

**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 8, 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 (arrived at 5:58 p.m.)
Councilmember John LeTourneau
Councilmember Jason Tossey (arrived at 6:07 p.m.)

Members Absent: Councilmember Chris Riley

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Finance Director Diana Lund
Fire Chief Dean Kapler
Public Works Superintendent Grant Riemer
Development Services Manager Timothy Gladhill
Assistant to the City Administrator Patrick Brama

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Strommen called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:49 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Discussion on Next Steps of Fire Station #2 Replacement

Fire Chief Kapler reviewed the staff report and past work of BKV, such as designing the current building and providing recommendations on how to use the old City Hall once we moved to the new Municipal Center. Fire Chief Kapler explained how a 4.2-acre site was acquired that would be an excellent location for Fire Station #2, and that a site analysis was undertaken by BKV. Fire Chief Kapler stated a process is still underway in how to use the old City Hall site and consideration tonight is whether to consider a parallel path to also move forward with construction of Fire Station #2.

Bruce Schwartzman, architect with BKV, stated in 2011 he worked with the Fire Chief and City staff to analyze the subject site at the corner of Helium Street and Alpine Drive to determine if the site would accommodate a fire station. He displayed an aerial view of the subject site and explained how they conducted a program analysis of type and size of equipment and training and office space needs, so the station could be designed to uniquely fit the City's needs. Mr. Schwartzman stated they calculated a conceptual square footage need of 12,000 sq. ft. and then

considered whether it would fit on this site. Mr. Schwartzman explained that placing the building pad is then considered to assure adequate turning movements for the largest piece of equipment, in this case the aerial ladder truck. He presented a two-story (more expensive) and a single-story (more efficient) application and floor plan layout. Preliminary cost estimates were then determined for hard and soft costs. Mr. Schwartzman presented the updated proposed schedule that included the steps involved to design a project and how long each step would take. He stated they typically tour newer fire stations as a group to determine what does and does not work well.

Councilmember Kuzma arrived at 5:58 p.m.

Mr. Schwartzman completed an explanation of the steps contained in the schedule, noting with each step a cost estimate is calculated to assure it remains within what has been approved by the Council. He estimated eight to ten months of construction, meaning if approved in October of 2013 and bid next summer, Fire Station #2 would be completed the summer of 2015. Mr. Schwartzman stated next steps at this point are to finalize purchase of the property (already completed), complete a site survey, conduct geotechnical borings of the site, finalize architectural and engineering contract and project schedule, research zoning and planning requirements, design and client team kick-off meeting, and schematic design phase and cost estimates. Mr. Schwartzman displayed and described diagrams of the Rochester fire station and process used by that city.

City Administrator Ulrich stated staff recommends retaining BKV, moving to the schematic design phase, and to negotiate the fee for that, which is estimated at \$20,000. He stated a schematic design should be good for five years so it could be held off for budget reasons or the sale of the old City Hall property, if applicable. City Administrator Ulrich stated another option is to go out for RFPs; however, it would cost additional for staff time. He asked for Council feedback on whether they were comfortable with using BKV as the architect and the next steps.

Councilmember Tossey arrived at 6:07 p.m.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated he understands Fire Station #2 is in the CIP and anticipated in the 2014 budget and asked what is the actual need, and why now.

Fire Chief Kapler stated a new fire station has been in the CIP but pushed out as the decision process has been underway. He stated it was discussed when the City moved out of the old City Hall but it did not seem like the right time to do it. Fire Chief Kapler stated the existing building no longer serves the needs of the Fire Department and is not efficient.

Mr. Schwartzman stated if the new fire station is not available, it may hold up the sale or use of the old City Hall.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated he is trying to tie it into public safety and need of the community and not tie it into future use of the City Hall site.

Fire Chief Kapler stated staff has researched the best location for the new fire station and believe the property the City owns is the best location related to north/south and east/west routes. In addition, he does not believe the City's Fire Department will become full time any time soon and this is a good location to pull fire fighters.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated he thinks there would be a need for a new fire station based on the need of public safety and that consideration is unrelated to whether to sell the old City Hall property or its future use.

Mayor Strommen stated another issue is that the Fire Department is located within the old City Hall, which impacts its future use.

