

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, May 26, 2015, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Sarah Strommen
Councilmember Jill Johns
Councilmember Mark Kuzma
Councilmember John LeTourneau
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Melody Shryock (arrived at 6:05 p.m.)
Councilmember Kristine Williams

Members Absent: None

Planning Commission

Members Present: Chairperson Gary Levine
Commissioner Andrews Andrusko
Commissioner Randy Bauer (arrived at 6:07 p.m.)
Commissioner Ralph Brauer
Commissioner Cindy Nosan
Commissioner Gary VanScoy

Planning Commission

Members Absent: Commissioner Matthew Maul

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood
Community Development Director Timothy Gladhill
City Planner Chris Anderson
Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Patrick Brama
City Attorney Joe Langel

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Strommen called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:45 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Review Development Plan and Design Framework for The COR

Community Development Director Gladhill reviewed the staff report and key discussion topics that he wanted the group to consider.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that he was a part of the group when the plan was originally developed and since that time, as the City has gone through process of approving projects, there is more varying from the original concept. He stated that it makes him uncomfortable for the City to consistently approve variances from the Ordinances, as that inhibits the ability to accomplish the original goal. He questioned if the original concept is still valid or whether he is holding onto old values that simply do not work. He stated that he measures applications against the Ordinances and whether or not the project fits within the desired intent of the City. He believed that the City should review the basics and if the vision has changed, make the necessary amendments. He stated that parking is still an issue, noting the desire for shared parking but the lack of a plan to reach that end result.

Mayor Strommen stated that multiple plans can still bring the City to the same vision. She questioned whether the Commissioner believes the vision is the same but the plan has changed or whether he believes the vision and plan have changed.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that he believed both the plan and vision have changed, noting that he does not oppose the change but simply believes that the vision and plan should be amended to fit the City's current path.

Commissioner Bauer stated that the idea had been that The COR should never look like Riverdale. He stated that there is a sense that perhaps the development is moving in more of a Riverdale direction. He questioned the Council's idea for the future development of The COR.

Commissioner Levine stated that things have changed just as life changes and that currently the City is not "playing by the rules". He stated that the City should review what is being done and what needs to be done and amend the rules to better fit the desired outcome as that has changed over time, rather than continuing to issue variances.

Mayor Strommen agreed that the Master Plan has changed several times throughout this course but believed that many elements of the vision remain the same. She stated that there may be degrees of implementation to reach the vision, noting that some elements of the original vision may still exist but in a different manner than originally thought.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that one of the main issues is parking strategies, specifically surface parking, and believed that some of the language in the zoning code could be further clarified. He noted that mixed use is another large component and confirmed that there may also be better language to address that component.

Mayor Strommen agreed that clarification of the zoning code could be made but stated that perhaps there should also be a higher-level discussion regarding the elements of the original vision as some of those items may have changed over time.

Community Development Director Gladhill questioned whether that discussion should occur at the Planning Commission level, a joint Commission and Council meeting or whether public input should also be gathered.

Commissioner Levine stated that he liked the idea of a joint meeting to check back in and make sure the discussion the Commission is having is moving in the right direction but did not believe that a large public meeting would be necessary.

Commissioner Bauer stated that he wanted to make sure that the process is transparent as well because multiple residents have expressed that they felt the original discussions for The COR had been hushed and were not transparent.

Councilmember Shryock arrived.

Mayor Strommen stated that through this process there should be a review of the original vision to determine if that is the same or where changes need to be made to the elements or implementation items. She stated that perhaps those results are then shared with the public.

Councilmember Riley stated that another step of the process would be to determine the impediments to the desired vision.

Commissioner Randy Bauer arrived.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that there is a good amount of community interest in The COR and agreed that could be a good public involvement process.

Mayor Strommen agreed but believed that the review should be completed first in order for everyone to be on the same page.

Councilmember LeTourneau agreed that this would be a good exercise. He stated that there has been a good effort for the City to get out of the development business but believed that there would be a good benefit for the City to take a step back and review the best methods to reach the desired end result.

Mayor Strommen agreed that the City has been focused on being a landowner and getting out of the development business which has distracted the City from their overall role in the planning process.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that his platform had been for the City to get out of the development business and believed that the City has done a lot in the past ten years. He stated that there has been a large amount of development in The COR in the past ten years along with beginning the Armstrong interchange project. He stated that the City was dealing with these issues while bringing on a new economic development staff member and working with reality rather than what the Metropolitan Council had projected. He also believed that the City has been much more transparent than it had been in the past.

Councilmember Williams stated that the Economic Development Authority (EDA) has recently been brought into discussions, which she thought was a great idea and also provides another level of transparency.

Commissioner Levine stated that this process has been underway for about 15 years and acknowledged that things change. He stated that the City is trying to be transparent and believed an open forum would be a great part of this process where the changes and vision can be discussed. He also believed that it is important for the Council and Commission to meet jointly in order to facilitate discussion of this nature.

