

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, April 28, 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

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
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor LeTourneau called the City Council Work Session to order at 6:00 p.m.

City Administrator Ulrich read a statement related to the COVID-19 pandemic and Local State of Emergency. In declaring this Local State of Emergency, the City of Ramsey has determined that in person meetings and meetings conducted under Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.02 are not practical or prudent because of the declared health pandemic emergency.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Receive an Update Regarding COVID-10 and Discuss the Timeline to Re-Open Public Facing City Facilities

Fire Chief Kohner reviewed the staff report and provided an update on COVID-19. He advised of increased testing occurring in Minnesota in an attempt to reduce the spread and reviewed local and state COVID-19 statistics. He advised that the Fire Department will receive additional PPE kits and provided an update on the FEMA reimbursement process.

Councilmember Musgrove thanked Fire Chief Kohner for the work he has done. She noted that it seems most of the hotspots for the virus are in higher density residential, specifically care facilities for the elderly and asked how those facilities are doing in Ramsey.

Fire Chief Kohner replied that Ramsey has a few congregate care facilities. He noted that the City received 780 masks during the mask drive the past weekend and the fire department worked to distribute those to the different care facilities in Ramsey. He stated that as of now, the congregate care centers in Ramsey are not listed in the centers that have been infected in Anoka County.

City Administrator Ulrich complimented Fire Chief Kohner on the work that is being done by the duty crew, which has proven to be a good model. He noted that response times have been significantly reduced and the City is experiencing lower costs with the potential for long-term savings. He stated that he surveyed neighboring communities and there is a variety of different levels of what remains open and what is closed. He noted that everyone is awaiting to hear if the Stay at Home Order remains in place next week, or whether that is lifted. He stated that staff is preparing to bring additional staff back into the building along with various policies and procedures to address sanitizing, social distancing, and public facing services. He stated that Anoka County intends to open license centers, but that is a concern to the City Hall building. He stated that as long as social distancing continues, there will continue to be some form of telecommuting and modifications to the front counters. He stated that staff is gearing up for the transition to being more open. He commented that the remote meetings have been going well but welcomed input from the Council.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that she likes the plan of staff to implement additional social distancing when the transition occurs that would allow staff to remain safe. She stated that she has heard concerns from residents that City Hall is shut down and the lack of ability for residents to voice their opinions publicly in that type of setting. She stated that she would prefer to get back to face to face meetings with social distancing.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she also agrees that there are options for social distancing within the Council Chamber. She appreciated the work that staff and the administration have done to prepare a transition plan. She asked how employees are doing with productivity in terms of people working from home and whether they have enough work to do. She noted that the Consent Agenda for the regular meeting includes the hiring of two seasonal workers and wanted to ensure that there is sufficient work for those employees and the regular employees.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer stated that currently the full-time public works staff are busy doing their jobs. He noted that the seasonal workers would be responsible for mowing, which will soon begin. He noted that there were two offers for employment, but one refused the offer because of the COVID-19 situation. He noted that staff will be interviewing another candidate the following week for the other seasonal position.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that employees are being kept busy. He noted that although there is less over the counter work, some staff have been working on items that were previously backlogged, such as scanning files. He stated that he has not received complaints related to

levels of service or speed of project review. He stated that a variety of work continues, although it may not be the same type of work that was occurring prior to the COVID-19 situation.

Administrative Services Director Lasher concurred with the statements from City Administrator Ulrich. She stated that they have been forced into realizing some process improvements during this time that will continue to occur going forward. She commented that her staff remains very busy.

Councilmember Specht stated that as soon as it is safe and feasible, it would be nice to hold the meetings at City Hall in person.

Mayor LeTourneau agreed. He stated that there was mention of plexiglass shields and other social distancing elements and asked if those costs would be eligible for reimbursement under the Emergency Declaration.

Fire Chief Kohner confirmed that if something is purchased specifically for COVID-19 that would not typically have been purchased, that expense would be reimbursable.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill referenced the Planning Commission meeting that is set to occur the following week, which has larger public hearing items on the agenda, and is still planned to be held telephonically.

Councilmember Heinrich asked if it would be possible to open City Hall for the Planning Commission meeting because there has been so much feedback from the community related to upcoming public hearing cases.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill noted that notifications have already gone out with the assumption that there would be a continuation or extension of the Stay at Home Order for that meeting.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that the management group discussed this issue and while the City would like to get back to normal as soon as feasible; it would be too soon to open City Hall at that scale next week for a group of that size. He stated that he does not recommend allowing the Planning Commission meeting to be held in person at City Hall. He noted that the process should be phased, first bringing in the Council to be spread out through social distancing and then phasing in the ability for residents to attend. He stated that City Hall is not prepared for a group of that size to be present.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill confirmed that staff has been receiving feedback from residents on those cases, just through different methods.

