

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, January 24, 2017, 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

Members Absent: Councilmember Kristine Williams

EDA Members  
Present: Vice Chair Wayne Skaff  
Member Jim Steffen

Planning Commission  
Members Present: Chairperson Randy Bauer  
Vice Chair Gary VanScoy  
Commissioner Bruce Anderson  
Commissioner Cindy Nosan  
Commissioner Patrick Surma

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 5:33 p.m.

**2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

**2.01: Introductions and Definition of Success for The COR Exercise**

Mayor Strommen asked the members present to introduce themselves and then give a brief statement of their vision of success for The COR.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated that he would like to see the City follow the plan and strategy for The COR but noted that as the market and dynamics continue to change, the City should also be able to react to those changes.

Commissioner Nosan stated that she would like to see the City continue with the success of creating density within The COR and creating a destination for the community to gather within The COR.

Councilmember Riley stated that he would like to see The COR developed with the retail and restaurant elements that the residents were promised. He stated that he would also like to see the property leave the ownership of the City.

Member Steffen agreed that the residents would like to see restaurants and retail.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that he would like to see commercial success and would like to see The COR be a community asset that does not pull resources from the community.

Member Skaff stated that The COR should be the first place you would like to go for eating out, shopping and entertainment.

Commission Bauer stated that he would like to see The COR with unique locations that bring in people from outside of the community as well.

Commissioner Surma stated that he agrees that he would like to see the strategy reconsidered. He stated that the City does not need more apartment complexes and would like to see green walkways, greenspaces, and a pedestrian friendly location.

Commissioner Anderson stated that residents tell him that there is not a destination for their kids and they would also like a place that brings them home, so they do not have to go outside of the community for needs.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that The COR should be a destination. He stated that he likes the mixed use but would also like the area to be welcoming and pedestrian orientated.

Councilmember Johns stated that The COR should provide quality amenities and experiences, improve the quality of life for residents, bring in people from outside the community, and be pedestrian friendly.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he would like to see the City sell the land to get out from being a developer. He stated that he would like to see the City follow the plan but also be flexible to accommodate the market changes.

Councilmember Shryock stated that she views the success of The COR with a full mixed use build out where all modes of transportation intersect and lead into Ramsey.

Mayor Strommen stated that at the end she would like to see an increased access to services for residents and The COR should provide a community gathering space. She stated that there seems to be a lot of common ground mentioned from the comments made by everyone tonight.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated that because of the diversity, and how the City is moving, the process should be the outcome to ensure a quality product.

## **2.02: Presentation of Progress on Revised Vision Statement for The COR**

Commissioner Bauer provided an update on the recent meeting the Planning Commission held to discuss this topic. He stated that the Commission believes there is a real danger in the fact that the City is a landowner that does not want to be a landowner and therefore is dealing in piecemeal rather than focusing on the larger picture. He stated that the plan is important to ensure that these pieces of development that come along continue to fit into the plan. He stated that the tendency for shoppers is to go to areas that are retail heavy to have a variety of options and with the Riverdale and Elk River retail development, Ramsey will not be able to compete with those areas. He stated that the numbers do not provide proof to retailers that there is sufficient demand in Ramsey and instead believes that The COR should focus on becoming a destination that brings people in. He stated that there could be unique features like a skating pond, unique architecture, or unique shops that people will travel to reach. He stated that The COR should be pedestrian friendly, include entertainment, and some more unique shops rather than traditional retail.

Commissioner Surma echoed the comments of Commissioner Bauer. He stated that he travels to Stillwater once per month and the retail options have a high turnover rate. He stated that as internet shopping continues to increase, traditional retail will continue to face challenges and therefore The COR should not be retail heavy. He believed that there should be more of a focus on fine dining rather than fast food. He stated that if more housing is going to be added perhaps it be one level housing for the senior population that continues to age in the community.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that the Commission can provide input but there is not a lot of market data to support these decisions and believed that it would be important to have that market data. He explained that it is hard to make decisions based on general perceptions as the Commission members are not experts in this area.

Commissioner Nosan stated that the Commission is generally on the same page but also have different visions. She stated that the vision for the town center is different than The COR. She stated that some elements, such as big box retail will never happen for The COR. She did not envision that The COR would see a lot of retail. She stated that she has spoken with a real estate broker that deals in retail and restaurants who did not believe that a restaurant would come to Ramsey. She stated that the broker believed that perhaps a local owner that believes in Ramsey would open a restaurant but there would be difficulty in obtaining an outside business. She believed that the focus should be changed to better focus on filling a need for the community, such as a gathering space or destination that could serve the community.

Councilmember Riley asked why restaurants would not come to Ramsey.

