

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, October 29, 2013, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Sarah Strommen  
Councilmember Randy Backous  
Councilmember Jill Johns  
Councilmember Mark Kuzma  
Councilmember John LeTourneau  
Councilmember Chris Riley  
Councilmember Jason Tossey (arrived at 7:55 p.m.)

Environmental Policy Board

Members Present: Chairperson Michael Max  
Board Member Bob Bentz  
Board Member Michael Hiatt  
Board Member Michael Valentine

Planning Commission

Members Present: Chairperson Gary Levine  
Commissioner Randy Bauer  
Commissioner Ralph Brauer  
Commissioner Joseph Field  
Commissioner Mathew Maul

Economic Development Authority

Members Present: Chairperson Jim Steffen  
Member Glen Hardin  
Member Wayne Skaff  
Member Kristine Williams

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich  
Associate Planner/Environmental Coordinator Chris Anderson  
Development Services Manager Timothy Gladhill  
City Engineer Bruce Westby  
Assistant to the City Administrator Patrick Brama

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Strommen called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:35 p.m.

**2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

**2.01: Discussion Regarding the Annual Performance Review of the City administrator, an Individual who is subject to the City Council's Authority**

Human Resources Manager Lasher advised that under Minnesota Statutes, the meeting can move into closed session to discuss personnel issues. She indicated the closed session discussion will relate to the annual performance review of the City Administrator. The closed session will be tape recorded and that tape will be maintained for a period of eight years.

Motion by Councilmember Riley, seconded by Councilmember LeTourneau, to move to Closed Session to discuss the annual performance review of the City Administrator.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Mayor Strommen, Councilmembers Backous, Johns, Kuzma, LeTourneau, Riley, and Tossey. Voting No: None.

The City Council meeting moved into a Closed Session at 5:36 p.m.

The City Council reconvened in Open Session at 6:34 p.m.

**2.02: Planning Commission and Environmental Policy Board (EPB): Review Status of Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA/Critical Area) Rulemaking Process by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as Directed by the 2013 Minnesota Legislature**

Development Services Manager Gladhill noted that the intent for the meeting tonight is to simply obtain general input and determine if staff is on the right track. He asked for input on critical red flags to ensure that responses to other agencies are made appropriately. He identified the critical area, which is a 72 mile stretch of Minnesota along the Mississippi River, and provided a brief history. He reviewed the intent of the rulemaking process, which includes protection of key features, to clarify inconsistent or conflicting standards, and to create a baseline of common standards throughout the corridor. He summarized the current district standards and reviewed the rulemaking schedule, which includes additional time to obtain input from local municipalities and residents. He advised of a tiered land use district, which is included in the draft plan and would be beneficial to Ramsey. He noted that although some nonconforming structures would still exist, the proposed districts would help to create local control and flexibility as well as removing some structures from nonconforming status. He advised of a recent meeting, which occurred and noted that the detailed comments and issues identified were included in the packet. He highlighted a DNR meeting he attended on October 24<sup>th</sup> and noted that following that meeting 88 percent of the participants, which included staff and elected officials from affected municipalities, were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the DNR process. He reviewed the other review meetings, which have been conducted and attended thus far in the process. He referenced the Draft Statement of Policy, suggested that the title possibly be changed to Official Response, and highlighted the course moving forward following tonight's meeting.

Mayor Strommen thanked Development Services Manager Gladhill and staff for their assistance and work in this process, including the open meetings with residents. She referenced the recommendations section of the Draft Statement of Policies and questioned if the group found those issues to be true and whether the comments found under those issues were appropriate.

Planning Commission Chairperson Levine commented that this is nothing new but simply tweaking what is already in place to make the corridor more flexible. He believed that the DNR has been very accommodating throughout this process.

Environmental Policy Board Member Bentz referenced the issue of grandfathered protection and expressed concern with properties that may become nonconforming.

Development Services Manager Gladhill noted that the DNR is reviewing how they could protect those properties that would become lawful nonconforming structures. He addressed issues of expansion and rebuilding. He noted that staff would work to determine if the timeline for rebuilding could be lengthened.

