

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Special Work Session on Monday, March 16, 2020, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor John LeTourneau  
Councilmember Nadine Heinrich  
Councilmember Mark Kuzma  
Councilmember Jeff Menth  
Councilmember Debra Musgrove  
Councilmember Chris Riley  
Councilmember Dan Specht

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich  
Fire Chief Matt Kohner  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill (arrived at 7:05 p.m.)

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor LeTourneau called the City Council Work Session to order at 6:30 p.m.

**2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

**2.01: Continue Review Housing Plans and Policies**

City Administrator Ulrich recommended that this item be postponed to a future agenda.

**2.02: Discussion Regarding an Adjustment to the Wages for Temporary Seasonal Employees Working in the Public Works Department**

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the staff report.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood provided background information noting that the City noticed a difficulty in filling temporary seasonal positions about 10 years ago, which has continued to be a challenge. He hoped that increasing the wage for the position would help to attract, and maintain, additional candidates.

Councilmember Riley stated that the report suggests changing the wage to \$12 per hour but the comparable averages appear to be closer to \$13.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that while the department would love to have the starting wage at \$13, staff is aware of the budget conscious climate and therefore is hoping to get to \$12.

Councilmember Menth asked how the work is accomplished if there are not enough temporary staff people.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that sometimes the full-time maintenance staff is taken off the higher purpose jobs to mow. He explained that the seasonal workers are very important in completing these jobs, so that the full-time maintenance/streets workers can focus on the jobs they are intended to focus on.

Councilmember Menth stated that it appears a lot of time is wasted training new people and using higher paid staff people on lower paying jobs. He asked if it would then make sense to begin the starting wage at \$13.

Administrative Services Director Lasher confirmed that would definitely help. She stated that staff always monitors the budget throughout the year. She suggested that perhaps the starting wage is set at \$12, with discretion for staff to offer up to \$13 if the candidate has appropriate experience.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that she would be comfortable with that recommendation.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if temporary seasonal employees are only paid hourly wages and not paid benefits.

Administrative Services Director Lasher confirmed that the City pays the hourly wage and contributes for workman's compensation but does not have to pay benefits for those employees.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would be willing to increase the hourly wage in order to retain the seasonal employees and allow the higher paid full-time employees the ability to focus on their responsibilities.

Councilmember Specht asked if the City could contract or subcontract for mowing.

Administrative Services Director Lasher replied that would have a much higher cost with less control. She stated that the City has tried that method in specific locations in the past, but it was not successful.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would agree with the range of \$12 to \$13 for a starting wage in order to attempt to attract and retain seasonal employees and allow full-time employees to focus on their duties.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that it could also be helpful to apply the non-union COLA to this position as well, in order to keep the position in the competitive market range.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she does not agree with applying the COLA to the position as these would most likely be entry-level workers. She stated that she would rather review the position in the future if additional increases are needed.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he would support the starting wage at \$12 with the discretion for staff to increase to \$13.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would prefer to start at \$13, with discretion for staff to increase.

Mayor LeTourneau recognized that staff was being cautious in its ask for a higher starting rate and asked if the best opportunity to recognize the retention for the position would be at \$12 per hour with discretion, or \$13 per hour with discretion.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that he believes the \$13 per hour rate with discretion would result in a larger number of applicants and better retention. He stated that staff continues to monitor the budget throughout the season. He explained that if the budget runs tighter towards the end of the season, the City keeps on only the higher quality seasonal workers for the remainder of the time in order to receive the most amount of work for the cost.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the position was posted the previous week, noting that the posting states that the City will pay up to \$12 per hour. She reported that 23 people viewed the position and only one applied.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he would support increasing to \$13 per hour with discretion for staff on either side.

Administrative Services Director Lasher asked if the discretion would increase to \$14, which is currently the top level, or whether the levels would increase appropriately as well.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would trust staff to make the adequate adjustments to the levels.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would be comfortable with the position rate ranging from \$13 to \$15 and not applying COLA.

Mayor LeTourneau confirmed the consensus of the Council to have a starting rate of \$13 per hour with a cap at \$15 per hour, and not tying the position to COLA increases.

### **2.03: Discussion Regarding Section 2-156 of the City Code – Boards and Commissions**

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Kuzma commented that he has no interest in changing the language.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that she can see the value in changing the language to only allow Ramsey residents, as the City's population has grown since the language was written. She stated that while the City holds the discretion to not appoint people from outside the city, the language should align with the practice.