City Administrator Ulrich stated when this process was started, all the options were considered and that included a remodel of the City Hall. He stated the old City Hall sits in the middle of a 17-acre parcel and it was found that in the long run, it was more cost effective to relocate the fire station to the property the City owns.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated he heard comments that the City was considering a data center to pay for a new fire station but he thinks Fire Station #2 is needed to serve public safety.

Fire Chief Kapler clarified that the discussion of moving the fire station location started long before the option of a data center came up.

Councilmember Kuzma asked if the cities considering shared fire services will contribute to the cost of a new fire station.

Fire Chief Kapler stated anything is possible and cost-share models are currently under review. He stated the issues of who owns buildings, equipment, and pays for maintenance is an issue in how to divide costs equitably between all members that consolidate. He stated he will bring that issue before the Study Group for discussion.

City Administrator Ulrich stated the timing should also be flexible because the next six months to a year will involve an in-depth analysis of shared fire services.

Mayor Strommen stated that is a broader discussion of how costs are allocated for operations as well as building and equipment, which should play out in the Study Group.

Fire Chief Kapler stated with this consolidation, the question of whether Ramsey needs to rebuild comes up. He stated the consultant hired in 2013 and the ISO agent were contacted and the consultant thought the City's four fire stations were the right number and in the right location considering the four communities under discussion for joint services. Apparatus within the stations is different because two of the communities feel they have more apparatus than needed.

Councilmember Backous asked if the old City Hall property has a posted "For Sale" sign.

City Administrator Ulrich stated it does not. He explained that in November and December, staff will be meeting with neighboring residents to discuss future property use for the old City Hall site. But, that property could be placed with the broker if so directed by the Council.

Councilmember Tossey stated he does not think asking other communities to subsidize a fire station will encourage them to enter into a long-term relationship for shared fire services. He stated Corcoran is already out so he would be cautious in how that issue is approached.

Mayor Strommen asked whether the Council supports staff's recommendation.

Councilmember Johns stated support for staff's recommendation.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated he appreciates Mr. Schwartzman's participation and suggested that relationship continue with BKV to deliver this project.

Councilmember Tossey stated he wants to be cautious in a new endeavor that will cost the City more money in light of a possible tax increase. He stated when the bonds come off for Fire Station #1, it may be an opportunity to lower taxes instead of starting to pay for a new fire station.

Mayor Strommen stated the schematic design will have a shelf life of five years so moving forward with that step will allow the City to be ready but not require immediate construction.

Mr. Schwartzman stated there may be code or material changes, depending on the time elapsed.

Councilmember Backous stated he is not supporting stopping the process but would feel better if the land was sold and then the City would have the cash in hand. He stated support to place the old City Hall site with a broker so it can be sold.

Fire Chief Kapler noted the fire station is currently located in the old City Hall and there is a process to complete Fire Station #2 that will take time.

Councilmember Tossey stated he agrees the property should be sold, but the issue of zoning has to be resolved first.

City Administrator Ulrich agreed and noted when sold, the first thing someone will ask is what can be done on the site so the public process relating to use of the site needs to be completed.

Mayor Strommen supported moving both the design step and public process forward at the same time. She stated she is comfortable continuing to work with BKV and to have staff vet costs to be sure BKV's cost is competitive.

City Administrator Ulrich agreed it is prudent to not move ahead until the old City Hall site is sold but with the Fire Station #2 plans in place, the City would be able to quickly move forward, if needed.

Councilmember Backous asked if Fire Chief Kapler is moving forward with alternative plans for a temporary location.

Fire Chief Kapler stated there are options, but not great options, to find a temporary location.

City Administrator Ulrich stated staff has looked at scenarios for the fire station to move out quickly should a purchase offer be received.

The majority consensus of the Council was to move forward with staff's recommendation to retain BKV, move to the schematic design phase, and to negotiate the fee for that, which is estimated at \$20,000.