Environmental Policy Board Member Bentz questioned the erosion rates at the bends in the river. He noted that a property could have been conforming but due to erosion, the property no longer meets the setback requirements.

Development Services Manager Gladhill stated that staff will look at that further, noting that rates of erosion are different throughout the corridor.

Environmental Policy Board Member Valentine commended staff for their work thus far as he believed the issues of concern were included.

Mayor Strommen confirmed that the issues of concern have been included in the Statement and she believed it was a nice balance of providing comments to the DNR and also leaving room for the information that is not yet known.

Councilmember Kuzma questioned if there were funds available to assist a resident with erosion problems.

Associate Planner/Environmental Coordinator Anderson noted that there may be funds available through the Anoka Conservation District, noting that the funding covers design costs and does not necessarily cover construction type costs. He noted that comment was heard at the public process meeting.

Councilmember Kuzma referenced the LRRMWO, which has a trip scheduled to float the Mississippi River in the spring in an attempt to document areas of concern.

Associate Planner/Environmental Coordinator Anderson confirmed that in the past ten years it is obvious that the river is shifting.

John Freeburg, resident, stated that he has completed erosion control on his property and noted that many of his neighbors would like to do similar work but cannot access the necessary area. He commented that perhaps the DNR could allow barges to bring rocks that could be used for erosion control purposes.

The consensus of the Council was to support the Draft Statement of Policy document related to the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Rulemaking Project as presented, amending the title to Official Response.

**2.05: Planning Commission and Economic Development Authority (EDA): Review Status and Schedule of Small Area Land Planning Projects**

- **15153 Nowthen Boulevard NW (Former Municipal Center / Current Fire Station #2)**

Development Services Manager Gladhill advised that the intent tonight is simply to provide a general update and noted that staff has focused on land use review for three small areas within the City and identified each of those areas. He noted that updates for each area were included in the packet. He stated that the process for the former municipality center has focused on the possible use of that space for data storage.

- **167<sup>th</sup> Avenue Node at Saint Francis Boulevard NW (Trunk Highway #47)**

Development Services Manager Gladhill referenced the 167<sup>th</sup> Avenue node at Saint Francis Boulevard NW and noted that this spot had been an anchor retail space and discussed the problems with the site. He advised that staff has reviewed a number of possibilities and a number of options were discussed with the residents in that area to garner input.

- **Armstrong West (Future Business Park / Retail Area)**

Development Services Manager Gladhill referenced Armstrong West and noted that the intent for this parcel would be a future business park and location for employment. He noted that adjacent to Armstrong is a small retail area and discussions include the appropriate land use for that parcel as well. He noted that staff will continue this work over the next few months and advised that a general timeline was included in the packet for review including purpose and schedules.

Planning Commissioner Bauer questioned the impact that the Highway 10 improvements will have on the Armstrong development. He also referenced a large parcel in the center that may not become available.

Development Services Manager Gladhill stated that staff is aware of acquisition parcels and the impact that could have. He believed that the County has approved the final design for the Armstrong intersection. He referenced the holdout sites and advised that the owner desires the area to be a business park and not retail.

Councilmember Letourneau commended staff for their efforts in focusing on these three areas as he believed it to be important to the viability and stability of the City and those areas.

Environmental Policy Board Member Bentz referenced ongoing activities and questioned if the City could afford to take on these projects. He questioned if the cart was being put before the horse in regard to road construction.

Development Services Manager Gladhill explained that this plan has nothing to do with road construction and is to speak with property owners and ensure that the Comprehensive Plan meets with those intentions. He advised that road construction would come along with the projects when developed.

Mayor Strommen confirmed that the road projects were in conjunction with the Armstrong project.

City Administrator Ulrich noted that the realignment of Sunfish was to prepare for the Armstrong intersection project.

Mayor Strommen also expressed appreciation for the time the Commissions have put into these plans, which are important elements of the Comprehensive Plan, noting that community input has also been a focus throughout these processes. She recognized the additional time for the Commissions and staff and advised that she has heard positive input from the residents that were able to participate.

Planning Commissioner Brauer thanked the residents that were involved in the process. He noted that although the first few meetings may not be well attended, that attendance should grow in the future as residents realize that they can be a part of the process and will be heard.

