

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, November 24, 2020, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor John LeTourneau
Councilmember Mark Kuzma
Councilmember Jeff Menth
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Dan Specht

Members Absent: Councilmember Debra Musgrove

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Finance Director Diana Lund
Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher
Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill
City Engineer Bruce Westby
IT Manager Jason Fredrickson
Communications and Events Coordinator Megan Thorstad
Councilmember Elect Matt Woestehoff
Councilmember Elect Chelsea Howell

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor LeTourneau called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Review of 2021-2030 Capital Improvement Plan

Finance Director Lund reviewed the staff report.

City Administrator Ulrich commented that Councilmember Musgrove was not able to attend tonight but reviewed the comments she provided which included her opinion that Highway 10 should have a higher priority.

Councilmember Riley commented that there is momentum for the Highway 10 project and asked if it would make sense to slot that project in a more appropriate timeframe.

City Administrator Ulrich agreed that could be a good idea as they are nearing 50 percent funding for the project.

Finance Director Lund provided additional explanation on the priority designation that was given to the project. She stated that it could be moved to priority two, which would identify it as a new project.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that typically a project moves up in the priority standing when additional funding is identified. He was unsure that changing the priority from five to two would change the importance of the project.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the project shows as a priority within the Strategic Plan.

Finance Director Lund provided additional clarification on the different priority categories.

Councilmember Menth asked the City portion for that project cost. He asked where the additional money is anticipated to come from.

Finance Director Lund replied that \$2,000,000 is designated for Ramsey Boulevard and \$2,000,000 is designated for Sunfish Lake Boulevard from the City of Ramsey and reviewed the different funds that will be used. She confirmed that the City does have those funds available.

Councilmember Kuzma asked the balance of the PIR Fund.

Finance Director Lund replied that after the Highway 10 funds are used there will be a balance of slightly over \$1,100,000 in the PIR Fund.

It was the consensus of the Council to change the priority rating of the Highway 10 project to priority two.

Councilmember Riley referenced the observation boardwalk and observation deck, as he believes adding items that will be a maintenance burden would not make sense when staff is currently having a hard time maintaining parks infrastructure.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that there are funds included in the proposed 2021 budget to provide additional parks maintenance. He categorized the boardwalk and deck as lower maintenance items and would not require regular maintenance. He stated that the observation deck item would be meant to develop feasibility and plans so that it could be a possibility when development comes forward in that area. He asked that the items be left in for planning purposes to continue towards project development.

Councilmember Specht asked the purpose of the dates in the document as they do not always seem to align when the projects could move forward.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that some of those project are projections but are meant to move ahead with some other development projects of which the timing is not always known.

Councilmember Riley acknowledged that the Council asked for a ten-year plan, but then noticed the same police vehicle identified three times within the document as that is the replacement schedule. He commented that it seems that the City is buying a lot of vehicles but is essentially only replacing the same vehicle. He asked if there is a way to remove some of that type of “noise” from the document.

Finance Director Lund replied that would be difficult to do. She noted that the items are included because that is the schedule for replacement. She acknowledged that a ten-year document is difficult because it goes so far into the future.

Councilmember Riley asked if those could be budgeted for as an expense rather than capital.

Finance Director Lund explained the capital expense policy and the reason those purchases must be included in the plan. She noted that those vehicles are identified as replacement.

Finance Director Lund noted that this item will appear in the consent agenda for tonight’s regular meeting to call for a public hearing in December.

2.02: Discussion and Update of 2021 Budget/Levy

Finance Director Lund reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Kuzma asked for details on the pending employee contract negotiations.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that discussion should remain confidential. He stated that there is a base amount included in the budget, but contingency is also included for settlements that may be necessary. He noted that there are things outside of wages that have budget impacts.

Administrative Services Director Lasher replied that they are not as close as they hoped on settling the contract negotiations. She noted that the discussions will continue in a closed session on December 8th with the Council.

Councilmember Riley stated that at the last discussion he brought forward a concern related to this late discussion and he was told that the timing was not late. He asked how the budget could be set when the largest expenditure is not certain.

