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**EMERGENCY SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Ramsey City Council conducted a special meeting on Monday, March 30, 2020, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota. Meeting by telephone or other electronic means in accordance with Minnesota Statute 13D.021.

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

Members Absent: None

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Fire Chief Matt Kohner
Police Chief Jeff Katers
Public Works Superintendent Grant Riemer
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher
Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill
City Attorney Joe Langel

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor LeTourneau called the special meeting of the Ramsey City Council to order at 7:00 p.m.

City Administrator Ulrich advised that this meeting is being conducted by telephonic means as noted, following Federal, State, and Local Declarations of Emergency. He provided information on how the public can join the meeting or provide comments in other ways.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Councilmember Heinrich, seconded by Councilmember Kuzma, to approve the agenda as presented.

A roll call vote was performed by the City Administrator:

Mayor LeTourneau aye
Councilmember Riley aye
Councilmember Menth aye
Councilmember Heinrich aye
Councilmember Kuzma aye
Councilmember Specht aye
Councilmember Musgrove aye

Motion carried.

4. COUNCIL BUSINESS

4.01: Receive an Update Regarding COVID-19

Fire Chief Kohner reviewed the staff report and provided an update regarding COVID-19. He reported that as of today there have been 18,822 tests for COVID-19 in Minnesota, with 576 of those returned positive. He stated that 92 of those patients required hospitalization and ten patients have died. He noted that seven of the ten people that passed away lived in a nursing home or assisted living facility. He advised that there has been one confirmed case in Ramsey. He stated that 85 percent of those that tested positive experienced mild symptoms and did not require hospitalization. He reported that police and fire continue to serve the community, while implementing additional safety measures. He stated that the State continues efforts to locate additional personal protective equipment and hospital beds. He reported that the purpose of the Stay at Home Order issued by Governor Walz is to limit the spread of the disease from person to person and prevent the healthcare system from being overwhelmed. He asked residents to take the six feet social distancing standard seriously and stay at home.

City Administrator Ulrich provided an update on City staff activity, noting that essential employees remain onsite while other personnel have transitioned to working remotely. He stated that he has authorized continued closing of public and park facilities consistent with the County and School District through May 4, 2020. He reported that the City's local declaration of emergency runs through April 14th, and the City Council will consider whether to extend the local emergency at that time. He reported that an all staff meeting will be conducted electronically later in the week to address any questions as this moves forward. He stated that the Federal guidelines run through April 30th and the City will remain consistent with that.

Councilmember Riley asked if this is the appropriate time to discuss the positions the City considers essential.

City Administrator Ulrich confirmed that discussion would be a part of the next case.

Mayor LeTourneau expressed appreciation for the work being completed by Fire Chief Kohner and City staff.

4.02: Adopt #20-066 Approving Paid Administrative Leave during Executive Order #2020 – Stay at Home Order by Governor Walz

City Administrator Ulrich stated that at the time the case was developed, the City did not believe it would be able to place all employees into essential positions but has since reviewed the action of Anoka County and believes that the City can place all employees into functions that could be considered as critical functions and therefore no action is needed. He reviewed some of the parks and maintenance activities that can still occur and how social distancing can be implemented, along with additional cleaning activities. He stated that staff feels confident that each employee can remain employed pursuant to critical activities.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer provided additional details on the public works and parks staff activity that will begin the following day, including road patching and watermain flushing. He noted on rainy days, equipment can be cleaned and maintained.

Councilmember Menth asked for details on how social distancing can occur inside of the trucks.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer replied that normally there are three crew members inside the patching truck, but in order to accommodate social distancing there will be one crew member in the truck and the two additional members would follow in their own vehicles. He confirmed that the street sweeping truck is also manned by only one staff member with another following in the dump truck.

