

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, November 1, 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 Sarah Strommen  
Councilmember Jason Tossey

Member Absent: Councilmember Jeffrey Wise

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich  
Deputy City Administrator Heidi A. Nelson  
Public Works Director Brian Olson  
Finance Officer Diana Lund  
Police Chief James Way  
Fire Chief Dean Kapler  
Senior Planner Tim Gladhill  
City Engineer Tim Himmer  
Environmental Coordinator Chris Anderson  
Economic Development/Marketing Manager Aaron Backman

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Ramsey called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:30 p.m.

**COUNCIL TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

**1) Snowmobiling in Ramsey**

Police Chief Jim Way reviewed the 2010-2011 snowmobile season with the Council and asked where the Council wants to go with regard to the snowmobiling season of 2011-2012. He noted that individual Councilmembers have been contacted by citizens regarding snowmobiling and he offered that any comments or concerns could be discussed. He reported there were a total of 26 complaints last year – that number being down even with a lot of snow. A few citations were issued. The average number of complaints in the past has been about 100 per snowmobile season.

Mayor Ramsey commented that the designated trails on Armstrong were impacted by the walking trails.

Chief Way stated we have come up with an alternative plan in working with the snowmobile club. They have secured a permit to make changes and will make some changes on 167<sup>th</sup>. That will make the north side better. He noted a couple members of the snowmobile club were present at this meeting.

Mayor Ramsey stated he talked with a gentleman (also present at this meeting) who lives near the trail. Mayor Ramsey stated he would be in favor of allowing people to go to and from the trails – from their house. He talked about that there could be some type of permitting system and noted that St. Francis does that. He added he is in favor of opening this up so people can go out from where they like.

Councilmember McGlone asked Chief Way about the system in St. Francis.

Chief Way stated that it is a permitting system – color-coded. The permit color matches the color on a map and it tells where you can ride. There are four colors and one area where no one can ride. St. Francis has issued very few tickets. He felt that this type of system is an enforcement nightmare.

Mayor Ramsey reiterated he would be in favor of just allowing people to ride from their house to a trail.

Chief Way stated at one point, snowmobiling was allowed all over the City of Ramsey; then it was banned in the area of the MUSA. He talked about not being able to ride on a County Road as per state statute.

Councilmember Tossey expressed agreement with Mayor Ramsey - if we just allow folks without permits to go to the nearest trail that would be fine. He stated he is concerned about inconsistencies in writing tickets though so if you have to get a permit – it makes for less chance for those inconsistencies – there are no questions. He expressed concern as well about enforcement issues.

Mayor Ramsey suggested it could be written in such a way that they have to go directly to the nearest trail so if they are outside of that parameter – they get a ticket.

Chief Way reported that we see very few violations.

Councilmember Backous inquired if Chief Way knows why the complaints went down so dramatically and asked if we changed something.

Chief Way replied that we changed the area for riding but not just in the last year. We have had it the same for a number of years so people know where they can and cannot ride. We added Armstrong and Variolite last year but the other changes were made back in 2005.

Councilmember Elvig felt it was because people are getting more educated. What he likes about permitting is the amount of education it brings. How well it would actually work – he wasn't

sure but if you open up more area to snowmobiling again – we should do it with some sort of an education process.

Councilmember Backous felt the permitting is going too far. Allow them to go from house to trail – period – and see how it goes.

Mayor Ramsey stated we need to have the policy if you are doing something wrong – they get ticketed.

Councilmember Strommen expressed support in doing this and seeing how it goes. Her issue would be snowmobiles in the yards where there are young children, dogs, etc. We just need to watch for issues.

Councilmember McGlone suggested to just open it up. Whatever we are doing is working – the education and the help from the snowmobile club are making a difference. He feels the permitting is a mess. If someone is doing something wrong, we will ticket them.

Councilmember Tossey stated he just wants to make sure we allow the Police Department to not have any problems citing folks if they are doing something wrong.

Chief Way stated, so if we open the City back up to snowmobiling, will we allow them to ride on the boulevards again. That was the biggest complaint. Maybe we say, in that area, on a street or on a designated route. We could still use the same line and call it something different – we are not letting people ride in the parks or on the golf courses, etc.

