



## 2014 City of Ramsey Legislative Platform

### **BACKGROUND**

Annually, the City of Ramsey drafts and adopts a Legislative Platform. This document includes a list of Legislative priorities specifically related to the City of Ramsey. Upon adoption by the City Council, Ramsey's Legislative Platform will be forwarded to our County, State and Federal elected officials. Additionally, this document will be used internally by Staff as a supplemental workplan for 2014.

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***SECTION I: LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES, CITY OF RAMSEY***

- (1) State Bonding for Interchange at U.S. Highway 10/Armstrong Boulevard
- (2) Ground Water
- (3) Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) Rulemaking

## (1) State Bonding for Interchange at U.S. Highway 10/Armstrong Boulevard

ISSUE: The at-grade intersection located at U.S. Highway 10/Armstrong Boulevard is a highly relied upon transportation junction for the City of Ramsey, the northwest Twin Cities metro region and the State transportation system as a whole. Considering the significant usage of this intersection, and its close proximity to a highly utilized railroad line, safety has become a major public concern. In the event an emergency takes place on U.S. Highway 10, while a train is passing through the City of Ramsey, public safety officials are physically unable to reach U.S. Highway 10 and respond via Armstrong Boulevard.

The proposed solution for this serious public safety issue is to construct an interchange located at U.S. Highway 10/Armstrong Boulevard. Local, State and Federal funding secured for this proposed project fall about \$17 million short of the \$35 million estimated total cost.

RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION: State bonding to fund \$17 million for the proposed interchange at U.S. Highway 10 and Armstrong Boulevard in Ramsey.

>Topic Generally Supported by: Anoka County

## (2) Ground Water

ISSUE: A clean and reliable source of ground water is critical to the function of any healthy community. In many cases, communities utilize aquifers as their primary source of ground water. The City of Ramsey is located in a “recharge zone” for aquifers utilized throughout the Twin Cities Metro region, known as the “Anoka County Sand Plain.”

The City of Ramsey is a developing community and anticipates significant growth over the next two decades. As a result, additional water supply will be required to meet the demand of future development. Recently, the City of Ramsey was notified by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that the City ‘MAY’ no longer be permitted to install new wells to utilize aquifers as a water source without first evaluating the ability to use surface waters, such as the Mississippi River. The DNR made this decision in order to protect existing, and future, ground water supplies of communities throughout the entire Twin Cities Metro region.

As a result, the City of Ramsey recently began planning for a new surface water treatment plant, which would draw from the Mississippi River. The City does plan to retain its ground water supply system as a back-up to the purposed surface water supply system. The estimated cost of the proposed surface water treatment plant in Ramsey is significant, at \$36.5 million. Costs for retaining the ground water supply system will be minimal compared to the treatment facility costs.

Clearly, utilization of ground water resources is not solely a local issue, as aquifers and “recharging zones” span across the entire Twin Cities metro region. The need for the City of Ramsey to switch from a ground water system to a surface water system is not a result of development in the City of Ramsey alone; it is the result of demand across the entire Twin Cities metro region.

RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION: The City of Ramsey supports a regional analysis and planning effort to utilize ground and surface water throughout the Twin Cities as a whole, rather than community-by-community. The City of Ramsey opposes actions limiting the ability of Ramsey to develop in order to sustain, or allow new development, in other Twin Cities communities affected by the Anoka County Sand Plain “recharge zone.” The City of Ramsey supports regional solutions to address regional ground water supply concerns; specifically including, regional funding sources.

>Topic Generally Supported by: Anoka County

### (3) Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) Rulemaking

**ISSUE:** The Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) is a 72-mile corridor of the Mississippi River in Minnesota stretching from the cities of Ramsey and Dayton to Hastings established by Executive Order in 2009. The 2013 Minnesota Legislature authorized the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to commence rulemaking to update the minimum standards of the corridor. A similar rulemaking process was authorized in 2009; however, the legislative deadline to complete the process expired and updated rules and standards were never update.

Common themes from resident feedback include a) protection for lawful, non-conforming structures; b) additional local control provided in decision-making process; and c) flexibility in vegetation management. These primary concerns are also present in existing standards. Based on resident feedback, Ramsey desires to see draft standards better supported by technical analysis while providing examples of current issues.