Commissioner Nosan stated that the broker stated that Ramsey does not have the population and it is hard to get to Ramsey in terms of transportation.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that if there is a willing participant that wants to buy some of the land, he is open to hearing the purchase agreement and if the idea is solid he is willing to sell the land. He stated that Ramsey has the Mississippi and Rum Rivers, great walking trails and could promote those elements.

Member Steffen asked if there is a current vision statement and, if so, when it was last written. He stated that perhaps that is where they should start.

Mayor Strommen stated that it is less about the statement but more about the plan that vision supported, which included shops, restaurants, and housing choices.

Member Steffen stated that the statements made going around the table seem to support the original vision statement.

Commissioner Bauer stated that originally the plan was for retail and restaurant elements on the ground floor of buildings with housing on the upper floors, all within one building. He explained that developers were not interested in that definition of mixed use. He stated that the shared parking was also an element of the original vision and that has gone on the back burner after the first ramp was constructed, as people do not want to pay the entire cost for a ramp and would rather have surface parking for their use. He stated that The COR will not be a traditional retail area where people go to get all their shopping done.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that currently there are different pieces for visioning within the Comprehensive Plan and The COR marketing documents. He stated that the goal is to create a cohesive visioning statement that could be used throughout the different elements.

Commissioner Anderson stated that it is time to listen to the residents once again to determine what they want to see, whether the City should continue to be the developer or consider selling the land to a developer at an overall cost. He stated that the citizens should provide input on what they want and see for The COR.

Councilmember Shryock agreed that the residents should provide input but cautioned that the residents need to be informed of the elements that the City has learned about retail and restaurants, otherwise the residents will provide the same input asking for big box retail and restaurants. She stated that while everyone wants to have retail elements, some of those aspects will just not happen for Ramsey.

Mayor Strommen asked the main sticking points of the Planning Commission discussion that occurred at their meeting.

Commissioner Bauer stated that biggest issue was to develop a vision and stick with it rather than develop in piecemeal.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that making piecemeal decisions can make it difficult to develop other projects within the original vision. He believed that it will be good to have a vision statement, but noted that everything cannot be encompassed in one sentence. He stated that the Commission is just at the start of this process and would like to hear ideas and the support that would be provided for different elements.

Councilmember Riley stated that as he heard that the two biggest problems are within the definition of mixed use and structured, shared parking.

Commissioner Bauer stated that he is not sure that those are issues but those are elements that were part of the original plan for The COR that have deviated through development thus far. He stated that the Commission would rather look forward to determine what is realistic for the future.

### **2.03: Presentation of Draft Work Plan for The COR Development Plan Update**

Community Development Director Gladhill reviewed The COR re-visioning portion of the draft work plan and the process suggested by staff for updating The COR development plan. He stated that staff believes that this timeframe would be sufficient for the next year and still allow development to continue in the interim.

Asst. City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama provided additional details on The COR system plans, which relate to elements such as infrastructure, and the pro-forma which will help the City make better decisions. He explained that this process will allow the City to make educated decisions. He stated that visioning sets the tone for the work that is done and communication that needs to occur.

Commissioner Anderson asked if there is a common workspace that the groups can place ideas, such as a website working area where ideas can be shared between groups.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that for the Comprehensive Plan update process there are a variety of methods that will be utilized, outside of traditional meetings at City Hall, including pop-up meetings, online forums, and other methods. He stated that planning staff will attempt to open some additional online options for sharing ideas.

Commissioner Anderson stated that perhaps there is a drop box that could be created to share ideas for the Planning Commission to further consider when they continue these discussions.

Mayor Strommen stated that there needs to be caution on open meeting laws but noted that perhaps staff could open a one-way stream of communication where people could submit ideas and staff could filter those to the Commission. She stated that perhaps there is a version of the ice breaker that was done today to obtain 30 second ideas from people around the community,

noting that the wording would require thought to ensure that the snippets do not all focus on big box retail.

Commissioner Bauer stated that the Council's agenda tonight supports the reasoning that The COR needs this type of plan. He noted that there is a request the Council will consider tonight for a business, that while it is a great business, perhaps is not the best fit for the center of The COR. He stated that when you have piecemeal development it loses the ability for an overall vision.

Councilmember LeTourneau asked if the Commission feels that their recommendations are not being heard by the Council.

Commissioner Bauer stated that the Commission provided input on the old municipal center that although the Council heard, they did not agree with.

Councilmember LeTourneau stated that he wants to ensure that the comments from the Commission are being heard and are relevant, as that is how this process will be successful.

Commissioner Bauer stated that the Commission recognizes that they are an advisory body to the City Council and the Council makes the final decision. He stated that the Commission and Council need to be on the same page, along with the EDA, to ensure that the overall vision is the same and their actions are not in conflict.