2.02: Review Proposal for Resident Survey

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report and presented a proposal and prototype survey from The Morris Leatherman Company to conduct a community survey. It was noted that \$7,500 is budgeted in the General Fund for 2014, there are State grant funds of \$3,400, and questions relating to utilities can be charged to that fund. He explained staff would like to discuss the merits of moving forward with a survey in 2013 to allow for a baseline of information to be used for strategic planning in early 2014. If conducted in 2013, the cost of the survey can be funded by Enterprise Funds, Council contingency, and State grant funds. City Administrator Ulrich reviewed options to reduce the survey cost by reducing the number of questions and indicated staff could obtain quotes or a mailed/newsletter survey could also be considered though it could involve more staff time and may not result in receiving comment from a cross section of Ramsey's residents. He asked for the Council's input whether to conduct the survey in 2013 or in 2014.

Councilmember Kuzma supported pushing out the timing for the survey because there is currently a lot of disinformation in the community. He would like the issues currently under discussion to be settled before conducting a survey.

Councilmember Tossey suggested the "survey" be the 2014 election and stated he would prefer doing it by initiative referendum or the City's representatives. He stated he thinks residents are using the survey on him so he would not support conducting a survey as a priority because residents are already engaged.

Mayor Strommen asked if the City has ever conducted a survey that is not issue specific but more broad in nature relating to City services.

City Administrator Ulrich stated there has not been such a professional survey to his knowledge.

Councilmember Johns stated depending on the thrust of the survey, it could be valuable as a budgeting tool. But, if talking about services and strategic planning, that is set. Councilmember Johns supported delaying the survey but still felt it was important to find out what the priority is for residents.

Councilmember Backous stated he thinks the survey on road reconstruction was a waste of money because the Council did not do anything with the information received. He stated the City sends mailings (utility bills/newsletters) already and he would suggest always stuffing those mailings with questions on how the City is doing and then keeping a record of the responses. In that way, all have the opportunity to respond. Councilmember Backous stated he does not support hiring a professional firm to conduct a survey.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated the City conducted strategic planning and found it would be a good way to gauge the Council's performance and get community direction. He noted the Council made a commitment to do that but now when it is under discussion, the Council is not as engaged in the survey process. He stated he knows there are items that need to be addressed and a survey could gather that information but some issues, such as average fire response time should be information the City already has. Councilmember LeTourneau stated the Council should know about ratings of the business community and other services and that type of survey information could be beneficial during the next strategic planning exercise.

Councilmember Backous agreed but stated if transparency is the goal, it should be a simple quarterly survey and the Council should not pick and choose the time the survey is conducted.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated a longer conversation on the tools will need to be held along with the type of information to be gathered, as the statistical results from a telephone survey will be totally different than the statistical results from a mailed survey. He felt a telephone survey will produce better outcomes.

Councilmember Backous stated he thinks a lot of people used to have home telephones but they now have cellular telephones so those statistics went "out the window."

Councilmember Tossey stated he would like to talk about the idea that it was in the Strategic Plan so it has to be done, as he does not want to be "tethered" to the Strategic Plan if it does not make financial sense. He stated if funding was not an issue it would be great but in Ramsey the money is not there so the Council should stop spending it. Councilmember Tossey stated as policy makers, the Council has the right to be flexible and make that type of decision, to adapt to the current conditions.

Mayor Strommen agreed with the need to be flexible with the Strategic Plan, noting the other issue is that metrics are part of the Strategic Plan and residents support having a means to measure. She stated she is also asking if the survey is worth the cost and the types of questions that would be asked. Mayor Strommen asked if there is another way to measure whether the Council is succeeding and suggested another conversation of how to measure success with the Strategic Plan and in setting priorities. She agreed that the City can ask questions but how the questions are framed needs to be considered to ensure the input received will be useful. Mayor Strommen stated as the Council considers the 2015 budget, it needs to know the services that residents find to be important. Mayor Strommen agreed it is important to have good baseline information but she wants to consider if there is another method to get the information and if a survey is conducted, to clearly define the intent.

City Administrator Ulrich suggested staff conduct further research in how other communities conduct surveys and address strategic planning during budget discussions.

Councilmember Johns noted part of the cost is analysis of the survey results, which is expertise the Council does not have. She stated if a survey is done, it has to be done right to assure honest feedback and a good assessment of the resulting data.

The consensus of the Council was to delay consideration of a resident survey and ask staff to research additional options.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

Noted.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

None

5. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Strommen adjourned the Work Session of the City Council at 6:46 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.