

**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 13, 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 5:35 p.m.)
Councilmember Kristine Williams

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Finance Director Diana Lund
Fire Chief Dean Kapler
Police Chief Jeff Katers
Police Patrol Captain Frankfurth
Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood
Public Works Superintendent Grant Riemer
Human Resources Manager Colleen Lasher
Community Development Director Timothy Gladhill
City Engineer Bruce Westby
Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Patrick Brama
City Attorney Joe Langel
Anoka County Sheriff's Office Lieutenant Bryon Fuerst

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Discussion Regarding the Proposed 2016 Staffing Changes

City Administrator Ulrich provided a brief overview noting that tonight's discussion will focus on the scope of personnel changes proposed for 2016.

Human Resources Manager Lasher reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Shryock arrived at 5:35 p.m.

Councilmember Kuzma asked if the change in title could be delayed for the permit assistant position.

Human Resources Manager Lasher explained that the change is to go from permit assistant to permit technician. She explained that this was an intentional strategy for the position and the reclassification also corresponds to the skills of the employee.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that in 2014 there were projects that had been planned that had not yet moved forward and single family construction had continued to be slow, which is why the department was conservative in their staffing needs with the hope that permit levels would increase and projects would progress. He reported that the single-family construction has picked up and will continue at that level for the next few years. He advised that the large projects in the City have also moved forward ahead of schedule and will continue on for the next years as well. He stated that his background is in planning and not building inspecting and therefore he did not place as much emphasis on the permit administration and now sees that it is important to have the permit administration and permit inspection.

Mayor Strommen provided clarification on Councilmember Kuzma's concern regarding the increased hours and the change in title and classification.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained that the intent of the current title was to acknowledge that the position was part-time. He stated that the employee has done an excellent job and has taken on additional responsibilities. He believed that it is important to match the description and title with the actual needs of the department and the responsibilities of the employee.

Human Resources Manager Lasher stated that the plans for the remainder of 2015 would be to increase the hours under the current title and pay.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that there is a need for the additional hours under the current title. He stated that perhaps the decision to change the classification and title should be delayed until a future time when the criteria to promote to a higher classification can be further considered.

Mayor Strommen confirmed that the Council would be in agreement with the increased hours under the current title and classification, noting that the request would formally come before the Council at the next meeting.

Human Resources Manager Lasher continued to review the details of the staff report.

Councilmember Johns commented that it was her thought that the drug task force position would be a rotating position.

Patrol Captain Frankfurth confirmed that the position would be a rotating position.

Mayor Strommen clarified that the position would be an additional position for the department.

Councilmember Johns asked for additional clarification on the amount shown in the budget.

Patrol Captain Frankfurth explained that an officer currently in the department with experience would be selected for the drug task force position and a new officer would then be hired to fill the vacancy that would occur in the patrol department.

Councilmember Kuzma asked for additional information on the amount of time the drug task force member would spend in Ramsey working proactively for the City.

Patrol Captain Frankfurth stated that the drug task force member would work primarily in Ramsey but would assist with other officers on the task force when needed processing a scene or assisting in a search warrant. He noted that Ramsey would also receive that assistance in return.

Anoka County Lieutenant Bryon Fuerst stated that the City would also be gaining assistance from 12 other detectives at the drop of a hat. He stated that the task force would help in Ramsey when needed whether or not the City is part of the task force but explained that if Ramsey is not a member of the task force the incident would not receive priority. He explained that a member agency will receive priority over non-member cities. He stated that the goal is for the City to get its money's worth out of that position, the City will receive at least an equivalent amount of hours, as a regular officer would provide. He advised that the Police Chief in Ramsey would also receive a vote in establishing the priorities for the task force.

Councilmember Kuzma asked if the word is spread that Ramsey is part of the task force and is becoming more proactive in the area of crime prevention and drugs.