Mayor Ramsey thought we had a trail through Rivers Bend Park to which Chief Way responded no, we do not.

Mayor Ramsey asked then if you live by Rivers Bend Park, how do you get to the trail to which Chief Way replied we would have to work on that. We cannot have people ride or cross our walking trails.

Mayor Ramsey felt there was no good place to put a trail through that park.

Chief Way stated we could let them park there.

A resident present in the audience talked about a way they can access – right by the bridge. Discussion ensued between the resident and Chief Way and they drafted/mapped out how that could work. Chief Way noted they could mark that area. He inquired of Director of Public Works Olson if there would be any problem with that to which Mr. Olson replied there would not.

Mayor Ramsey stated he did not want to open up more road ditches.

Bob Simpson, resident and member of the snowmobile club, asked how about if you live in a certain distance from a marked route – say a mile – is that too confusing.

Chief Way responded that is too difficult to enforce and also difficult to understand.

Mayor Ramsey suggested if people want to ride a mile and a half or so on the streets to get to the river – that’s fine.

Director of Public Works Olson inquired about studs doing damage on the City streets.

Mayor Ramsey agreed it would cause some damage.

Councilmember Elvig talked about how driveways were wrecked years ago – now wrecking streets will be an issue.

John Enstrom, 181<sup>st</sup> Avenue, stated he has always been opposed to snowmobiling. He said he could call the Police each time someone is riding where they shouldn’t be but that is too time consuming for the Police. He feels there is a lot of abuse. He stated last year on County Road #83, there were more snowmobile tracks off than on the designated areas. He felt that landowners should not have to put up with the abuse from snowmobiles driving on their property. He suggested the Council might want to consider moving 181<sup>st</sup> off the trail system.

Mayor Ramsey stated he hears Mr. Enstrom’s issue – maybe he should put up a couple signs that state “no snowmobiling”. There will always be some problem people, but most will abide by the rules.

One of the gentleman present from the snowmobile club offered that members of the club could go out to Mr. Enstrom’s property and erect signs.

Councilmember Strommen stated we can try this and see how it goes. If it becomes an enforcement issue, we will review it – we need to make sure it’s workable.

Councilmember McGlone commented that there are always a few who wreck something for everyone. He suggested maybe a snow fence could be erected on Mr. Enstrom’s property.

Bob Simpson offered that the snowmobile club will work with Mr. Enstrom.

Chief Way clarified that Council is fine with allowing snowmobiling on the streets in the “designated non-use area” and to create a route through River’s Bend Park’s parking lot to the Rum River. There will be no snowmobiling on the county roads, and not in the ditches. We will not use a permitting process.

Mayor Ramsey agreed and clarified with regard to River’s Bend Park – so people know they can go through there but to keep out of the park area. Maybe the snowmobile club can help us out with that. He suggested maybe creating more signs. He suggested this information needs to be on the website, on QCTV, etc.

Chief Way stated he will make changes to the City's ordinance and bring it back to a Council meeting.

City Administrator Ulrich stated, in the interest of time, we could waive the first reading.

The members of the snowmobile club felt this is important to get published in the *Ramsey Resident*. It was noted there would not be another issue coming out until January.

Discussion ensued relating to avenues to get this information out to the public. Mayor Ramsey noted that we are adding privileges so maybe the word will get around faster.

Councilmember Elvig expressed concern about waiving the first reading of the ordinance – stating it could appear as if we are pushing this through if we shorten the timeframe for dealing with the ordinance.

Chief Way offered that staff will work on this for next week's meeting.

## **2.2 Discuss Utility Easement Resolution**

City Administrator Ulrich stated that residents and Council have expressed concern over current practices regarding the management of rights-of-way and easements and as a result of those concerns, staff drafted a resolution for Council consideration, which spells out more what is requested of each utility company doing business in the City. He noted the resolution is advisory and, if approved by Council, would be sent out to all utilities. He summarized the resolution. He added that it was also suggested by a staff member that we are a Tree City USA and have been for the past 19 years and we could maybe use that as the preamble.

Mayor Ramsey stated he has no problem with this resolution and he would actually like to take it farther. He would like to express his frustration with the lack of common sense with regard to utility companies.

