

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, June 23, 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  
Finance Director Diana Lund  
Police Captain Timothy Frankfurth  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood  
Public Works Superintendent Grant Riemer  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher (attended remotely)  
Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill  
Communication and Events Coordinator Megan Thorstad (attended remotely)

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor LeTourneau called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:30 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. With the lifting of the local state of emergency and the current statewide guidelines, Council Members, staff and participants may attend either in-person or through telephonic means. He noted that all Councilmembers are attending in person tonight.

**2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

**2.01: Continue Discussion Regarding City Events and Staffing**

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Menth asked the type of deposit that is paid towards entertainment.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad replied that the City has paid a \$1,000 deposit with a contract total of \$4,000.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the hours of staff time and cost is just for the week of the event or whether that includes the planning prior to that.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad replied that is a cumulative total of the planning for the festival, based on 2019 numbers.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that staffing looks quite different this year, noting that staffing will be impacted by the decision on Happy Days. She noted that there is a pending absence of 12 weeks for the Communications and Events Coordinator, which will impact staffing of regular duties and would significantly impact planning for Happy Days. She stated that this will impact the 20/per week Recreation Specialist. She stated that staff is recommending that the Recreation Specialist be increased in mid-July to work with Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad to gain additional knowledge on the communications duties. She provided an update on intern positions that were not hired due to the COVID-19 situation. She stated that the Recreation Specialist will be a good fit to cover the duties of Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad during the 12 week leave of absence. She noted that there would still be a cost savings to bringing the Recreation Specialist on at 40 hours per week.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that staff has talked about how all the pieces work together. He noted that staff believes that all the recreation planning in the works could be completed along with the Happy Days light events that were previously discussed by the Council.

Mayor LeTourneau commented that there seems to be some planning in place for decisions to be made about programming into the summer. He stated that it appears utilizing the Recreation Specialist at 40 hours per week would allow staffing activities to continue.

Councilmember Heinrich asked if there would be a change in benefits for the employee.

Administrative Services Director Lasher replied that currently at 20 hours per week, the employee accrues sick time and vacation time and receives the PERA benefit. She stated that those benefits would then be based at 40 hours per week instead of 20 hours per week. She stated that the employee would be offered the health insurance waiver, similar to other employees that have gone from part-time to full-time. She noted that three-month calculation was factored into the cost savings proposed.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if that practice is used for the transition from part-time to full-time status on a regular basis or temporary basis.

Administrative Services Director Lasher replied that practice has been done in the past on temporary basis such as this. She provided details on the memorandum of agreement that is done with AFCSME.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the employee would lose the insurance after the three months.

Administrative Services Director Lasher replied that the waiver would only be allowed during the time the employee works more than 30 hours per week.

Councilmember Riley asked if the discussion should be focused on Happy Days or the employee.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad stated that the staffing piece is related to Happy Days because she will be out for 12 weeks and an intern was not hired this year. She stated that without rearranging staff in this proposed method, there would not be staffing in place to support Happy Days or modified Happy Days activities. She stated that she recommends that the Council make a decision on the Happy Days events by July 1<sup>st</sup> so that staff can plan appropriately. She stated that the decision would be whether the full event moves forward or whether a series of events moves forward in place of the larger Happy Days event.

Mayor LeTourneau suggested that decision be made today in order to allow staff to plan.

Councilmember Riley stated that he would like to see anything move forward that could be done in a safe manner. He stated that it seems in order to do that, staffing would need to be in place.

Councilmember Specht agreed that other communities are holding events and he would like to see Ramsey hold events that could carry forward to the extent possible. He acknowledged that would require the increase in hours for the Recreation Specialist.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that if Happy Days looks anything similar to the past, staff would not be equipped to handle that. She stated that increasing the Recreation Specialist by 20 hours per week would help but could only manage some smaller events.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he would support what could be managed by staff.

Councilmember Menth commented that it would be great to offer events that could be done safely and in a spaced-out manner. He commented that vehicles could be spaced out for a car show.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that if activities are spread out too many days in a row there could be less participation. She stated that perhaps events are spread out throughout The COR. She commented that she would like to hold as many activities as possible throughout the three-day period. She stated that perhaps the run is held the week earlier.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad stated that some of the Happy Days Committee members were interested in finding a way to hold smaller events that could incorporate social distancing. She noted that there was interest in the fireworks, car show and bike ride. She stated that she is hesitant to speak for staff as she will be absent. She stated that she would want to ensure that staff would be comfortable with that.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that she is reluctantly comfortable as administrative services has a lot going on with elections, budget discussions and union contract negotiations. She

stated that there may be employees on leave due to COVID and therefore she would want to keep things scaled back as much as possible.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood believed that some fun and memorable recreation events could be developed. He stated that the benefit of spreading events over a longer time is that weather is not as impactful. He recognized that the priority would be normal staffing duties with the recreation events coming second.