City Administrator Ulrich replied that there is an estimate within the proposed budget and settlements cannot exceed what the City is able to pay. He stated that if the negotiation went to arbitration, the budget would identify what the City is able to pay. He stated that there is a contingency within that budget, but the City cannot go above what it is able to pay.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that it is typical to be in this position at this time but agreed that she would like to be further along at this point. She acknowledged that the election took a lot of staff time. She stated that additional flexibility could be gained by delaying the start date of a new employee.

Councilmember Riley stated that the average increase for municipal increases statewide was 4.5 to five percent, noting that the City will most likely come in under that.

Councilmember Menth stated that the budget timeline is designated by State law and asked for details on the contract negotiations. He stated that perhaps to avoid this situation in the future the contract end dates should be changed to better align the timing.

2.03: Review Communications Survey and Discuss Expectations

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Kuzma commented that he believes that the website should be improved to be less cumbersome for users to find the desired information.

Mayor LeTourneau agreed that he finds it challenging at times as well. He asked if members of the community have provided the same comments.

IT Manager Fredrickson stated that the City is scheduled to have a website upgrade but noted that he would need direction on what would make it easier for users. He stated that from the statistics gathered it would be difficult to determine if users are finding their information right away and leaving the site, or become frustrated because they cannot find their information and leaving the site after that time.

Councilmember Riley provided an example, noting that he goes to the website to find what is playing at The Draw and advised that if it is not posted on the front page, he has difficulty finding it. He stated that perhaps speaking with the front desk would provide input on what people are looking for, as residents may call if they cannot find their information on the website.

Councilmember Specht stated that he is excited about an update to the website as he agrees there are difficulties for users. He used the Elk River website as a good example, noting that perhaps there are ways to highlight the upcoming City Council agendas for those that may be interested.

Councilmember Riley commented that he agrees that it is important to not engage in a back and forth with people on platforms like Facebook but stated that sometimes a reply would be helpful. He used the example of comments related to the poor condition of Variolite and noted that it would have been easy for Ramsey staff to reply that the street is being fixed with the repair timelines and a link to project information.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he likes that the City sends out a letter to residents and businesses that are impacted by road projects or related to things like the franchise fee. He noted that in those instances, education is important to avoid those situations on social media.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would caution against posting on different Facebook pages as it could give the impression that the City condones or endorses that Facebook page.

Councilmember Elect Woestehoff commented that as an organization the City should stay out of commenting on different Facebook pages. He stated that the members of the Council, however, are often members of those Facebook groups and could comment with the applicable information directing residents to the appropriate information.

Councilmember Riley commented that while he would prefer it was different, many people find out information on Facebook. He stated that his comment was not to engage people but simply provide links to appropriate sources of information rather than letting bad information continue to circulate. He asked the extent of the City email list.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad commented that even though the City has more emails from residents, they have to opt in to receive email updates and estimated about 200 residents have signed up for that.

Councilmember Elect Howell agreed that she would caution against engaging too much on Facebook or having City staff comment on some of the community pages.

Councilmember Specht stated that he received four texts since November 6th from the City about upcoming meetings, which he found helpful.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that he could research whether there are applications which can target a more specific audience.

Councilmember Elect Woestehoff stated that perhaps a subcommittee could be formed with a few Councilmembers, members of staff, and residents to help provide guidance for the website update. He commented that communication is a vital function of government.

Councilmember Specht agreed that would be helpful.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

City Administrator Ulrich stated that a request was made by Councilmembers Specht and Musgrove to add the topic of targeted protesting in residential areas to a future agenda. He noted that Lino Lakes and Hugo recently adopted ordinances addressing that issue. He commented that a request was made by the Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair to consider having Commissions meet remotely. He noted that staff replied with the direction the Council had previously provided on that topic and a revised statement was provided by the Chair and Vice Chair to have their members attend remotely. He stated that anyone can attend remotely but the position has been that meetings can take place in person, remotely or through a hybrid mix.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that staff provided the response to the Chair and Vice Chair with the previous direction of the Council but wanted to bring the comments forward to the Council.

Councilmember Specht agreed with the approach that it is good to have both options, those comfortable can attend and those that would prefer can attend remotely.

Councilmember Riley supported the previous direction.

It was the consensus of the Council to continue with the allowance for a hybrid environment for meetings.

Mayor LeTourneau encouraged staff to continue to monitor how things are changing in that regard.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

None.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
Administrative Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.