Planning Commission Chairperson Levine stated that the folks at the golf course really appreciated the opportunity to meet with the neighboring property owners to obtain their input.

Councilmember Letourneau stated that he believes that the process demonstrates what the Council believes in, that being transparency and openness.

Planning Commissioner Field stated that the final act of listening to public input is incorporating the sound input into policy.

**2.03: Planning Commission and Economic Development Authority (EDA): Review Alternatives for Highway 10 Access Planning Study; Case of Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT)**

Wayne Noris, MnDOT, introduced himself as well as Paul Young of MnDOT and Chris Chromy of Bolton and Menk.

Chris Chromy, Bolton and Menk (consultant to Mn/DOT), noted that work on this project began approximately six months ago and will continue an additional six to eight months. He noted that

Highway 10 has been studied numerous times in the past ten years and briefly highlighted elements of each study that was completed which includes the City of Anoka Plan for Highway 10 as well as the plans within the City of Ramsey. He estimated the cost for the improvements, including construction and right-of-way acquisition costs. He explained why another study is necessary for Highway 10 and summarized some of the information obtained including delay in speeds and at intersections during peak congestion times and the higher than average crash and severity rates, noting the number to be twice the average for comparable corridors. He noted that there is a need to do something in order to reverse the trends for the roadway. He stated that in considering the current overall state and federal funding levels it will be difficult to achieve the vision of a freeway facility on this portion of Highway 10 within the next 20 years. He stated that in order to reduce crashes and improve mobility issues it is reasonable and responsible to implement lower cost interim measures that incrementally improve safety and operations for all users of Highway 10. He advised that the intent of this study is to identify high-benefit improvements that are fiscally responsible so that improvements can be funded, programmed and implemented incrementally. He reviewed the improvement concept approach, which includes an access management approach that will reduce conflict points at public street intersections, to remove or consolidate conflict points at driveways, and will also focus on driver information using technology. He stated that throughout this process they will review a number of options. He began with the reduction of conflict intersections, which includes options such as a right in/right out intersection, three quarter intersection, acceleration and deceleration lanes, restricted crossing U-turn (RCUT), continuous green T intersection, median u-turn, jughandle, continuous flow intersection, and pedestrian and bicycle routing to more desired at-grade crossings. He noted a common theme in these options, which is to eliminate the ability to turn left off of the main route, which can reduce accidents and improve operation. He advised that grade separation will also be investigated and reviewed options including pedestrian and bicycle routing to more desired grade separated crossings, high T intersection, mini-cloverleaf, flyover bridge, and local street overpass or underpass. He moved on to the issue of street closure and reviewed the option of frontage/backage road connectivity. In regard to driveway removal, he mentioned the option of driveway relocation/consolidation for some properties. He noted that some properties do not have another option for access and that access would therefore need to remain as long as the current use remains. He referenced the idea of driver information using technology noting the options of overhead lane use signs, advanced queue warning system, overhead dynamic message signs, signal timing, hybrid travel time sign, and alternate route guidance. He stated that as this moves forward the planning study will identify lower cost high-benefit safety, mobility and access solutions that can be built in the near future; consider improvements that can be utilized in the future transition to freeway; and support construction of the Highway 10/Armstrong Boulevard interchange. He reviewed the access planning study and identified meetings that have been held with the public and stakeholders. He noted that following the first of the year the City should have some recommendations and noted that the study will include not only the plan but also an implementation schedule.

City Administrator Ulrich referenced the properties that were purchased with state monies that have been set aside for right-of-way purposes and questioned if that was factored in with the cost of the improvement measures.

Mr. Chromy stated that they are aware of the properties that have been acquired and if those can be useful, they will be included in the plan. He stated that the County has been reminded throughout this process that these are interim improvements as the roadway is planned to become a freeway.

Development Services Manager Gladhill noted that this study is being funded through the County and MnDOT and advised that this is the opportunity for the City to provide input.

Planning Commissioner Bauer questioned if the study would include phasing of the most critical intersection options.