Councilmember Riley stated that obviously Happy Days does not receive the same priority as elections and union negotiations. He stated that there are some churches that have been involved in the past and perhaps those organizations can assist in the planning and organization.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad commented that the churches are involved in the festival but most of their sponsorship and assistance occurs the day of and not in the planning process. She agreed that perhaps the partnerships could be strengthened to provide additional assistance.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the churches were still willing to participate.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad commented that she spoke with a few representatives from the churches and one was very reluctant to participate in the Expo element. She stated that the other church typically sponsors the kids tent and inflatables, which are things that cannot be done safely.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that she thinks it is a great idea to strengthen the partnerships. She stated that if the typical elements cannot occur, those churches might need ideas on things that they could do to help.

City Administrator Ulrich used the example of the Storybook Walk that one of the churches assisted with recently.

Councilmember Kuzma commented on the timeline and effort necessary to get things done. He stated that he would be concerned with placing too much work on staff.

Mayor LeTourneau agreed that staff needs to feel confident coming forward and stating that they could not handle any more duties throughout this process.

Councilmember Menth asked if there are funds that could be slid around for limited events.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad commented that the \$12,000 that the City contributes annually would be the only potential funding. She noted that the other funding is fully funded by sponsorships.

Mayor LeTourneau confirmed the consensus of the Council to cautiously move forward with the staffing and budget constraints.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad referenced the language in the entertainment contract. She stated that the City should have something in writing that the festival is not occurring so that the City does not lose out on \$4,000.

Mayor LeTourneau confirmed that staff could draft that language to come forward to the Council.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that staff is doing the summer concert series in a modified format. He noted that the band could perform in that format if desired.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that staff could identify if a Happy Days type concert is going to be held at the amphitheater. He noted that staff could bring back a resolution formally canceling the event and use that to book the entertainment for 2021.

Councilmember Kuzma suggested that the City Attorney review the contract to ensure that the local declaration would be sufficient for the contract.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would prefer that the band be booked for a concert at The Draw rather than canceling.

Councilmember Riley asked if the City is worried about social distancing and whether that is the purpose of the tickets.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that the mandate by the State is that gatherings should be limited to 250 people and that would be the purpose of the tickets. He stated that his thought would be to save the larger band for the 2021 event, as that band would draw more than 250 people. He stated that perhaps that decision be left to staff to have conversations with the band.

## **2.02: Discuss 2020 Citizen Survey**

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he is not in favor of an online survey, as the feedback will be skewed.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that the City is looking for a sample size and response that is statistically significant and it does not sound like that it ensured online. He stated that when mailed there is better statistical significance.

City Administrator Ulrich replied that the online option has about 20 percent less response rate.

Mayor LeTourneau commented that the response rate is important.

Councilmember Menth stated that he recalls filling out a survey a few years ago. He asked the response rate on paper.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that he would have to look that up.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that the measurement was statistical significance and the City has always fallen within that range.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that perhaps the postcard could be mailed to all residents to potentially increase online participation. She stated that some residents do not have access to online services and perhaps a statement could be included that would allow residents to call to have a written survey mailed to them.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that he could discuss that option with the company.

Councilmember Musgrove referenced question 15 and believed that something should be added about Zoom/WebEx meeting access. She stated that perhaps that format could continue in the future if residents like that option. She stated that she would also like to leave the road maintenance question as is. She found it interesting that eight out of ten respondents were okay with the 75/25 funding option.

Councilmember Riley stated that his concern with how the survey is conducted is that it could lose the comparability factor from previous years. He stated that he wants to hear from everyone but wants to ensure comparability. He stated that if the road maintenance question is left in it should be modified to be more clear. He stated that he is concerned that people did not understand the question when they answered.

Mayor LeTourneau confirmed that the question should remain but should be made more clear without changing it too much. He stated that the Council should decide what it wants to know when it asks the question.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that when the question is changed, the response is changed similar to how the survey is sent out. She stated that if the format changes, that would simply provide the baseline going forward and that new data set would be used for future comparisons.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that would change the variable of how things are measured. He stated that perhaps staff could ask the survey company what they would expect if that format were changed and whether that would skew the answers and data.

Councilmember Menth stated that perhaps the Council is attempting to fix something that is not broken. He stated that the City is receiving responses in the current format and therefore that method is not broken.

City Administrator Ulrich confirmed the consensus to keep in the road financing question with possible modifications.

### **2.03: Review 2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), Management Report and Special Purpose Audit Reports**

Aaron Nielsen reviewed the staff report including the 2019 Comprehensive Financial Report (CAFR), 2019 Management Report and 2019 Special Purpose Report. He reported a clean or unmodified opinion with no material weaknesses or issues of noncompliance.

Mayor LeTourneau asked the overall evaluation of the material.

Councilmember Riley commented that the City does a good job of accounting and the audit shows that in the unmodified opinion.

Mr. Nielsen stated that they focus on the information provided by the City with what it receives throughout the year. He stated that there were no material findings, which was good.

Mayor LeTourneau commented that it shows that there is good performance within the Finance Department.

Councilmember Menth commented it appears the Finance Department is doing an excellent job.

### **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 6:49 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.*