The DNR is in the process of revising the draft rules in order “to be simplified and clarified to ease the administrative costs and ensure that key resource protections are enforceable” [*excerpt taken from DNR website January 2, 2014*]. The DNR has established several rulemaking goals moving forward: a) Maintain and improve water and resource protection; b) Better recognize existing and planned development; c) Increase flexibility for local governments; d) Limit rules to those that realistically achieve resource protection; and e) Simplify administration and clarify DNR evaluation criteria

As a result of the extensive public input and feedback received from its residents, much of which are concerns with the existing minimum standards, the City of Ramsey supports reviewing the output of the next steps of the MRCCA Rulemaking Process (utilizing the feedback received from its residents as noted above) before determining if further legislative involvement is appropriate. The City of Ramsey also supports the ability of other local governments to maintain control over local land use decisions and level of participation in the rulemaking process as it sees appropriate.

The City of Ramsey desires to amend its local ordinances that consolidate and streamline the administrative provisions of all its shoreland regulations (MRCCA, Wild and Scenic Rivers, & Shoreland) to create a clear and consistent process for all property owners, regardless of geographic area. This update would require approval by the DNR.

The City of Ramsey also desires to amend its local ordinance to amend its existing land use classifications of the MRCCA to classifications that match the City’s Comprehensive Plan and existing development patterns. The result would be the elimination of a number of existing, lawful, non-conforming lots. This update would require approval by the DNR.

**RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:** The City does not support efforts to exempt Ramsey from Rulemaking effort until the City has a better understanding of the impacts of the Rulemaking effort are fully understood through a revised set of draft rules and response from our residents. The City would consider joining an exemption effort when the impacts of revised rules are better understood.

## **SECTION 2: ENDORSED LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

### Anoka County Legislative Platform

- (4) Fiscal Disparities
- (5) Right of Way Acquisition Fund (RALF)

### League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) Legislative Platform

- (6) Road Improvement Utility
- (9) Levy Limits
- (8) Business Development Programs
- (7) Publishing Public Notices

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES ENDORSED BY THE CITY OF RAMSEY  
2014 ANOKA COUNTY LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

**(4) Fiscal Disparities\***

ISSUE

Chief Authored by former Anoka State Legislator, Charles R. Weaver, the Twin Cities Area Fiscal Disparities program, enacted in 1971, was created for the purposes of:

1. Providing a way for local governments to share in the resources generated by the growth of the metropolitan area without removing existing resources;
2. Promoting orderly development of the region by reducing the impact of fiscal considerations on the location of business and infrastructure;
3. Establishing incentives for all parts of the area to work for the growth of the area as a whole;
4. Helping communities at various stages of development; and
5. Encouraging protection of the environment by reducing the impact of fiscal considerations to ensure protection of parks, open space, and wetlands.

Fiscal Disparities affects cities, counties, special taxing districts, and school districts within the seven-county metro area. It has reduced tax base disparity throughout the seven-county metropolitan area to a level of 3-to-1 (instead of the previous 10-to-1).

Any future legislation that would modify or impact the Fiscal Disparities program should only be considered within a framework of comprehensive reform efforts of the state's property tax, aids and credits system. Any proposed legislation that would modify or impact the Fiscal Disparities program must be evaluated utilizing the criteria of fairness, equity, stability, transparency and coherence in the treatment of cities and taxpayers across the metropolitan region, and must continue to serve the program's intended purposes.

The Ramsey City Council is in support of the Fiscal Disparities program. The Ramsey City Council opposes future diversion from the Fiscal Disparities Program to fund specific programs or projects, as this would contradict the purposes of the program.

RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION: The City does not support efforts to exempt Ramsey from Rulemaking effort until the City has a better understanding of the impacts of the Rulemaking effort are fully understood through a revised set of draft rules and response from our residents. The City would consider joining an exemption effort when the impacts of revised rules are better understood.

\*Identical language as 2014 Anoka County Adopted Legislative Platform

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES ENDORSED BY THE CITY OF RAMSEY  
2014 ANOKA COUNTY LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

**(5) Right of Way Acquisition Fund (RALF)\***

ISSUE: The 1982 Minnesota Legislature established a Revolving right-of-way Acquisition Loan Fund (RALF) program to acquire undeveloped property threatened by development that is located within an officially-mapped metropolitan highway right-of-way. This has been an effective tool for use by MnDOT and local road authorities for several decades, including on portions of U.S. Highway 10 in Anoka County.

Unfortunately, the RALF account has essentially been “frozen” for the past several years due to lack of available funds and a shift in the Met Council’s transportation policy plan. This is creating a hardship for those businesses on TH 10 in Anoka and Ramsey that may want to sell or redevelop but can’t. The U.S. Highway 10 / Armstrong Interchange project has identified a \$7,000,000 property acquisition need, the U.S. Highway 10 / Thurston and Fair oak projects have identified a \$24 million property acquisition need for a total right of way acquisition cost of \$99 million.

RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION: State bonding funding of \$10 million per year for the Right-of-way Acquisition for Ten Expansion (RATE) projects in Anoka County on U.S. Highway 10 from Armstrong Boulevard in the City of Ramsey through Fair oak Avenue in the city of Anoka.

\*Identical language as 2014 Anoka County Adopted Legislative Platform

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES ENDORSED BY THE CITY OF RAMSEY  
2014 LMC LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

**(6) Road Improvement Utility\***

*ISSUE:* Constructing and maintaining an effective roadway system is an essential function of local governments. The City of Ramsey owns, operates and maintains more than 174 miles of roadway. The cost to properly maintain existing municipal roadways in the City of Ramsey is estimated at \$2.5 million annually over the next 10 years.

Proper maintenance of local roadway systems extends the life of roadways and ensures the most effective application of tax payer dollars. For every one dollar spent on preventative road maintenance, local governments save seven dollars on future repairs. In many cases, similar to the City of Ramsey, other Minnesota municipalities are not dedicating adequate funding for proper maintenance on local roadway systems.

Existing road maintenance funding mechanisms, such as Municipal State Aid (MSA), local property taxes and special assessments have become increasingly restrictive and less effective forcing local government to seek new road maintenance funding mechanisms. Alternative funding methods for road maintenance programs are nearly nonexistent.

Historically, the State Legislature has given Cities the authority to operate utilities for essential City functions such as water supply, sanitary sewer and storm water services. The establishment of said utilities has set a precedent for a workable process of charging fees on a utility bill for City services provided through local infrastructure. Today, the authority for Cities to charge a similar utility fee for a road maintenance program does not exist.

*RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:* The City of Ramsey supports enabling legislation authorizing Cities to establish roadway utility fees.

\*Similar language as 2014 League of Minnesota Cities Legislative Platform

**(7) Levy Limits\***

*ISSUE:* During the 2013 State Legislative session, levy limits were imposed on Cities over 2,500 population for one year. Levy limits replace local accountability with State judgment about the appropriate level of local taxation and local services. Additionally, State restrictions on local budgets can have a negative effect on a City's bond rating due to the restriction on revenue flexibility. Levy limits also fail to account for the decertification of tax increment financing districts—Upon decertification, property taxes that formerly collected and used to support public improvements in a TIF district can no longer be collected at the same rate, to support existing City operations.

*RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:* The City of Ramsey supports the principle of a representative democracy that allows the Ramsey City Council to formulate local budgets without State restrictions.

\*Similar language as 2014 League of Minnesota Cities Legislative Platform

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES ENDORSED BY THE CITY OF RAMSEY  
2014 LMC LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

**(8) Business Development Programs\***

ISSUE: The 2013 State Legislature made substantial investments in Statewide economic development programs, reversing Great Recession funding shortfalls. Proven programs, such as the Minnesota Investment Fund (MIF), the Redevelopment Program, and contaminated site clean-up grants all received substantial funding increases. The State Legislature also appropriated \$24 million for the newly created Minnesota Job Creation Fund, which will replace the expiring JOB-Z program as a way for local communities to access State development dollars.

The City of Ramsey has a number of existing, and anticipated, development projects eligible for various State economic development programs. The ability of Ramsey to utilize State economic development programs will play a vital role in moving development projects forward. The City of Ramsey has a vested interest in the sustainable and consistent funding of Statewide economic development programs.

RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION: The City of Ramsey supports increased (or sustained) funding levels to Statewide economic development programs to assist local communities' development efforts.

\*Similar language as 2014 League of Minnesota Cities Legislative Platform

**(9) Publishing Public Notices\***

ISSUE: To keep the public updated and informed, State law requires local units of government to publish various official notifications and documents in newspapers and often dictates which newspapers receive Cities' publication business. The number and variety of documents cities are required to publish and the costs of publication are burdensome.

The media and newspaper industry continues to experience significant changes and declining subscriptions; and, technological advancements have expanded options for citizens; and, citizens are demanding and expecting said new media options; and, new technologies are often more efficient, widely and easily accessible and cost effective. A call for change to existing Legislation related to publication of public notices is eminent.

RAMSEY CITY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION: Legislation should be updated to authorize Cities to: (1) take advantage of new technologies to increase the dissemination of information to citizens and potentially lower associated costs. (2) Designate an appropriate daily/weekly publication. (3) Use alternative means of communication such as City newsletters, cable television, video streaming, e-mail, blogs and City websites. (4) Expand the use of summaries where technical or lengthy notifications otherwise required.

\*Similar language as 2014 League of Minnesota Cities Legislative Platform