Councilmember Riley stated that he has a strong preference that the City only appoint Ramsey residents and only consider non-residents when the position cannot be filled by a resident. He stated that he did not feel that the language in the Charter would necessarily need to be changed. He stated that he does feel that the EDA benefits from allowing non-residents, as sometimes those people are Ramsey business owners, or the group sometimes is looking for a person with a certain skill set.

Councilmember Specht commented that with the growing population he would agree that the language should be changed to Ramsey residents.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the Charter could review the ability for the EDA to select non-residents.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the Council can provide direction for the Charter Commission to review the language and determine what would be best.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would be in favor of having the Charter Commission review the language, allowing only Ramsey residents with the exception of the EDA.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that a Charter amendment would require a vote of 7-0 from the Council for approval.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that the policy has been in place and has never been an issue in the past. He explained that to some degree this would be attempting to fix something that has not been an issue and expending time and resources to do so. He stated that the language change would also preclude a Ramsey business owner, that is not a resident, from being a member of the EDA or perhaps other Board or Commission that could benefit from a certain skill set. He stated that he would not want to give up that flexibility when it has not been an issue.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that recently there was an EDA member that was appointed when he was a resident but then moved out of Ramsey. He noted that language could be added that states that if someone moves out of the City once appointed, they would need to reapply.

Mayor LeTourneau asked how many times that has happened in the last 20 years, noting that probably only happened one time as most residents would choose to resign from that position when they move out of the city.

Councilmember Menth stated that he agrees that this would be fixing something that is not broken as it seems to be working quite nicely as it is. He stated that he has no objection to leaving the language as it is.

Councilmember Kuzma agreed that he does not want to change the language.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that it appears that the consensus of the Council is to have the language reviewed.

Administrative Services Director Lasher reminded the Council that a 7-0 vote would be necessary to change the language in the Charter and asked if the Council would still like staff to spend the time to review the language.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he did not believe the item would pass through the Council at a vote of 7-0 but noted that perhaps members could learn something new from additional discussion that could change their position.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that she believed that valuable input could be gained from the Charter Commission that could perhaps be workable for the Council.

Administrative Services Director Lasher continued to review the staff report related to the language related to compensation and stipend.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that she is surprised by the number of cities that do not have a stipend and by the number of Ramsey Board and Commission members that waive their stipend.

Councilmember Riley commented that people volunteer for these positions and have the expectation that they are volunteering.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for additional details on the seven out of 12 members that have chosen to waive stipends.

Administrative Services Director Lasher replied that seven out of 12 Board and Commission members have chosen to waive their stipend since November of 2016, when the option to waive stipends was offered. She stated that she did not ask existing members whether they would like to waive the stipend that they have been receiving. She noted that five of the members that joined since 2016 did accept the stipend.

Councilmember Specht stated that he likes the option of offering the stipend as members could have expenses in return for attending meetings. He stated that those that chose to waive can choose that option.

Councilmember Menth stated that he believed that the question that arose from Councilmember Musgrove was not related to the amount of the stipend and whether it is offered but the language used in the ordinance.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that staff simply provided the background information as the topic was being discussed and because of the staff time expended. She noted that some cities do not offer a stipend and instead offer an appreciation event, which Ramsey

also does. She confirmed the recommendation of staff to eliminate the stipend for Boards and Commissions, which would also eliminate the need for one payroll cycle.

Councilmember Heinrich asked if the payroll could be combined into another cycle to eliminate the additional cost.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that the cost of \$5,000 is for all of the stipends for the year, not the cost for the additional payroll cycle. She stated that if the Boards and Commissions stipend is eliminated, the City Council stipend could be combined with staff payroll to generate savings.

Councilmember Heinrich asked the number of current Board and Commission members that opt into the stipend option.

Administrative Services Director Lasher replied that 17 members accept the stipend currently, out of 24 members.

Councilmember Specht asked the number of hours spent on the additional payroll cycle.

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the staff work that is necessary for the stipends, estimating about a few hours per month.

Councilmember Kuzma commented that it would be difficult to take the stipend away from those that are used to receiving the stipend. He noted that perhaps it could be an option in the future to phase out for new members.

Councilmember Menth agreed that he would not want to take something away from people that are receiving it. He stated that the trend may continue that people choose to waive the stipend, but he would not want to take that choice away.