#### **2.04: Discussion on Roles and Responsibilities in the Land Use Planning and Development Review Process**

Mayor Strommen stated that her perspective is that Ramsey's greatest asset is its people and has no doubt that the City has the right people in the right places to work through these issues. She stated that this Council has a strong focus on public input and respect for the members of the Boards and Commissions. She stated that these issues are challenging because the City is wearing two different hats, one in the traditional role of land use control but the second as the landowner and master developer. She stated that the goal is to determine how those roles can work in harmony but acknowledged that there will be challenges that arise. She stated that the EDA provides input to the landowner position of the City while the Planning Commission provides input to the land use control position, which sometimes places the Council in an awkward position to make the ultimate decision. She stated that everyone is at the table and brings different perspective based on their position and role.

Commissioner Bauer stated that having everyone at the table is an advantage, as otherwise everyone works in a vacuum and can lose focus. He stated that if everyone is on the same page that helps reach the end goal. He stated that while the City is in an awkward position as the landowner, it also provides the City with more control in the type of development that is created. He stated that as long as there is a good vision, being the landowner provides the City with more control.

Mayor Strommen asked for input from the EDA on the elements they consider to be successful, similar to how the Planning Commission feels that an overall vision would be helpful.

Member Steffen noted that the case on the agenda tonight is a tough case and two opposing points will be brought to the Council. He stated that he is unsure that the EDA wants to be in the position of deciding where a business should be located.

Commissioner Anderson stated that the key point is that everyone is being respectful of the other party's decision.

Member Steffen stated that ultimately what is built is at the cost of the business that comes forward with a quality product and is willing to pay the right price.

Councilmember Kuzma asked what would happen if an entity were to come forward with a full price sales offer that does not fit the vision and whether the City would have the ability to refuse.

Mayor Strommen replied that as the landowner the City does not have to sell.

City Attorney Langel confirmed that there is nothing to stop the City from making the decision to not sell the land should they feel that would not be a good fit.

Councilmember Riley stated that statement highlights the different roles everyone plays. He explained that while one body says yes and one body says no, the Council will need to look at the request from their perspective and make the overall decision.

Member Skaff referenced the question of whether a master developer should be considered to take the place of the City as the landowner. He stated that ultimately that question will need to be addressed.

Mayor Strommen acknowledged the question continues to come up and the Council would like to look at that option and what that would entail.

Commissioner VanScoy noted that although a piecemeal development may be of great quality, it may not fit in the area which can cause issues down the line and implications on what could be developed in the future.

Councilmember Shryock noted that an overall vision will help to ensure everyone is on the same plan and working towards the same goal. She stated that the original plan for The COR was focused on what the City wants and perhaps it should be more geared towards what the City has and what they can work with to bring more success.

Mayor Strommen stated that the other issue is what the City will want not only today, but in five or ten years. She agreed that she tends to shop online and avoids going to actual stores and the City should anticipate those trends to avoid being irrelevant once built.

Commissioner VanScoy stated that the past vision is documented in The COR vision framework, noting that each section has a summary that can be helpful in determining where the City has come from.

Commissioner Surma stated that he does not see the vision going far enough out. He stated that he grew up in the development/construction business and watched buildings go up and down. He stated that often cities would follow what neighboring cities have done rather than being leaders. He stated that the land for the case tonight is far too valuable for the future of the City to be considered in this purchase agreement. He stated that the best location for that business would be near the medical examiner's office.

Councilmember Shryock stated that she respects the view of Commissioner Surma as one community has been very successful in their vision while another continues to build and fill trying to keep up.

Councilmember LeTourneau acknowledged the point made by Commissioner Surma that he had seen buildings go up and down. He used the example of a Minneapolis business that is no longer in business but the building is now being repurposed for another use. He stated that The COR needs to be built for what is right for the community, as there are variables the City cannot control in the future that cannot be predicted.

Commissioner Bauer stated that he read that typically the third restaurant in a building is successful. He stated that the focus should be on long-range goals.

Mayor Strommen referenced the comment that Ramsey will not get restaurants unless they are local and noted that is Ramsey's history in building businesses from members in the community and perhaps the City should focus on tapping that energy rather than looking outside the borders.

Member Steffen agreed that the piece of land is the center of The COR and sadly there are pricing irregularities within The COR. He stated that a business will be attracted to the lesser priced land. He stated that the business model should be fluid as they will need to be able to react to proposals that come along that could benefit the City.

Commissioner Surma noted that although you can have great planning, you cannot plan for the market changes. He noted that there are technology elements that are on the horizon to adequately plan for those elements.

Commissioner Nosan stated that Commissioner Brauer has made the visioning process so much fun and commended him for his efforts, although he could not attend tonight.

Mayor Strommen thanked everyone for their participation tonight.

### **3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION**

#### **3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar**

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,

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Kurtis G. Ulrich  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

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Jo Ann M. Thieling  
City Clerk

Drafted by Amanda Staple  
*TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*