

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
CITY OF RAMSEY  
ANOKA COUNTY  
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The City of Ramsey Economic Development Authority (EDA) conducted a regular meeting on Thursday, September 10, 2020, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present:     Chairperson Jim Steffen  
                          Member Brian Burandt  
                          Member Scott Cords  
                          Member Ryan Heineman  
                          Member Mark Kuzma  
                          Member Chris Riley

Members Absent:     Member Glen Hardin

Also Present:         Sean Sullivan, Economic Development Manager  
                          Tim Gladhill, Deputy City Administrator  
                          Kurt Ulrich, City Administrator

**1.     CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Steffen called the Economic Development Authority meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

**2.     APPROVE AGENDA**

Motion by Member Cords, seconded by Member Kuzma, to approve the agenda.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chairperson Steffen, Members Cords, Kuzma, Burandt, Heineman, and Riley. Voting No: None. Absent: Member Hardin.

**4.02:   Discuss Potential Billboard and Dynamic Display Sign Plan for Highway 10**

Economic Development Manager Sullivan presented the staff report.

Tom McCarver, Blue Ox Media, stated that his intent is not to provide a “pitch”, but he is present to open up the discussion on the topic. He stated that the traffic counts in this area are similar to Champlin, where they recently installed a sign of this nature. He provided details on the factors they consider for locations of digital billboards and the businesses that chose to advertise. He noted that the majority of businesses that have chosen to advertise on the Champlin sign are local businesses looking for a new way to advertise. He provided details on the difference between national and local customers in terms of advertising on digital signs. He reviewed information on traffic counts at the different Highway 10 intersections in Ramsey. He provided details on the cost

to construct and maintain a digital billboard sign. He stated that his company focuses on the local advertisers, providing opportunities for smaller local businesses to use that type of advertising, in order to compete with the two national businesses that also provide digital billboard services in this market. He explained that because they are not tied to a large national corporation, they are able to move quickly once the decision is made to move forward on a digital sign.

Member Cords stated that Highway 10 will be completely disrupted in the near future and asked how that type of project would impact this type of activity.

Mr. McCarver stated that they would want to have additional discussions to ensure that the location of the sign would not be impacted by an overpass. He noted that the pattern of traffic changes slightly during construction but did not believe that it would change so dramatically that it would result in an asset that is not saleable. He stated that these deals typically involve 30-year leases, therefore construction of that activity is considered short-term. He provided details on how COVID has impacted the market because of the large reductions in the volumes of traffic. He noted that some areas, such as Minneapolis, continue to see much lesser traffic volumes, while the other service corridors have had most of their traffic return.

Member Riley stated that the EDA is interested in helping local businesses and attracting additional businesses. He asked how this would benefit businesses in the community, the EDA, and the City.

Mr. McCarver stated that generally cities receive revenue but noted that formula is different for each partnership. He stated that the City could choose to implement a business of the week, which would allow a small business that does not have the revenue to advertise to be featured in advertising on the sign. He explained that could allow the business to gain its footing and perhaps then return to pay for advertising in the future. He highlighted the benefits of a municipal/private company partnership noting that it allows the City to have additional control and the flexibility in order to best serve the business community. He noted that sign efforts could be combined with local businesses allowed to advertise on both the Ramsey and Champlin signs. He stated through those partnerships with municipalities they also provide for a certain amount of public service announcements and advertising of City sponsored events.

Chairperson Steffen asked and received confirmation that the sign would generate revenue for the City and the City would not have expense to construct.

Mr. McCarver stated that each situation is unique in its circumstances but confirmed that the cost would be borne by Blue Ox Media.

Chairperson Steffen asked for details on the advertising model.

Mr. McCarver provided details on how advertising is sold.

Chairperson Steffen asked how the advertising would direct those seeing the sign to the businesses within The COR that may not have highway visibility.

Mr. McCarver stated that while many in this area are familiar with The COR, they could also work with the City on its branding of The COR to make others that see the sign aware of that location.

Chairperson Steffen asked why every city would not want a sign.

Mr. McCarver stated that it is a personal choice and every aesthetic is different. He noted that digital billboards allow for a magnitude of advertising opportunity on one double sided sign, rather than having a proliferation of signs along its corridor.

Member Burandt asked if a sign in Ramsey would be feasible without any subsidies from the City.

Mr. McCarver stated that Ramsey is essentially on the bubble from an advertising perspective. He stated that because Ramsey is a growing community with increasing activity, that encourages his company in wanting to work with Ramsey. He explained that the majority of advertisers for a Ramsey sign would be generated within a five-mile radius of the sign.

Member Heineman asked for information on light pollution for a high double-sided sign that would operate 24 hours per day.

Mr. McCarver stated that a sign can be tuned to its environment. He stated that the signs are sophisticated and are programmed to ensure they are under a threshold at all times. He stated that if done correctly, a sign would not have any more impact than a backlit sign. He confirmed that the sign would be designed to only focus its impact on the intended corridor and the light would not impact from the sides.

Chairperson Steffen asked what the next steps would be in this process.

Mr. McCarver stated that the City would need to decide if this is something that makes sense for the community. He believed that it would be a good location because of the highly dense commercial corridor. He stated that if the City chooses that it would like a digital billboard, his company would only be interested in a partnership and provided details on that process that would begin with a vendor agreement.

Member Cords asked if the City has a process that would require an open RFP process.

Assistant City Administrator Gladhill stated that there is a purchasing policy that requires RFP for certain expenditures. He believed that direct negotiation could occur on this type of project but noted that it could benefit the City to go through the RFP process as other vendors could be interested.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan asked if there is any concern that the digital sign of the City would be a conflict.

Mr. McCarver stated that he would not be worried about that but noted that it would be a part of the discussion as they would want to ensure there is proper spacing.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan stated that if the EDA is supportive of this type of activity, further discussion could be gained from the City Council and Planning Commission. He stated that while he understands the vendors preference for exclusivity, there is another vendor interested as well and therefore an RFP process may be the preferred route if this is something desired in the community.

Mr. McCarver noted that the City could also go through an RFQ process rather than an RFP process.

Member Cords stated that he thinks this would be a relatively good idea for the City of Ramsey as the businesses in The COR are essentially invisible to the traffic on the corridor. He commented that this would be an asset to those businesses. He stated that he does not have a preference on vendor but was comfortable with the information presented by Blue Ox.

Member Burandt agreed that this would be a great idea if the City did not have to front the expenditure and believed this would be a great solution to the challenge in visibility from the corridor.

Chairperson Steffen agreed that this would be a great opportunity for businesses.

Member Riley stated that from an EDA standpoint he believes this would be a great asset for businesses. He noted that this would be the first step and from an EDA and business standpoint, this appears to be something the City should pursue. He noted that additional input will be gathered from the Planning Commission and City Council.

Member Kuzma agreed that this seems like a great opportunity for business. He stated that he would be more interested in the benefits that would be available for the City.

Assistant City Administrator Gladhill provided details related to on premise signs and off premise signs and the different regulations within City Code.

Member Heineman stated that while he agrees this could be good for the business community, he would caution against moving forward with an exclusive vendor and would want to hear from additional vendors.

It was the consensus of the EDA that this topic should move forward on this topic and the City should review the opportunities from both vendors interested.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan noted that he was unsure that a formal RFP would be required and provided the idea of using a subcommittee to further vet the vendors interested.

Assistant City Administrator Gladhill noted that currently there are two vendors interested and the City could make a statement, without using much staff time, to make a statement expressing interest which would determine whether additional vendors would be interested. He noted that the next step would be to gain the input of the Planning Commission and City Council before seeking interest from vendors.