Councilmember Riley stated that perhaps a policy direction be that the stipend would be eliminated when the current term expires, in order to phase out the change.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that her intention was not to take away the stipend when she originally brought up the discussion. She agreed that the phased-out approach could work.

Councilmember Specht stated that he still leans towards offering the stipend but noted that his position could change in the future.

Councilmember Riley commented that those that receive a stipend receive a W-2 at the end of the year, which seems weird as these are not employees of the City.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that 70 percent of the Board and Commission members are accepting the stipend and therefore she would not be in favor of taking away that opportunity.

It was the consensus of the Council to continue to offer the option of a stipend or for members to have the option to waive the stipend.

#### **2.04: Round Up for Change Program**

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Heinrich commented that she would support the program if it is an opt-in program rather than an opt-out program.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that Ramsey pays a larger portion than other cities for Youth First, along with the credit for the building lease. She stated that she would like to see the round up program go forward to help defer the cash payment that the City contributes to the organization. She commented that the residents pay taxes for high priority items such as roads and public safety, rather than charity. She stated that the round up program would be an option for residents to choose to contribute. She asked if the resident could choose to opt out at any time, if the City chose the opt out program. She commented that an opt out program would seem to have less paperwork and staff time.

City Administrator Ulrich confirmed that residents can choose to opt out at any time.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the cost to the City is just the implementation cost or whether there is an ongoing annual fee.

City Administrator Ulrich noted that staff could investigate whether there could be an annual cost for the software.

Councilmember Riley stated that the case is written with the recommendation that the funds generated from this program would reduce City expenditures. He stated that he does not agree with that. He stated that a separate topic could be whether it is appropriate for the City to fund charity. He explained that he would not want to collect these funds under the guise of charity and use them to offset what the City would have already been paying.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that the City receives a lot of complaints on utility billing already and therefore he would not support this program as it seems to be a low return on the investment for the software.

Councilmember Menth stated that he would also vote against this program.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would support the program as written as it would allow residents the choice to contribute to a community program. He stated that the choice could be reevaluated after one or two years.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that people would make their own choice on whether or not they want to contribute and the funds could be used to offset the contribution the City pays to

Youth First, which would reduce the amount of tax dollars expended for that item. She was unsure why that would be negative.

Councilmember Riley stated that he does not believe the actions should be linked. He stated that if the City does not want to pay the expenditure, that should be a separate discussion.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that taxpayers do not pay taxes thinking that the money will be used on charity.

Councilmember Riley agreed that is a good discussion but would be separate of this discussion.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that the Council has already had that discussion and the direction was to use the lawful gambling fund for the Youth First contribution, therefore the general fund is not being used for that. She stated that this choice is whether to offer residents the choice to decide to round their bill up to contribute, noting that the donation could be made to another organization and it would not have to be Youth First.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he generally supported the program but is not a fan of attaching something to a utility bill right now with the road funding discussions that still have to occur related to the possibility of franchise fees. He agreed that he would also not want this to appear that the City is using this contribution to offset another expenditure, similar to the comments of Councilmember Riley.

It was the consensus of the Council not to pursue a round up program at this time.

## **2.05: Review Adopt-a-Flag Project Concept**

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Specht stated that he supports the program as presented and thanked staff for their work.

Councilmember Heinrich thanked staff for their work to incorporate the discussion of the Council and expressed support for the program.

Mayor LeTourneau asked if there would be additional staff work, for times of half staff and such.

City Administrator Ulrich provided details on the minimal staff time that would be necessary.

Councilmember Riley asked for details on the hold harmless agreement from Connexus.

City Administrator Ulrich provided additional details on the agreement he received from Connexus. He noted that the City Attorney is currently reviewing the language.

The consensus of the Council was to support the program.

## **2.06: Update on COVID-19 Preparations**

Fire Chief Kohner reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Menth asked the type of cleaner that is being used or recommended.

Fire Chief Kohner provided additional details on sanitizing.

Councilmember Heinrich thanked staff for their work and communications during this time. She asked if attendance would be staggered for weekly meetings to not exceed the limit of 10.

Fire Chief Kohner confirmed that will be a topic of the meeting tomorrow. He stated that Allina has canceled its training at this time. He noted that required training would continue but the weekly training would be canceled.

Councilmember Specht asked if City employees have the ability to work from home.