Commissioner Bauer stated that from a systemic perspective the interest in The COR has grown because this Council has been more open and residents feel that they are being listened to and are more a part of the discussion. He stated that they also need to remember that some people had expressed the opinion that the original plans were not attainable and therefore could have never been reached.

Councilmember Johns stated that this would be a great opportunity to refresh on what is possible, noting the timing of the Armstrong interchange project actually moving forward.

The consensus of the Council and Commission was to conduct an inventory on the elements of the original plan compared to the current status and the vision for The COR today, which will be reviewed with the Planning Commission, other relative Advisory Boards, and City Council.

Councilmember Riley stated that the market must also be considered, noting that it may not be economically feasible for development to fund a multi-million dollar parking ramp. He stated in that case the City would need to fund the element or amend the development plans.

Mayor Strommen agreed that the plan should be reviewed to determine if some of the original elements are feasible.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that along with this process he would like to see the plan made more user friendly as it can be very confusing to follow in the current format.

Commissioner Andrusko questioned what the Commission would do in the time being.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that the Commission would continue to enforce the regulations as they exist today.

Commissioner VanScoy stated he is having difficulty supporting the land uses proposed by applicants as there is conflict with the existing regulations. He stated that the Commission will still look at the land use and Ordinances to determine if they fit and make a recommendation to the City Council based on that, noting that the Council may have different priorities than the Commission.

Mayor Strommen appreciated the Commission bringing this discussion forward as she believed it would be a benefit to have this refresher in order to better match the implementation items with the intent. She stated that policy decisions will need to be made as the projects come. She stated that the opinion and recommendation of the Planning Commission matters, whether or not the recommendation is followed. She agreed that the City Council does have different priorities

regarding the policies and acknowledged the difficult position the Commission is placed in during this review period.

Commissioner Bauer stated that there are companies that gather consumer information that may be useful to the City during this process.

2.02: Discuss Approach for Comprehensive Plan Update

Community Development Director Gladhill reviewed the staff report and the role of the different Advisory Boards and Commissions during this process.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he has attended a number of the focus meetings hosted by Community Development Director Gladhill and believes he does a great job of facilitating and gathering public opinion.

Mayor Strommen encouraged everyone to think carefully about the questions, such as those in the work planning document, to ensure that the questions are able to be answered by all residents. She provided the example of using questions that everyone can answer rather than higher level planning questions that could be intimidating.

2.03: Discussion on Potential Improvements to Other Planning Commission Topics

Community Development Director Gladhill presented the staff report.

Commissioner Bauer stated that perhaps it would be a good idea to do a review of all the planning Ordinances as there are so many variances being issued, in order to better fit the intent of the City within the Code.

Mayor Strommen suggested that staff use a prioritization level, beginning with those issues that are constantly receiving variances and delaying review on Ordinances that may not need to be amended.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that at one time there was a small architectural review board that considered projects proposed for The COR and believed that perhaps there should be a discussion on whether that group be re-established.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that board was removed during the revisioning process as the City was very involved, to the point of hiring an architect to sit on that board. He stated that staff agrees that there could be benefit to re-establishing some format of that group to review applications within The COR.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated that it may be beneficial to define a process where the community could be divided up into sections, noting that while some development regulations fit within certain areas of the City, those regulations do not fit well with other areas of the City.

Mayor Strommen questioned if that process would be outside of the Comprehensive Planning process.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated that he was unsure as currently the City makes choices on a community level over the entire City and perhaps decisions would be more appropriately made over smaller development areas.

Commissioner Andrusko stated that perhaps the idea of neighborhood boards could be used in order to gain input from different areas of the City during the Comprehensive Plan process.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that the City has been doing that to some degree and agreed that would be a great idea to continue that aspect, noting that additional ideas could be built into the Work Plan.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that idea reminds him of the Northfork Home Owners Association meeting that Mayor Strommen and Councilmember LeTourneau attended. He explained that residents often feel more comfortable sharing ideas about their geographic level when the group comes to them on “their turf”.

Mayor Strommen agreed that could be done by Ward, visiting one Ward each quarter.

Community Development Director Gladhill questioned if the Commission and Council feel that enough information is being brought forward through staff reports and with contingent conditions, which sometimes allow an application to move a bit faster.

Commissioner Levine commended staff, noting that staff is doing an excellent job of supplying the necessary information to facilitate a review while still allowing applications to move forward.

Commissioner Bauer agreed that the City has a great staff team in place.

Councilmember Riley stated that he would not like to see conditions made contingent upon agreements that have not yet been discussed.

Mayor Strommen agreed that this process and the input from staff has been a vast improvement from where the City has been in the past and appreciated the upfront planning of staff. She believed that staff was doing an excellent job of using their judgement to determine when there is sufficient information for an application to move forward or whether additional information is necessary before review can occur. She thanked the Commission for their time and input during the discussion tonight.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

Noted.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

None.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Jo Ann M. Thieling
City Clerk

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.