

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, March 10, 2015, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Acting Mayor John LeTourneau
 Mayor Sarah Strommen (via teleconferencing at 8:29 p.m.)
 Councilmember Jill Johns
 Councilmember Mark Kuzma
 Councilmember Chris Riley
 Councilmember Melody Shryock
 Councilmember Kristine Williams

Member Absent: None

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
 Human Resources Manager Colleen Lasher
 Community Development Director Timothy Gladhill
 Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Patrick Brama

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: City Board and Commission Interviews

Human Resources Manager Lasher stated the City did not receive Chair comments relating to one appointment but all incumbents have met the City's attendance policy and are seeking reappointment.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau asked the Council if there were questions related to the incumbents who have stated interest in reappointment.

There being no questions or concerns voiced, Council consensus was reached to reappoint all incumbents.

Human Resources Manager Lasher referenced the staff report and advised that the interview notes taken by the Council are of public record. It was noted that the Council conducts Board and Commission interviews every March for specific seats that are vacant and set to expire on March 31st.

The City Council conducted seven interviews for the following vacancies: Environmental Policy Board – 3 seats expiring March 31, 2015, with 2 reappointments; Park and Recreation Commission – 4 seats expiring March 31, 2015, with 3 reappointments; Planning Commission – 2 seats expiring March 31, 2015 with 1 reappointment; and Economic Development Authority – 1 seat expiring March 31, 2015.

The City Council introduced themselves and asked the following questions of each applicant:

- Please take a few minutes to describe your background and any knowledge, skills, or abilities that you possess that may be of a benefit to the Board or Commission, which you wish to serve?
- What excites you about the possibility of serving the City of Ramsey? Are there specific concerns that you have with regard to the community?
- In your opinion, regarding the Board or Commission of your preference, what is its role in the City of Ramsey?
- What do you feel has been the most important accomplishment of the City over the last five years in the areas related to your preferred Board or Commission?
- If you are appointed to the Board that is your first or second choice, what types of issues would you like to focus on or improve?
- Is there anything you would like us to know that we have not covered?

Following the interviews, the Council provided their interview score sheets to Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama.

Human Resources Manager Lasher asked the City Council to address appointment to the two partial terms on the Environmental Policy Board (EPB) and Park and Recreation Commission.

The consensus of the City Council was to appoint the incumbent to the full term and the new appointment to the partial term.

The City Council discussed its preference for the appointment to the Economic Development Authority (EDA), acknowledging that this is a Mayoral appointment with ratification by the City Council. The consensus of the City Council was to recommend appointment of Brian Burandt to the EDA.

Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama tallied the City Council's interviewee votes and announced the results. The Council discussed its preference for appointment and consensus was reached to support the following appointments and reappointments:

Environmental Policy Board

Appointment - Jane Covart

Reappointment – Reid Bernard and Larry Lewis

Park and Recreation Commission

Appointment – David Troy

Reappointment – Angela Barr and Andrew Fyten and Jon Trappen

Planning Commission

Appointment – Andrew Andrusko

Reappointment – Ralph Brauer

RECESS AND RECONVENE

Motion by Councilmember Kuzma, seconded by Councilmember Johns, to recess the Work Session.

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

The City Council Work Session recessed at 6:53 p.m.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau reconvened the City Council Work Session at 8:25 p.m.

2.02: Status Report Regarding Highway 10 Legislation

City Administrator Ulrich stated Mayor Strommen is testifying before the Legislature and unable to attend tonight in person but has expressed opinion in how to approach Highway 10 Legislation. He advised that a bonding bill needs to be introduced by March 20, 2015, so time is short to discuss the type of legislation, corridor partnerships, and partnerships with Anoka County.

Mayor Strommen joined the meeting via teleconferencing at 8:29 p.m.