Councilmember Menth stated that he was at a home improvement store the previous day and people are not practicing social distancing. He hopes that the public works crew understands the need for social distancing.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that the case originally included 11 employees that would not have enough work, but it now seems that those employees will have 40 hours of work. She asked what that would entail as that is a large change from the previous case.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that originally the City took a fairly conservative approach in reviewing the Governor's Stay at Home Order in determining the work that could be completed. He stated that after reviewing the interpretation of other municipalities and entities, staff determined that additional work could be done during this two-week period. He noted that some of the park staff have been reassigned to street maintenance.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer explained that the parks department would normally be working on ballfield maintenance and reviewed some of the other spring work that would occur in the parks. He explained that those elements have been delayed and the only park activity at this time is trash collection in the parks. He explained that the 11 employees have been reassigned to the patching or street sweeping crews.

Councilmember Heinrich commented that she believes that this is a good time for the patching and street sweeping to occur, with less vehicles on the roads.

Councilmember Riley stated that he applauds the ideas that staff came up with to keep people employed and maintain the streets and parks the best that they can.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if both the full and part time employees from parks would be transitioned to street maintenance. She noted that this is proposed to run through April 14th and asked if after that time the Council would revisit the discussion on essential and non-essential workers.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer replied that the department does not yet have seasonal workers and therefore only full-time staff is included in the transition to street maintenance.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the Governor's Executive Order runs through April 10th. He stated that the activity of the City would depend upon the action that takes place by the Governor when his Executive Order expires. He noted that if the Order is lifted, additional work could be completed by the City, but still following social distancing.

Councilmember Specht thanked City staff for being flexible on how they continue to work in these unique circumstances. He commended staff for their ideas to continue to work on the streets during this time.

5. MAYOR, COUNCIL AND STAFF INPUT

City Administrator Ulrich advised of the new guidelines for playgrounds from the League of Minnesota Cities. He stated that the decision has been left to local counties and cities as to whether or not to close playgrounds. He noted that the playgrounds could remain closed or could be opened with advisory signs posted advising residents to practice social distancing. He stated that if the playgrounds are to be closed, it would be enforced on a complaint driven basis. He stated that the playgrounds have not been taped off, but signs have been posted stating that the playgrounds are closed but the remainder of the park is open. He asked the Council for input on the topic.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that families and children are impacted by the pandemic in a unique way and need this outlet to connect with nature and the parks and trails in a new way. She stated that the City has great amenities and supports having the posting at the playgrounds.

Councilmember Specht agreed that it would be fair to post the information but not close the playgrounds and leave that choice to the residents to decide.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that if the virus becomes airborne it could be more difficult to manage and more serious. He stated that if the virus becomes airborne, he would believe that the playgrounds should be closed.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that this is a difficult decision. He stated that while he understands the positive element of offering the playground to residents, it is important to maintain six feet of separation. He explained that the virus is currently transferred person to person through coughing and sneezing. He noted that as children are crawling around on the playground

equipment, they are touching equipment used by previous visitors that could be carrying the virus without knowing. He stated that if the playgrounds are kept open, the risk information should be on the sign to alert residents that the equipment could be contaminated.

Mayor LeTourneau asked if there is any liability exposure.

City Attorney Langel replied that the City or hospital cannot guarantee that a person would not be exposed, as the virus spreads by people that are not even aware they are carrying the virus. He stated that the best the City could do is to strike a balance between getting the community outdoors versus creating a place that could spread infection.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she has the feeling that this could be viewed as a double message, encouraging residents to get outdoors but to also maintain six feet of distance, which would be difficult on playground equipment. She asked what the signs would say.

City Administrator Ulrich provided input on the recommended language from the League of Minnesota Cities. He noted that City staff could work with the City Attorney to develop the exact language.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer stated that the current signs state that the playgrounds are closed but the other elements (trails, fields, and courts) are open.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she likes the idea of keeping the signage in place, which allows people to have a greater amount of mobility but minimizing the risk.

Councilmember Menth asked if the playground equipment is currently open.

City Administrator Ulrich replied that the playgrounds are currently not open, and the discussion is whether to allow the playgrounds to open but place additional advisory signage or to keep the playgrounds closed.

Councilmember Menth stated that he would support opening the playground equipment with the advisory signage. He stated that would leave the choice to the resident and user.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would also agree to opening the parks and leaving the choice to the resident.

Councilmember Riley agreed that the playgrounds should be open with an advisory sign.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he understands the opportunity for kids to play but his experience is that people do not read signs and he would rather stay on the safe side and keep the playgrounds closed.