Councilmember McGlone stated that Councilmember Wise contacted him to voice his opinion that he objects to e) which reads for large-scale tree clearance operations an environmental worksheet be completed. Councilmember Wise suggested this might be overkill.

Environmental Coordinator Anderson stated that depending on the voltage of the line, rights-of-way can vary. He had a conversation with someone from a tree service that does work with Excel Energy. They are very open to tree preservation. He talked about general mandates and regulations.

Councilmember Backous stated he has a couple of issues. He feels it's a little overkill – and that "e" jumped out at him too. Also g) which reads restore all habitat within the right-of-way/easement to a level consistent with surrounding habitat. He did not know how some of these are really being practical but he did not have a problem with the concept.

Councilmember Strommen asked if we can require an Environmental Work Sheet. She felt it did not seem like something we have a right to request. She stated she would expect some restoration from the power company.

Councilmember McGlone stated that maybe anything they touch they would have to restore.

Consensus of the Council was to delete e) for large-scale tree clearance operations an environmental worksheet be completed. Mr. Ulrich noted we cannot maintain that as a City. Consensus was to revise g) restore all habitat within the right-of-way/easement to a level consistent with surrounding habitat. Mr. Ulrich noted it would instead state that they restore anything they touch to at least the previous condition.

Mr. Ulrich noted there is also information included in this topic report about the new transmission line that will be going through a part of Ramsey. He presented a brief description of the line.

Mayor Ramsey commented that with the new line, they will cut a swath 150 feet wide.

Senior Planner Gladhill stated that he thought they are looking at the potential for 75 feet. There will be an impact – and staff will keep Council updated.

Environmental Coordinator Anderson stated that going back to the letter g) on the resolution; maybe we should include some provision that says restoring the area to the preexisting condition or with consultation with the property owner.

John Enstrom, resident on 181<sup>st</sup> Avenue, stated we should have some control about the type of plantings they replace. For example, blue grass has zero value – trees have value.

Councilmember Strommen agreed native species requirement should be added – when applicable.

Councilmember Tossey stated he understands the concern but added you are bolstering their 150-foot right-of-way.

Consensus of the Council was that the resolution g) be amended to if they are doing a restoration; make it a native planting – no invasive species.

Staff will make amendments to the resolution and bring it to a subsequent Council meeting for formal adoption.

### **2.3 2012 General Fund Levy & Budget**

Finance Officer Lund presented a brief summary of the proposed levy. She noted we received the County numbers – we proposed a tax rate of 44.64 – it came in at 44.32. She noted on page 2 of the handout – the rate for 2012 is 113.119 – it was 110.413 for 2011. The school levy goes into effect for the 2013 levy. What is proposed in 2012 – 8,445,483, which represents

\$1,513,215 attributed to the total Municipal Center debt. She talked briefly about the one time funding transfer from the fund balance in 2010. Ms. Lund continued that the City Council has mentioned they would like to keep the levy constant. With TIF, it brings it down to about \$32,000. She presented some examples of the effect of the levy on taxpayers - on varying priced homes, and noted that it also depended upon the school district they are in. Ms Lund explained that for 2013, the City will need additional one-time funding of \$417,807 to cover the \$603,000 internal borrowing or one-time transfer from an undesignated fund – such as the Landfill Trust Fund. For 2014, TIF 2 and TIF 10 are decertified, which will add back approximately \$605,000 to City taxes. The Street Maintenance Program was mentioned as well. Ms. Lund disseminated a handout of a graph showing the one-time transfers as well as the funds balance analysis.

Mayor Ramsey stated he would like to hear how we are going to fix this in the future.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that if you look at two years out, there's an issue of about \$600,000. Two years out, these funds will disappear. The PIR Fund is replenished but the budget is so tight. He noted we have to find a way to reduce costs. The City Council needs to be made aware of the balances of these funds, etc.

Mayor Ramsey stated that even if you subtract out the road reconstruction, we still have a hole.

Ms. Lund reiterated that TIF 2 and 10 will generate about \$605,000. We have to levy about a million and a half for debt service on this building. She added that 2013 is a gap year.

Mr. Ulrich added so one gap year – one time money would be something we could do.