Elwyn Tinklenberg, The Tinklenberg Group, stated he had the opportunity to talk to County Commissioners Gamache and Schulte about what Anoka County is proposing to do. He explained there was uncertainty whether there would be a large bonding bill introduced by Anoka County or smaller bonding bills. Today, Anoka County made a decision on how it would proceed. He stated the County Board adopted a resolution authorizing the County to sell bonds to support a Highway 10 improvement project and seek legislation to support that bonding initiative. The resolution does not state how much or the specific projects or term. Mr. Tinklenberg advised that this resolution is conditional on Mn/DOT paying back all costs related to the bonding. He described the revolving loan fund that the Legislature occasionally funds for cities that cannot afford its share of a State highway project. He explained that Anoka County is proposing the opposite, to bring money to Mn/DOT who would then pay it back from that fund. That is the purpose of the legislation.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated Anoka County is talking to its legislators and there was interest in carrying smaller pieces of funding for Highway 10 projects, but not the entire \$123 million bond. The \$17 million is for design and engineering for all projects. The \$56 million proposal would provide that \$17 million for design and engineering and construction dollars for the area between Thurston and Fairoak Avenues in Anoka. He stated only the \$17 million proposal has been introduced.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated the other proposal discussed is \$5 million for a rail crossing improvement project in Ramsey but it has not yet been introduced. He stated the Council has been provided with information on the \$5 million rail crossing request as well as the funding proposal resolution adopted by Anoka County. Mr. Tinklenberg stated Anoka County's intent is to start with the \$123 million and if that is not approved to present the \$56 million proposal and if that is not approved to fall back to the \$17 million proposal. He stated he indicated he would get back to the City's legislators relating to the Council's position on the project at Ramsey Boulevard and grade separation at the railroad tracks.

City Administrator Ulrich stated the City can support all of the bills in some fashion, the \$123 million to improve the whole corridor, the \$56 million to design and engineer projects for the whole corridor and the Thurston/Fairoak Avenues project, and the \$17 million to design and engineer all projects. He stated the \$5 million request stands alone as a rail crossing request to correct the safety issues plus a 50% match from CTIB

Councilmember Shryock asked who supported the \$5 million proposal.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated Rep. Whelan indicated interest in supporting that proposal and was waiting to see what action was taken by Anoka County. Since that has been sorted out, she is waiting for the bill and will introduce it.

Councilmember Shryock asked if no one is introducing the \$123 million.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated Rep. Whelan intends to introduce it in the House and also supports the rail crossing and intends to be the co-author of that bill. Senator Peterson was not supportive of going after \$123 million as originally proposed or authoring that bill. After the Anoka County resolution passed, Commissioner Schulte said they would talk to him again and also to Senator Hoffman about the larger bill.

Councilmember Shryock asked whether the \$123 million and \$56 million proposals have been drafted.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated the \$17 million has been introduced but the \$56 million proposal has not been introduced.

Councilmember Kuzma stated he thinks the City needs to move forward with the rail crossing request while the City has this momentum.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated he will do as directed by the Council and agreed there is significant momentum because of what happened with the Armstrong Boulevard and Highway 10 interchange. He stated he sees no conflict with supporting whatever proposal Anoka County settles on and also supporting rail crossing safety money.

Councilmember Riley asked if the rail crossing money is separate and would not impact the City's partners.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated that is correct.

City Administrator Ulrich stated the language in the rail crossing request was softened to address that concern.

Councilmember Riley stated the Council already agreed to pursue rail crossing funding but not to the detriment of the City's other partners.

Councilmember Shryock stated the Highway 10 Subcommittee has been cognizant of those issues and talked with the County Commissioners, and Mr. Tinklenberg on how it will appear. She stated the Subcommittee is aware they don't want anyone to feel Ramsey is stepping over them but going after the rail crossing funds is a separate process and 'pot' of money. Councilmember Shryock stated the \$17 million proposal would get the projects shovel ready so all can support that and then as funding becomes available, projects can be tacked on. She stated they will have that discourse with all entities to assure all are on the same page and there is no animosity.

Mayor Strommen stated she thinks the approach being discussed is consistent with the Council's past position to place a marker for the whole corridor. She supported carving out the specific rail crossing piece in Ramsey. She stated the Subcommittee met with the Anoka County Board and County staff and learned it was acceptable to them. Mayor Strommen stated she had also talked to Rep. Whalen and said the Council would meet tonight to take up this issue and be ready with a bill shortly thereafter. She reported that Rep. Whalen seems ready to support that effort and Rep. Peterson was also ready to support that effort. Mayor Strommen stated she had told Rep. Whalen she did not anticipate the Council would have issues supporting Anoka County's larger funding requests as it makes sense for Ramsey and the corridor as a whole.