Administrative Services Director Lasher provided details on the ability for some employees to work from home, noting that those that work in the field would not have the capability of working from home. She stated that some staff members have expressed concern about working at City Hall during this time because they are at higher risk.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill provided details on the community development department, which has some ability to work remotely and noted that staff is attempting to rotate the necessity for some employees to work remotely and some working at City Hall. He stated that the City does not have enough equipment to allow everyone to work from home at this time. He explained that the City is working on a phased response, spacing employees and rotating the employees that are working remotely and working from City Hall.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if it would be better to have one staff person in regularly rather than rotating the staff member present at City Hall.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that they are holding a lot of virtual meetings. He explained that in terms of equity and fairness, rotating seems to be the better choice.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that currently the CDC limits gatherings to 50 people and the State Department has recommended canceling events of 10 people or more, where half the group would be considered high risk.

City Administrator Ulrich replied that the White House made an announcement this afternoon which stated no gathering of 10 people or more, which took it a step further than previously announced.

Mayor LeTourneau thanked staff for the work they continue to do. He stated that if there is something that staff needs from the Council to please let the Council know.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that Deputy City Administrator Gladhill has been a great resource for remote work and remote meeting attendance. He provided an update on the social distancing and sanitizing efforts. He asked if the Council would support canceling room reservations for ten or more people.

The Council confirmed consensus with that direction.

City Administrator Ulrich noted the less people coming into City Hall, the better. He provided an update on the procedures that have been implemented by the License Center and other areas of City Hall. He discussed other potential elements that could be implemented in regard to employee leave and potential use of sick time. He also provided an update on upcoming events that have been canceled or are being rescheduled. He reviewed the remote attendance policy of the City, which is preempted by the State declaration of emergency, noting that phone and electronic participation is available for meetings.

Councilmember Heinrich asked what the plan is in terms of communicating to the community.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the City has not issued anything as of yet, because there were not guidelines in place. He stated that he will work to develop a Facebook message based on this discussion. He asked for input on the reservation of park facilities for groups of ten people or larger.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that the strategies discussed thus far are in an attempt to be proactive. He stated that the bar has been set for social gatherings and the City should follow it, therefore he would support canceling the reservations for at least the next two-week period.

Councilmember Riley stated that the direction has already been provided from the President and Governor and therefore the City is only following that direction.

Councilmember Menth asked if the parks would be closed or whether gatherings would be limited to ten people.

It was confirmed that the limitation would apply to rental of park buildings for ten people or more for the next two weeks and the parks themselves would remain open.

City Administrator Ulrich confirmed that the Council would provide he and Deputy City Administrator Gladhill some discretion on the day to day operations at City Hall as things continue to evolve. He stated that under the Emergency Management Plan the Fire Chief is identified as the communications representative with the Police Chief as the second, followed by the Mayor.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that it seems that a large force of the recent actions is driven by anxiety and fear of the unknown. He stated that it seems that people listen when the President or Governor come on with updates. He stated that perhaps it would be helpful for the City to develop some short messaging to comfort residents and provide updates that could be played on

QCTV. He noted that he would be willing to work with staff to develop appropriate messages that he could tape with QCTV.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that based on the fact that the circumstance is ever changing, the message would need to be very generic. He stated that the virus has a lot of unknown elements and is causing anxiety and reaction based on the unknown. He stated that there should be a message of what the City is doing to protect its staff and changes at City Hall. He stated that he would lean towards some guidelines and a script developed by staff.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there have been a lot of comments on the City Facebook page.

Councilmember Heinrich commented not on the City page, but the community page.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that fortunately the City is not a major player, as the message continues to come from the CDC and Governor. He stated that staff would want to direct people to those sources of information for updates.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would be hesitant for the City to make its own announcements and would simply continue to direct residents to the CDC and Department of Health.

Fire Chief Kohner noted that the information Ramsey would put out would follow the CDC and Department of Health.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the intent would be to update residents with the recent changes at City Hall and cancelations of room and park facility reservations.

Councilmember Musgrove confirmed that she would agree with that update.

Councilmember Specht agreed that a Facebook update would be helpful with that information.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that Anoka County has closed its use of public meeting rooms through April 30<sup>th</sup> and suggested that the City follow consistent dates, either using that or March 27<sup>th</sup> as some other closures have used.

### **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 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kurtis G. Ulrich  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

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Katie M. Schmidt  
Administrative Assistant

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