

Public Information Proposal for City of Ramsey Long-Term Road Maintenance Program

Submitted by Himle Horner Inc. — November 19, 2010

Background

Roughly 45 percent of Ramsey's 174 miles of roads were constructed between 1976 and 1985. With routine maintenance, the average expected life of these roads is 40 years, which means that between 2016 and 2025, the City expects an estimated \$90 million or more in road reconstruction to be necessary to repair its aging streets. While approximately 20 percent of Ramsey's roadways would qualify for state aid, 80 percent will be the responsibility of local taxpayers. Currently, the City does not have a street reconstruction policy or a reliable funding source apart from costly individual property assessments.

Recently, the Ramsey City Council agreed to take a more proactive approach to street maintenance. It directed staff to develop a street reconstruction policy and a more balanced funding approach to this long-term issue. Specifically, the City hopes to establish a policy that:

- **Spreads the cost over time** so individual property owners are not surprised by burdensome multi-year assessments
- **More fairly distributes the cost** to all property owners who benefit from well-maintained roads
- **Removes roadblocks to maintenance** such as insufficient funds or property owner petitions against street repairs, which delay projects and ultimately increase costs
- **Better positions Ramsey for the future** by maintaining the high-quality streets necessary for motorist safety and to attract housing, commercial and other economic growth

The City has requested a proposal from Himle Horner, Inc. (HHI) for communications assistance with developing a plan to inform the public about the need for a policy; engage residents and property owners in a dialogue about funding options; and ultimately propose a new policy for City Council approval in late summer/early fall 2011.

However, several issues and environmental conditions should be considered, including:

- **A challenging economic environment** in which homeowners and business owners will find it difficult to support higher taxes, fees or other property costs
- **Currently well-maintained roads** that have not shown visible wear. This will make it difficult to communicate the need and urgency for a road maintenance policy.
- **A lack of public awareness** about the history and anticipated expense of maintaining the city's road system
- **Public sensitivity** to any increase in taxes or fees — as well as increased government spending.

Recommended Goals

To overcome these challenges, it will be important for the City to involve property owners and local opinion leaders in the policy's creation and implementation. Specifically, HHI recommends the City consider implementing a public information and engagement program through the end of 2011 to:

- Inform residents, businesses and other property owners about the long-term challenges that lie ahead for Ramsey's roads, and how the community will be impacted without a proactive approach
- Engage Ramsey property owners in a public discussion about potential policy and funding options
- Build public support for establishing a road reconstruction and long-term funding policy
- If a policy is approved, increase property owner awareness about the new policy and how it will affect them

Recommended Approach

To work toward accomplishing these goals, HHI recommends the following approach:

Step 1 — Research — Design research to identify:

- What residents know/perceive about the city's road maintenance needs and potential policy solutions
- Information gaps and what information residents need or want to make informed decisions
- How best to communicate that information to residents
- Also, test community attitudes/satisfaction with city services and other issues

Specifically, the research would include:

- Online/media scan of 3-4 other municipalities that have taken a similar long-term approach to road maintenance to learn from their successes, failures and messages
- Public opinion survey that involves a 30-question telephone survey among a randomly-selected sample of 300 adults in Ramsey. The sample would provide an accuracy rate of +/- 6.0% at the 95% confidence level. HHI would design, manage and analyze the public opinion research. We recommend working with Decision Resources, Ltd. to develop survey samples, conduct telephone interviews and tabulate data.
- Present public opinion results/analysis during a meeting in Ramsey (up to 2 hours) with City staff and/or council members.

Step 2 — Messaging and Public Information Plan — Based on the research, develop a plan for a public information and engagement program to be largely implemented by City staff and officials. The plan will include **goals, audiences, a strategic overview and key messages**, as well as outline **public information and engagement strategies and related tactics**. To accomplish this, HHI would:

- Draft a public information plan to include the sections outlined above for implementation during calendar year 2011; review and finalize plan in cooperation with Ramsey staff
- General talking points document, including information for specific stakeholder groups as needed

- Provide advice and counsel to city staff as needed
- Present plan recommendations during a two-hour meeting at the Ramsey Municipal Center

Step 3 — Implementation Assistance (Optional) — While HHI understands that primary responsibility for implementation of the plan will rest with City staff, it may be helpful for staff to involve HHI in the following:

- Materials development including up to 2 fact sheets (including content, in-house design and two rounds of edits), template PowerPoint presentation and other content necessary to introduce the policy's need and potential solutions to Ramsey property owners and opinion leaders, and to explain the policy once it is approved
- Series of earned media columns (up to 3) that may be submitted by City officials and/or interested third parties to local media to explain the need and potential policy solutions
- Template media release that may be used by staff to publicize a staff-planned series of public information meetings and/or public hearings about the proposed policy
- Implementation and media relations counsel to City staff as needed
- Assist with other tactics as agreed upon by City staff and HHI, budget permitting

Budget

Based on this approach, we estimate the following fees for a December 2010 – December 2011 contract:

Research (Step 1)		\$21,000 - \$24,500
<i>Decision Resources, Ltd.</i>	\$9,000 - \$10,500*	
<i>HHI Professional Fees</i>	\$12,000 - \$14,000	
Messaging and Public Information Plan (Step 2)		\$14,000 - \$16,000
Implementation Assistance (Step 3)		\$8,000 - \$10,000
Total		\$43,000 - \$50,500

Note: The budget is an estimate based on our current understanding of the potential engagement and can be adjusted depending on the desired scope of services from HHI. Should the client require additional services that are outside of the proposed or final budget, those services will be billed according to our standard hourly rates. HHI professional services and general office expenses, including but not limited to phone costs, photocopies, mail costs and mileage for up to two meetings in Ramsey are included in the above amounts. This budget also assumes that design, printing, mail house or other materials development vendor costs (except where noted above) will be the responsibility of the City and are not included in this estimate. HHI bills clients on a monthly basis for fees and expenses as they are incurred. Payment is due within 30 days of the invoice date.

*This fee estimate assumes that the City of Ramsey will be billed directly by Decision Resources, Ltd. If the City prefers that this work be billed through HHI, as part of HHI's overall work, a 15% mark-up will be added.