Councilmember Kuzma stated introducing the rail crossing bill is also important because everyone continues to hear about derailments.

Councilmember Williams asked about the plan for the improvements and if there is an agreement with the partner communities and Anoka County about the order or priority of the projects.

Mr. Tinklenberg referenced the Trunk Highway 10 Plan that lists projects in different time periods. He noted some are smaller projects that can go quickly and the Plan reflects not necessarily an order of priority but combination of priority and constructability.

City Administrator Ulrich noted the Plan lists opportunity projects, which is where the rail crossing request would fall.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated in addition to that Plan, the State has put together a Crude by Rail Crossing Priority List and both Ramsey Boulevard and Sunfish Boulevard are on that list.

Councilmember Williams noted the Plan contains estimates and asked if these projects total \$123 million.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated the \$123 million, the number Anoka County is using, would do the projects listed in the Plan.

Councilmember Shryock explained that Anoka County's \$17 million proposal is newer and there is a timeframe being considered so projects may go forward or backward depending on available funding.

City Administrator Ulrich stated the \$17.4 million would not match any project totals but it would total the engineering design costs for all of the projects in the Plan. It would then allow for taking next steps to move projects forward such as property acquisition for rights-of-way.

Councilmember Williams asked if that is the new plan, for the engineering and planning to be a comprehensive effort for the whole corridor.

Mr. Tinklenberg explained the \$17.4 million proposal relates to all of the design, engineering, and environmental work for the whole Plan. The sequence will have variability depending on projects ready to move forward and available funding. He stated the Thurston and Fair oak Avenues project will take longer to get ready because it is more complicated. In the meantime, other projects may be considered so there will be variability. He stated if you look at the whole package, there is the estimated cost of \$123 million to do all the projects. Of that, it would require \$17 million for design and engineering if done all at once. Mr. Tinklenberg explained that Anoka County's resolution allows them a good deal of flexibility in terms of where they end up. They will attempt to get legislation for funding of the full amount but if that is not possible, they will fall back to a smaller request of \$56 million and if that is not considered they will fall back to the \$17 million proposal. He noted it is hard to state what is supported as it may change but the City can indicate support for improvements to the corridor, Anoka County's initiative, and the rail crossing request in Ramsey.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau stated he appreciates the fact that it appears the City is moving forward with a plan, the rail crossing piece, and recognition of and continuing efforts to represent the best interests of the corridor but he struggles with economy of scale. He stated the City wants to meet its mission and it is known there will be a grade separation and traffic separation at both intersections. He stated there will be associated cost with the two projects and asked whether there would be a cost savings to do the two projects at the same time to gain an economy of scale. He also asked what it will cost Ramsey to not do both rail crossing projects together.

Councilmember Shryock stated additional issues relate to the time, disruption, and effort of two construction projects that are not undertaken concurrently. Another significant consideration is closing it twice.

Mayor Strommen stated Anoka County had indicated they did not believe there was a savings with concurrent projects.

Councilmember Shryock agreed that Anoka County felt doing the projects together would result in a negligible savings but the issue may be multiple closures within one area. She stated the City also needs to be cognizant in how that comes across to our other partners who feel they should be next in the funding. She stated by receiving rail crossing funds, other funds may follow if the project is ready.