Anoka County Lieutenant Bryon Fuerst noted that would be antidotal. He stated that it is an impressive force when 12 detectives are processing a case or serving a warrant. He stated that marijuana and meth have been a consistent issue for Anoka County and noted that heroin continues to be on an uptick. He stated that so far this year the overdose deaths are slightly lower than the previous year but acknowledged that heroin and opiate addiction continue to be a national problem. He stated that some of the new drug trends include honey oil, which is an extract of marijuana, and can be smoked in a tool similar to an e-cigarette. He stated that most heinous cases in Ramsey have involved meth including a two murder incident and officer shooting. He stated that he would love to have a task force member from Ramsey, noting that there would be increased communication and more activity from the task force.

Councilmember Riley stated that historically when a city has become a member has there then become an increase in arrests or activity decreasing.

Anoka County Lieutenant Bryon Fuerst stated that there are more arrests and search warrants in cities that are part of the task force compared to those cities that are not a part of the task force. He stated that arrests and search warrants will increase if Ramsey becomes a member because there will be a dedicated member following the leads.

Mayor Strommen thanked Anoka County Lieutenant Bryon Fuerst for his time and the additional information on the position he shared.

Human Resources Manager Lasher provided additional details from the staff report regarding the personnel changes proposed in the 2016 budget.

Councilmember Riley asked and received confirmation on the process of progressing through the classifications and step increases for positions.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he is aware that staff does comparisons with other municipalities and asked if a similar comparison is done in regard to the private sector.

Human Resources Manager Lasher stated that she does not compare salaries to the private sector.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that it seems like the cities compare their salaries to each other in order to remain competitive but did not think the private sector raised salaries at the same rate. He stated that he would like to see comparison to the private sector as well to ensure that the City is not outpacing the private sector.

Human Resources Manager Lasher stated that she can certainly add that element in the next discussion regarding the personnel policy.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that while it may be difficult to find comparisons for some positions, there would be some positions where the City can find similar positions such as engineering. He stated that the level of benefits would also have to be considered and the fact that the City would like to retain talented staff members.

Councilmember LeTourneau agreed that it is never an apples-versus-apples comparison when comparing municipalities and the private sector.

Human Resources Manager Lasher stated that the City Engineer recruitment occurred three times, noting that it was difficult to receive recruits and applicants for that position with the salary.

Mayor Strommen stated that there may have been other elements to that issue but acknowledged that there are other things to consider when thinking of comparing government to the private sector.

Councilmember Riley stated that he is not talking about the position specifically but referenced the reclassification of a new position, even though that was forwarded by staff and included in the budget, which was adopted.

Mayor Strommen stated that staff has agreed to remove the reclassification of the position from the table until the time staff can put together information for when the Council should consider reclassification and title changes.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that in the first case, with the event specialist position, that was a position that was newly hired and established on the market rate at the time. He explained that the position continues to follow the step increases but staff is recommending to keep the position the same and not go forward with reclassification. He referenced the second case, regarding the reclassification of the permit assistant position.

Human Resources Manager Lasher stated that the impact to the budget was \$1,100 but explained that Finance Director Lund stated that there would be a zero dollar increase rather than the \$1,177, which was included in the budget because of other factors. She stated that this position was unique in that there had been a strategy going decided upon by the Council in the past for the position to be reclassified after one year, noting that the minutes from that meeting were included in the packet for review.

Councilmember Riley expressed discontent that there are already changes being found for the budget which was already passed.

Mayor Strommen noted that the budget was certified to the County but that means that the budget and levy cannot be increased from that figure but can be lowered prior to the final adoption in December.

Human Resources Manager Lasher continued to review the details of the market rate adjustments proposed in the staff report.

Councilmember Shryock asked for further clarification regarding market rate adjustments, cost of living increases and increases that occur with position changes. She asked if there is a maximum set that would prevent someone from receiving a 12 percent increase with promotions.

Human Resources Manager Lasher explained that when someone is in steps one through six, they receive a step change on their anniversary date, which is four percent. She explained the process she follows to conduct comparison and negotiations with the union positions and non-union positions. She also provided information regarding the cost of living increases. She explained how the process for recruiting occurs and how that would apply to employees that are promoted to different positions.