2.02: Continue Discussion Regarding Housing Plans and Policies

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that during the last discussion there was quite a bit of feedback. She stated that one of the big things that businesses tell the City is that it needs more rooftops. She stated that the City has gained more rooftops and asked staff if there has been a change in that feedback from businesses or whether they are still stating that more rooftops are needed. She stated that Aeon had a specific project for two areas but had a problem with funding; therefore, she would entertain that second project within The COR, if Aeon has secured its financing.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that while the City is closer to reaching the critical density mass, the traffic counts and employment growth are equal factors. He stated that the Armstrong retail development will be a good test. He provided details on the competitive funding process of Aeon, noting that process is one to two years. He explained that high density can be perceived in many ways by residents. He explained that within The COR, high-density would be apartments and multi-story products. He noted that level of density is only allowed within The COR. He stated that there have been comments related to density in terms of detached townhomes and the narrower lots.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that the City continues to do its best to educate on the different types of density.

Councilmember Menth recognized that there is land within The COR for high density and retail/commercial. He asked the number of parcels currently zoned for high density remaining within The COR.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill replied that one site remains, which was slated for the second Aeon project, along with one additional parcel zoned high density and another for a senior housing type product. He noted that there are a few more parcels with flexibility. He noted that within The COR, about 85 percent of the parcels marked for high density have been developed. He noted that the continued majority of development within The COR in terms of residential would be some form of detached townhomes.

Councilmember Menth stated that he heard that there are two parcels remaining in The COR currently zoned for multi-story apartment type developments.

Councilmember Riley stated that the City has development that is unbalanced within The COR, as the high density residential came in all at once and the retail has been slow to follow. He stated that he believes that the City should hold off on additional apartments until additional retail development occurs to help the City achieve its long-term vision.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan stated that COVID-19 has put the City in a unique situation, as it is unknown if the development community will return to business as usual. He stated that there has been a retail center constructed, and there are plans for a hotel with restaurant and additional retail proposed near Coborn's. He stated that in his discussions with businesses and prospective tenants, COVID-19 has put a stop to retail development but noted that the retail market is looking for higher population, higher traffic counts, and higher daytime traffic counts. He noted that adding residential population and additional employers will help the

City's attractiveness to the business community. He stated that more rooftops will help to drive the workforce and retail market.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that when the City approved phase one for Aeon, it was always a plan for phase two to follow. He stated that extensions were given when Aeon had difficulty obtaining financing, but that ultimately ended. He stated that he was concerned that putting a pause on development of multi-family housing could give the City a bad reputation. He commented that if Aeon could obtain funding, he would support the project.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan explained that the original agreement with Aeon approved the first phase with the second phase to occur five years later, which would have been 2021. He noted that the clock began quicker than expected, which ended in this situation rather than the 2021 phasing.

Councilmember Specht echoed the comments of Councilmember Riley that the City should pause on higher density within The COR and focus on other development at this time.

Councilmember Musgrove referenced the Aeon project and asked if Aeon would be in a better position for funding if there was a purchase agreement involved. She stated that she would like to see some retail established and get a better idea of the traffic counts and rooftop numbers desired by businesses.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan replied that data varies from user to user, but typically for national retailers they would want between 20,000 to 30,000 within the five-mile trade area, however depending on traffic counts some users will consider sites based on other retailers in the area. He commented that in the past, a retailer would provide a minimum qualification sheet, but that information is no longer being shared and sites are being reviewed on an individual basis. He stated that in terms of Aeon, the level of ownership or control of the site has changed slightly, therefore having a purchase agreement would allow them to apply for the funding now. He provided details on the potential timing, should funding be secured. He reviewed the recent large construction projects that have occurred within Ramsey in the past two years, noting that those day workers bring dollars into the daytime business community and are a benefit to the City.

Councilmember Menth stated that Aeon provides workforce housing, which helps people get started and is a desire of the businesses within Ramsey. He noted that the area within The COR is zoned for this type of development. He noted that he would like to see the relationship the City has with Aeon continued through the second phase. He stated that if retailers feel that there is an opening to capitalize on the community, they will. He stated that if a pause is placed on construction, that will slow the development of the City and he is against that.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he supports continuing to move along the City's plan, which was designed to create rooftops that would drive demand. He stated that while that has begun, the business community is looking for local workforce and the Aeon project would provide that. He stated that ultimately, people want to live in this style of housing and are occupying it almost as fast as it is built. He appreciated that the City has guidelines, and this type of development will

stop once the original goal is reached. He stated that perhaps this topic come back in a Council case, which would allow the Council to vote on the item.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that she is appreciative to Aeon and their willingness to reach out to Councilmembers and educate them on the product but still holds fast to representing the people and their lack of desire for more apartment buildings. She stated that hopefully the relationship with Aeon can continue in the future, but it is all about timing.

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 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
Administrative Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.