Councilmember Williams stated the disruption to residents and businesses is not being quantified if the County's reaction is that the cost difference is negligible. She stated the cost to businesses is quantifiable and she thinks it should be considered. Councilmember Williams stated if the City is not asking for the Sunfish/Ramsey Boulevard interchange, is this a piece towards the grade separation. She stated she works for a railroad and thinks cities often underestimate the cost of grade separation projects. Councilmember Williams stated she would like more of a discussion to determine if additional funding can be requested for both intersections. She wants to be efficient with our time, business and resident disruptions, and funding resources.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated as he proposed this initially, the \$5 million was part of a larger funding package. There was discussion at the time of the Armstrong Boulevard event with the County about money being available to do one grade separation at the railroad in Ramsey that was estimated at \$11 million to construct. The County indicated it had commitment for additional CTIB funding for an underpass and then looking at additional State funding of \$5 million that would be part of the package. Mr. Tinklenberg explained that when the work is being done on the underpass, work could be done on the interchange as well. He stated if you look at 7th Avenue in Anoka (that goes under the railroad) and overlay the distance of where it returns to grade onto Sunfish Boulevard on the Highway 10 side, it will be right at the intersection so constructing that will have an impact. He explained that the underpass will shut down Ramsey Boulevard and the interchange will disrupt that access so it will have a significant impact.

Mayor Strommen stated that is a fair concern to raise but her issue is in the sequence that was established in how these projects move forward. It was to be Armstrong, then Thurston/Fairoak Avenues, then other considerations. She noted that Ramsey was brought to the forefront due to discussion on the rail safety issue, as noted by Councilmember Kuzma earlier. She stated it is not the intersection itself that is providing the opportunity to come forward at this time. She is concerned that while it may create efficiencies in one place, there is not the same opportunity. Mayor Strommen stated she is concerned about spending a long time trying to get something done when there is not a single strategy. She noted that when the opportunity to allow the project to come forward is the rail crossing, it is the most important piece to get done.

City Administrator Ulrich stated all projects happen incrementally and if Ramsey gets \$5 million for the rail crossing it will provide momentum to get funding for future road improvements and planning. The other point is that Anoka County said it would be better to build both grade separations at the same time so that is another option, to try to get funding for both Sunfish Boulevard and Ramsey Boulevard.

Councilmember Riley stated as Mayor Strommen pointed out, when we were not pushing in the same direction, it assured no one got anything done. He stated Ramsey may have its own project

but it keeps the momentum moving in the same direction. He supported pushing the \$5 million rail crossing and Anoka County's proposals.

Councilmember Shryock stated with Ramsey continually being proactive, it makes Ramsey more attractive for funding because the City is making the plans and buying the properties to move things forward.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated that when considering how construction occurs on grade separations, it may make sense to go after \$10 million for both rail crossings and then combining with County money to construct both at the same time. He encouraged the Council to consider that the 'door has been opened' in terms of building a working relationship with Congressman Emmer who has indicated his interest. Mr. Tinklenberg commented on the benefit of encouraging Congressmen Emmer and Nolan to work together in partnership for their respective districts. He stated there is also opportunity to go after rail crossing safety money because it is being looked at in Washington (federal level) as well.

City Administrator Ulrich asked if there is preference for seeking funding for one or two rail crossings.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated he thinks it will increase the chances of getting funding because if not successful in getting both, there is a better chance of getting funding for one. In addition, the State money would leverage this package so it would work well and have real merit.

Councilmember Kuzma supported increasing the bill to \$10 million for two rail crossings.

Councilmember Johns stated because the rail crossing money is separate, it is all the more reason to look at both projects at the same time. She noted it will also help with economic development.

Councilmember Williams stated it was mentioned by Councilmember Shryock that Ramsey is an attractive recipient for funding because of the work it is doing. She asked if Anoka County is also an attractive recipient for funding.

Mr. Tinklenberg stated Ramsey is an attractive recipient for many reasons, noting the funding for Armstrong Boulevard included Corridor Investment Management Strategy (CIMS) money that indicated this is an important corridor, giving it Mn/DOT recognition. It also got Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) money, giving it federal recognition. That established Ramsey as a good place to work and the business community has also stepped forward. He noted the City has been clear and its communication has been effective, which was demonstrated at the event when the Governor and Commissioner were in attendance. Mr. Tinklenberg noted other sections of the corridor have not positioned themselves in the same way.

Councilmember Riley asked if it is his professional recommendation to ask for \$10 million for two crossings instead of \$5 million for one crossing.

Mr. Tinklenberg answered in the affirmative and stated he thinks Mn/DOT and BNSF will also support doing both crossings at once rather than dealing with two disruptions on its line.