Mr. Chromy explained that this process is meant to determine problems and solutions. He stated that there are many problems with a high cost that society cannot afford to fix. He confirmed that the plan would not look to solve all of the problems but instead focus on some of the main problems. He advised that the phasing would be focused on smaller portions that would be fundable.

Mr. Noris explained that the study is set up with the goal to provide a proposal of interim projects that are affordable and can move forward within an intermediately short term period of five to ten years. He could not wager on what the budget will be and noted that the important focus would be the proposed improvements and the benefits that would be provided. He explained that once that is known then the improvements can be pitched to garner the appropriate funding. He explained that the intent of this study is not to remain on the shelf but to move forward.

Planning Commissioner Brauer asked for an estimated cost for some of the intersection improvements.

Mr. Chromy provided cost ranges for different intersection options.

Planning Commissioner Brauer questioned if these options were band-aids or a tourniquet. He questioned if the funds should be saved to complete one larger project, which could be done right rather than a series of projects that would only be small fixes and would not ultimately fix the overall problem. He questioned if some of the options would be modeled through this process.

Mr. Chromy stated that the purpose is not to provide band-aids, which do not improve the problem, but to go the path of the tourniquet. He noted that the Armstrong interchange improvements are moving ahead because of the strong desire of the City. He advised that a traffic operations model will be used to test the options and brainstorm the conflicts that could be removed from the model to provide a breakthrough in traffic.

Planning Commissioner Field referenced the 1,600 accidents which occurred over the past ten years and questioned if a detailed analysis was done to determine the cause, noting that rear-end accidents could be due to lack of driver attentiveness or congestions and stop lights. He noted that three elements would need to be considered including safety, traffic flow and emergency vehicle access.

Mr. Chromy confirmed that there is a statistical relationship to rear-end accidents and traffic signals. He noted that there is also bottleneck congestion where Highway 10 moves from a freeway type into stop lights.

Planning Commission Chairperson Levine noted that a number of scenarios provide the option of turning left by turning right and using a U-turn and questioned the safety element of that option.

Mr. Chromy stated that drivers are usually more cautious to make a U-turn and statistically left turns have a higher accident rate.

Mayor Strommen noted that there are times when adding a U-turn option to a left turn signal makes the turn less efficient because of those making U-turns.

Mr. Chromy noted that there is a point when the left turn lane can be overloaded.

Councilmember Backous noted that he is in favor of low cost high benefit options and questioned if these short term fixes would in essence shoot the City in the foot as the small improvements could delay funding in the long term fix.

Mr. Noris stated that part of the problem statement expressed that MnDOT would like to develop elements and projects that while are interim, are not throw away, and would still fit with the long term goal for a freeway. He explained that traffic is disrupted by projects and MnDOT does not want to repeatedly disrupt traffic.

Councilmember Backous referenced a left hand turn option and believed that those should be eliminated as possibilities as those cannot move forward into a freeway option. He referenced 252 and noted that once that project was complete it was already obsolete and believed that the project should be built for the future.

Councilmember Tossey agreed with the comments made by Councilmember Backous. He did not believe that the Ramsey or Sunfish intersections would be eliminated following the Armstrong interchange and did not want to delay possibilities for the future. He questioned if commercial and big rig vehicles have trouble with the U-turn options.

Mr. Chromy advised that the left turns can be designed for commercial sized vehicles while others may not be.

Planning Commissioner Bauer referenced the Thurston intersection, which does not cross the railroad tracks, but has a short turning time. He noted that intersection could be lengthened in order to accommodate additional drivers and those accessing the college.

Environmental Policy Board Chairperson Max stated that he has seen people fed up with waiting for green lights and therefore run the red light.

Councilmember Backous agreed that lengthening the timing of the light would be a low cost option that could provide a great benefit.

Mr. Chromy stated that MnDOT is doing the best they can with the signals that are out there and explained that adding five seconds more to the Thurston intersection could have an exponential delay to Highway 10.

Planning Commissioner Maul referenced the railroad and noted that he did not see any plans to address that.

Mr. Chromy acknowledged that the railroad compounds the delay on the cross roads and noted that the Armstrong improvements will provide a great option to the residents in Ramsey similar to the Thurston intersection. He acknowledged the low number of accidents at railroad tracks and zero fatalities in Ramsey, noting that a higher benefit may be provided through other efforts.