2.02: Confirm Council Direction for the *Ramsey Resident* in 2016

Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Shryock stated that she has additional concerns and would recommend staying with the current process until the necessary decisions can be made. She recognized the importance of getting the necessary information to the residents but believed there may be additional options for cost savings. She stated that perhaps the City does not need to use color, can use only two colors, or could possibly use color on the outside and black and white on the inside.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the addition of advertisers help to offset some of the costs and noted that options have been discussed as the product has evolved. He noted that there are many options that can be considered depending upon the type of product the City would like to distribute.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that in his opinion the *Ramsey Resident* is the most important method of communication the City has. He stated that the process of printing has evolved in the digital age and the cost of printing has decreased. He believed that the funds designated to this item provides a good value for the product the City receives in return. He stated that in his opinion color is an important factor in drawing attention and producing a nice product.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated that he agrees with both sides, as the *Ramsey Resident* is an effective communication tool. He stated that the full color edition would provide a product that is in line with what the City would like to distribute. He stated that in terms of cost savings the City could offer an option to receive the information digitally, noting that some residents may prefer that option in this digital age.

Councilmember Shryock stated that she would like to see the current format continue until the different cost options can be further reviewed and discussed. She agreed that it is important to get the information to the residents but wanted to have a further discussion before changes are made. She agreed that the newsletter is important and thinks that more people notice the *Ramsey Resident* when it is mailed separate from the utility billing.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he did not think the cost element centered on the printing element but perhaps more on the side of postage.

Mayor Strommen stated that while she agrees that getting information to the residents is important, some issues will not be appropriate for the *Ramsey Resident* because of the timing. She stated that she would like to have a more in depth conversation regarding the content and what the focus of the content should be in order to maximize that avenue of communication.

Councilmember Riley asked for more information on the current advertising firm that is used by the City and if any comments had been received regarding the color editions.

Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama explained that the progress today is the result of the in depth discussions the Council had a few years ago regarding this matter. He stated that he has not received input yet regarding the color editions. He agreed that perhaps a review of the consultant could be used.

Mayor Strommen confirmed the consensus of the Council to have a further discussion at a future worksession regarding the options for the *Ramsey Resident*.

Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama stated that staff needs to start preparation for the January and February edition soon if the issue is going to be done in color and asked for direction from the Council.

Councilmember LeTourneau asked and received confirmation that the option for six color issues would eliminate the concurrent mailing with the utility bill and would have separate mailing.

Mayor Strommen confirmed the consensus of the Council to delay the decision at this time until further discussion can occur at a future worksession and direct staff to print the January/February edition in black and white, which will be mailed with the utility billing.

2.03: Discuss Potential Tenant for Leasing Space on the Second Floor of the Ramsey Municipal Center

Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Riley stated that his number one concern would be that the City is marketing below market rate, but noted that the rate is market rate and has been advertised for the past year and would have been available to other interested parties. He referenced the tenant improvements and stated that he would have concern with the City funding a large portion of the tenant improvements and would possibly support a small amount of those improvements, as that would be more in line with market rate.

Mayor Strommen stated that in the future there may be a better community or public use for that space but recognized that there is open space. She stated that she would also be interested in the tenant improvements and how those would be funded. She explained that if the City contributed too much to the improvements the City would not obtain a profit from the lease.

Councilmember Williams stated that the details seem to be typical of a sublease deal and she is curious to see how the tenant improvements would shake out. She stated that the longer the lease, the more likely the leaseholder would be willing to contribute to those improvements.

Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama stated that the longer the lease the more likely the City would be able to recoup some of those tenant improvement costs but noted that if the Council is not comfortable with five or ten years for a lease perhaps this would not be the right tenant fit.

Mayor Strommen confirmed the consensus of the Council that ten years would be too long for a lease and even five years does not seem to fit comfortably with the Council, as this is not the best tenant fit for the space, especially considering the level of tenant improvements that would be necessary.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/Calendar

Mayor Strommen stated that the list of topics was included in the packet and asked for input on any topics that may be missing from that list.

Councilmember Riley noted the TIF districts and funds that have recently been discussed. He stated that he would like to have more time to discuss the balance of future needs and available funds.

Mayor Strommen stated that John and Sharon Freeburg are interested in having members of the Council and staff visit their property to observe some of the issues they are having on the river with erosion. She stated that perhaps staff can develop and coordinate the visit.

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.