Finance Officer Lund noted that the majority of the general fund is attributable to street maintenance.

Councilmember Strommen stated this is good information for Council to have and we need to discuss this very seriously. She stated that last week the rest of the Council learned that Mayor Ramsey had some recommendations for change but she feels she and the rest are disadvantaged as to what to do because they do not have all the information relating to this recommendation.

Mayor Ramsey stated that with regard to his recommendations, we have not talked about that yet – so we should not be worrying about that It will not happen this year.

Mr. Ulrich stated that this was not specifically asked for by the Mayor. It's never a good policy to take one-time fixes. We wanted to show you what could be done plus a long-term plan.

Director of Public Works Olson reported that from engineering, it's a pretty conservative estimate on the revenue provided. In 2010, there was a 93% increase with fees associated with work that was done. In 2011 – 126% - with conservative projects in the CIP - we are at about 96% for next year.

Mayor Ramsey stated that with regard to the budget for next year – the concern was previously we did not want to levy any more money than what was levied last year. The trouble we will run into with the new way things are calculated, it will look like we raised taxes.

Finance Officer Lund responded that the direction was to keep taxes the same. With two school districts, it will be a little more difficult. If the direction is that Council would like to see the levy kept the same – the reduction is \$32,000.

Mayor Ramsey stated we need to be at least there.

Councilmember Strommen stated she agrees with that goal but we also should have that entered as part of the conversation. The dollars we invest in the streets and neighborhoods – that's a value to residents too. \$50 to \$100 is worth it. There are two sides to this – one is to keep the levy the same and the other is we need to invest in our City.

Mayor Ramsey stated that we need to keep the streets up but we do not want to have foreclosures either. Will \$50 to \$100 cause foreclosures – he thought it could.

Councilmember Strommen reiterated it's about investment into our community.

Councilmember Tossey expressed concern about declining home values and added he does not want to raise the levy.

Councilmember Elvig commented that we are trying to add in The Draw for example – but then we are trying to cut other things. We will have several million dollars coming on with street reconstruction – there will be a lot of complexities in the next couple of years.

Councilmember McGlone stated that in the good years, we built up fund balances for one time money for bad times. Everything we build costs money.

Mayor Ramsey stated he would be interested in losing that \$30,000 and keeping it the same.

Councilmember Strommen asked what we are giving up to lower it that \$30,000 – and is it worth it. When is what we are giving up not worth it. She views it as a range.

Mayor Ramsey stated he wants to be able to say he did not raise taxes.

City Administrator Ulrich stated he is confident we can come back with a budget to reduce that \$30,000, without significant impacts. We will work on that and bring it back to the City Council and have the levy slightly lower than last years.

Ms. Lund reported in 2008 it was \$10 million, in 09 it was \$9,978 million, in 2010 it was \$9,639 million, in 2011 it was \$9,449 million and in 2012 the proposed amount is \$9,689 million and having TIF 1 come back to help absorb that. We have been decreasing for the last five years.

Councilmember Backous stated he knows we have \$32,000 waste, guaranteed, so he did not have a problem reducing the budget by that amount.

Councilmember Tossey expressed agreement.

Councilmember Strommen stated she agrees with the goal but we still have an issue of how to fund the street maintenance program longer range. We have not solved that problem – let's be honest about what's on the table.

Mayor Ramsey mentioned assessments.

Councilmember Strommen argued that that is coming out of the same pocket.

Councilmember McGlone felt that Council is working on it.

Councilmember Tossey stated we are trying to look at how we can all share with this expense. He felt that we should maintain the tax levy for this year.

Councilmember Backous stated that we could knock one-third of this amount out of the budget by giving up food for meetings.

### **3.1 Review Future Topics/Calendar**

It was noted that road reconstruction should come back for discussion at the work session level and that the Metro Transit Taxing Agreement should be on the next agenda.

### **MAYOR/COUNCIL/STAFF INPUT**

None.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Councilmember Tossey, seconded by Councilmember Backous to adjourn the Work Session meeting.

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kurtis G. Ulrich  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

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Jo Ann M. Thieling  
City Clerk

*Minutes drafted by Jo Thieling, City Clerk*