Councilmember Kuzma commented on the advantage and importance of the City's business community stepping up and being an important partner.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau agreed with the importance of support from the business community.

Mayor Strommen stated she does not object to increasing the funding request to \$10 million since it relates to the rail crossing. In addition, if both are not approved maybe the City can get one done. She stated she also supports the County's initiative.

Councilmember Williams stated the Council has recognized Ramsey is an attractive funding source and offered the County and Anoka to 'jump on our band wagon' and try to mirror this positive face and positive energy. She stated she has heard a lot about momentum but is also hearing that now it is the County's turn to do what they are going to do. Councilmember Williams stated she does not have a lot of confidence it will garner as positive a reaction as Ramsey received. She is also concerned about the City wanting continued support of the business community to achieve its goals while considering closing highway access twice. Councilmember Williams stated she is having a hard time reconciling those things because she does not understand why the Council continues to say it needs to support the County and each other. She asked what Ramsey is getting in return, what is in it for Ramsey at this point, how impactful is the past, and how certain is the Council they can shut us down.

Councilmember Shryock explained that as part of the process, the County and Anoka were getting a little scared that Ramsey was going to overstep them or go beyond the original concept by including the entire \$123 million project. Then as discussion continued, it was found that Representatives were not wanting to support Ramsey or anybody because of infighting and the entities not being on the 'same page.' Because of that, they went in the direction of supporting the \$123 million or \$17 million proposals so all were in the 'same page' position. Councilmember Shryock felt that if Ramsey were to step out and pull Ramsey Boulevard, there would not be support from Representatives because they are concerned about upsetting their constituents. This is an issue because cities need the support of its Representatives to bring bills forward. She stated she hopes since Ramsey is being proactive, they see they will get more 'bang for their buck' with Ramsey.

Councilmember Kuzma stated at the end of the day, Ramsey needs Anoka because the point of congestion is at Fair oak and Thurston Avenues so it needs to be fixed.

Mayor Strommen stated she wants to be clear that both Anoka County and the City of Anoka strongly supported Ramsey in the Armstrong Boulevard interchange. She described their support for Ramsey to obtain federal funding, noting the partnership was very effective. Because of that, she is not willing to abandon that partnership. Mayor Strommen noted it is a difficult situation at Fair oak and Thurston Avenues and she does not want to imply a partner is 'dragging their feet,' noting Ramsey needs to be respectful that all cities do not need to approach it in the same way as Ramsey. She pointed out that all Ramsey residents have to go through those intersections so at the end, even if all Ramsey intersections are upgraded, Ramsey residents will still sit at Fair oak and Thurston Avenues so Ramsey has a vested interest. Mayor Strommen

cautioned against ‘painting it as an all or nothing’ situation because Ramsey has had success in working together with its partners. She stated there can be multiple strategies but her fear is that with splintering and different requests, the money will quickly go to the south metro. Mayor Strommen reported that the last North Metro Mayor’s meeting was about priorities and many said Highway 10, even Andover who does not border Highway 10, because it is important to its residents. In addition, this involves County roads so it will be County-led projects. Mayor Strommen stated Ramsey has to do the best it can for its residents and businesses within parameters and political considerations that exist.

Councilmember Riley stated his agreement with the position of Mayor Strommen.

Acting Mayor LeTourneau stated he is still processing the incongruence and wants to continue to look at a corridor perspective. He noted that all points raised have made this conversation very productive and stated it goes back to the work that needs to be done and how Ramsey can make a difference.

Mr. Tinklenberg asked about discussing federal funding.

Mayor Strommen suggested the issue of a federal strategy be handled as a future discussion and that the focus now remain on the rail crossing request.

Councilmember Shryock stated her agreement to request \$10 million in rail crossing and discuss the federal package at a future Work Session.

The consensus of the City Council was to seek \$10 million in rail crossing funding and support the efforts of Anoka County.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

Noted.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

None

5. ADJOURNMENT

Acting Mayor LeTourneau declared the Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Jo Ann M. Thieling
City Clerk

Drafted by Carla Wirth
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.