Mayor LeTourneau commented that four members of the Council support opening the playgrounds with advisory signage. He stated that while he would prefer to keep the playgrounds closed, he can support opening the playgrounds with advisory signage. He asked

staff to watch the parks for activity level and social distancing and the Council can continue the discussion if problems arise or recommendations change.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that she agrees with Mayor LeTourneau that the issue should be monitored as this is a rapidly changing issue. She noted that staff can provide updates to the Council for additional discussion if necessary.

City Administrator Ulrich noted that the signs will be revised as directed and posted at the playgrounds.

Fire Chief Kohner provided details on the duty shifts being implemented by the Fire Department during this time. He stated that social distancing continues to be stressed with more people staying home. He provided details on the calls received, noting that two people can adequately respond to a medical call. He explained that when more firefighters are at home and able to respond to calls, that could increase the costs and would not maintain social distancing. He stated that instilling the temporary duty crew would provide social distancing and would almost be budget neutral, or a cost savings, depending on the number of firefighters that would otherwise respond during this time. He noted that the duty crew would also ensure prompt response to calls.

Councilmember Riley stated that it seems that this would make sense during this time. He asked if this would be a permanent decision to instill a duty crew.

Fire Chief Kohner replied that there have been discussions during strategic planning on the use of a duty crew. He stated that this has come into place sooner because of the COVID-19 circumstances and therefore this would be for the temporary situation. He stated that he has provided comparison information on the duty crew versus the 30 percent response rate, as well as comparisons of response times. He stated that he would like to see how the next two weeks play out and will then bring a comparison back to the Council to review.

City Administrator Ulrich commented that this is a great opportunity to test this method as a pilot during a time when it most makes sense.

Councilmember Menth stated that he likes this plan as it decreases the response time and implements social distancing. He stated that the situation continues to change rapidly, and this will allow the City to better respond.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that if the pilot project works, would the duty crew be a benefit to the residents moving forward from an insurance standpoint because of the reduced response times.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that the response times are a part of the ISO rating, but was unsure if the insurance rates of residents would change.

Councilmember Heinrich expressed appreciation to Fire Chief Kohner for bringing this idea forward and was hopeful that this would provide a cost savings and reduced response time.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that many cities are waiving utility bill penalties for late payment. He stated that currently Ramsey is not completing utility shutoffs. He asked for input on whether the City should continue to charge late payment fees or waive those late payment fees for the first quarter. He explained that often City utility bills are the last to be paid because the accounts are not reported to credit bureaus and assessed to property taxes if it remains unpaid. He stated that the City is preparing to bill for the first quarter and therefore wanted direction on whether or not to charge late payment fees.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she agrees with waiving the late payment fees for the first and second quarter as this is not a typical time for people.

Mayor LeTourneau noted that the first quarter is almost completed and agreed that challenging times are still to come. He confirmed the consensus of the Council to waive the late payment for utility bills for the first and second quarter.

Councilmember Heinrich asked if there is a policy in place for staff that travels out of town or goes on vacation. She stated that Anoka County has a policy in place in which employees are required to self-quarantine in those situations for 14 days without working.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the current policy requires anyone that goes on a cruise to serve a 14-day quarantine, consistent with the CDC recommendation. He stated that travel outside the state is not included in the policy at this time.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the City will continue to follow that policy and will follow the Federal Coronavirus Families First law which is implemented on April 1st. She noted that any required quarantine would first use an employee's sick time.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that staff will review policies related to out of state travel and will determine how the City's policy would refer to that.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Menth, seconded by Councilmember Heinrich, to adjourn the meeting.

A roll call vote was performed by the City Administrator:

Mayor LeTourneau	aye
Councilmember Riley	aye
Councilmember Menth	aye
Councilmember Heinrich	aye
Councilmember Kuzma	aye
Councilmember Specht	aye
Councilmember Musgrove	aye

Motion carried.

The special meeting of the City Council adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
Administrative Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.

A recording of this meeting is available for viewing online at www.qctv.org
<<http://www.qctv.org>>. Recordings are available for 36 months after the date of the meeting.