Mayor Strommen noted that the main concerns coming into this study was the safety and traffic concerns within Ramsey but also acknowledged the commercial and tourist gateway which is provided through the city. She was not sure that the long term vision came through as it should, or could, and asked that the element be brought forward more for the public meetings. She referenced the idea of identifying alternate routes and advised that there are no other alternate routes. She referenced the potential road closings and asked that the study also consider how those people would be displaced as there are no alternate routes available.

Mr. Chromy noted that the alternate routes he was suggesting would be to move traffic from the Ramsey intersection to Thurston.

Planning Commissioner Brauer explained that the other alternative would be to go down 47 to Bunker Lake Boulevard, which is also highly congested.

Mayor Strommen noted that these are the issues that the residents and businesses are acutely aware of and believed that incorporation of the input heard here would be beneficial moving into the public meetings. She thanked everyone for their time.

#### **2.04: Planning Commission and Economic Development Authority (EDA): Review Preliminary Metropolitan Council Forecasts**

Development Services Manager Gladhill reviewed the staff report and noted that a census is completed every ten years, noting that following that activity the Met Council reviews and updates their forecasts. He explained that this information is the precursor for the Comprehensive Plan. He explained that the Met Council has allowed early coordination with local governments in order to review the information. He reviewed the current estimates and the preliminary forecast through the year 2040. He explained that the permit levels in 2010 were much different than the past three years and advised that the new information will be focused on to amend the forecasts. He stated that more firm recommendations would be available at the November Planning Commission meeting. He advised that the previous forecasts were much more aggressive and have been brought down to reflect the existing conditions. He noted that

the Comprehensive Sanitary Sewer and Water Studies were updated in 2012 and also recommended that the NCDA be considered in the forecasting. He referenced unresolved assumptions including household size and employees per acre and reviewed the next steps. He believed the future land use map exercise could be used to guide the forecasting rather than the forecasts driving the future land use map. He advised that the Comprehensive Plan webpage will be updated in the next few weeks. He advised that preliminary responses were included in the packet. He noted that he will continue to update the necessary Boards and Commissions as appropriate.

Mayor Strommen advised that this step is so important in the Comprehensive Plan process and appreciated staff bringing the information back sooner rather than later this time around.

Planning Commissioner Bauer referenced the average size of households and noted that the increase in population and households is identical, meaning that those would be households of one. He stated that developers are not building homes to be vacant, and believed staff could work closely with developers to determine where there optimistic trend is coming from.

Planning Commissioner Field questioned where the Met Council obtains their statistics from and whether a general formula is used rather than basing forecasting on individual communities. He stated that the formulas would need to be known before the City knows whether the information is correct.

Planning Commissioner Brauer provided additional information on the method used to forecast by the Met Council and noted just how incorrect the Met Council information has been.

Development Services Manager Gladhill advised that the forecasting experience is not unique to the Met Council and this is a chance for the City to provide input.

City Administrator Ulrich advised that other benefits are tied to the forecasting and therefore staff wants to ensure that the forecasting is not overzealous but is still accurate as the City still needs to receive the investment in resources.

Planning Commissioner Brauer noted that Maple Grove is the biggest growing northwest community due to the new hospital. He recognized that when there is an investment in resources there is an uptick in population.

Development Services Manager Gladhill noted that staff will provide the Met Council with more historical data in order to garner appropriate forecasting. He explained that the Planning Commission and EDA will discuss this item in more detail prior to the December 1<sup>st</sup> deadline for comments during this first phase.

Mayor Strommen referenced a presentation she attended that referenced the aging statistics of the state and believed that would be beneficial to consider.

Development Services Manager Gladhill outlined the next steps that would be taken in order to reach the December 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.

**3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION**

Planning Commission Chairperson Levine noted that it is beneficial to have these groups meet in joint session and believed it would be beneficial to do that more often.

**4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT**

None

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kurtis G. Ulrich  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

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Jo Ann M. Thieling  
City Clerk

Drafted by Amanda Staple  
*TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*