating property.

Deputy City Administrator Nelson stated we would have to pass an ordinance on sale of land and would need to look into this more.

City Administrator Ulrich stated staff could bring back some policy objectives that would be an important piece of what we are trying to achieve.

2.3 Council Dias

Management/Planning Intern Brama reviewed the two options of correcting concerns expressed about the Council Dias.

Mayor Ramsey wanted to incorporate some ideas he had. One of which the monitor stands could be taken off and dropped down. He also stated that some of the monitors should be eliminated altogether.

Councilmember McGlone's comments were to fix the armrests on the chairs and he can't find any reason to support this.

Councilmember Elvig is in support of this and would like to move the Dias down.

Councilmember Tossey stated he is not in support of anymore spending on Council chambers.

Deputy City Administrator Nelson reviewed the original construction decisions of the Dias.

Councilmember Backous expressed support of this.

Councilmember Wise stated if you are going to fix it then fix it.

City Administrator Ulrich wanted to make a correction that the funding source is coming from the equipment revolving fund

Councilmember Tossey asked about the possibility of using the QCTV fund.

Consensus of the Council is to start with dropping the Dias at staff's discretion and then decide whether to take the floor out and whether to raise or lower the top.

2.4 2012 General Fund Budget

Finance Officer Lund reviewed the staff report.

There is about a \$505,000 increase with a difference of about a net of \$365,000.

Included in the revenue is also a decrease in engineering of billable time related to engineering projects of about \$239,000.

Public Works Director Olson wanted to expand on this being that in the past a lot of the billable time was with planning projects so it has been difficult because we don't have approved CIP projects. It was estimated very conservatively a number for the street maintenance program due to the uncertainty of the street reconstruction initiative. That is why it was estimated conservatively in this upcoming year and in order for this to be more consistent from year to year the smart thing would be to create some sort of equalizing fund, or public improvement revolving fund so that we can keep the same level of revenue coming in each year.

City Administrator Ulrich stated there are a couple key questions that staff is looking for answers for by the council in terms of policy - one is tax rates, secondly one time money \$603,000 leaves us with hole next year the following year that hole will be made up with the certifications and TIF districts going off and we see this as a two year issue.

Councilmember Tossey suggested that perhaps the \$29,000 for the Environmental Coordinators position could come from the Landfill Trust Fund, which could save that amount out of the general levy.

Councilmember Backous would like to have a discussion on the EDA.

Mayor Ramsey expressed concern with keeping property tax at zero increase. He is asking to open this up for discussion or consensus on this.

Councilmember McGlone would like to see taxes go lower.

City Administrator Ulrich asked if the Council could anticipate having a franchise fee in place by 2012.

Public Works Director Olson is concerned about putting some projects in jeopardy

Councilmember Tossey is not sure if he is in favor of the franchise fee.

Mayor Ramsey stated the goal is to get to zero on tax increase.

Chairperson Elvig asked about development fees.

2.5 City Maintenance of RALF Properties

Finance Office Lund reviewed the staff report and stated Mr. Sharp is in agreement with what staff imposed.

Finance Office Lund stated that what is being asked for tonight is if Council in agreement with painting of NAU building and also the Midwest Car Care sight.

City Administrator Ulrich recommended we continue with maintenance.

Mayor Ramsey asked if we can't use rent revenues to offset revenues on other properties then he would like to go to the legislature to get that changed because with all these properties how do we maintain them.

Councilmember Wise wondered if we can explore a way of something on the outside source to manage these properties.

Mayor Ramsey would like to have the maintenance department monitor the building once a week for repairs.

City Administrator Ulrich stated we will continue to monitor that but right now staff is asking to move forward with contract.

Councilmember Elvig would like to quantify the bids, if they are bid at mowing once, or three times a month.

Finance Officer clarified that it would be maintained every ten days.

Mayor Ramsey suggested skipping the fertilizing and weed control.

Consensus was to move forward with the paving and go with the lowest bid.

MAYOR, COUNCIL AND STAFF INPUT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Elvig and seconded by Councilmember Wise to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried. All voted in favor.

The City Council work session adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Jo Ann M. Thieling
City Clerk

Drafted by Mary Jo Warner
City of Ramsey Public Works Secretary