

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, January 26, 2021, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Mark Kuzma  
Councilmember Chelsee Howell  
Councilmember Debra Musgrove  
Councilmember Chris Riley  
Councilmember Dan Specht  
Councilmember Matt Woestehoff

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich  
Public Works Superintendent Grant Riemer  
Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill  
Representative John Heinrich  
Representative Peggy Scott  
Senator Jim Abeler

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

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

**2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

**2.01: Review Current Legislative Session with Local Legislators**

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report.

Representative Heinrich commented that it is refreshing to be in the meeting with live people and to see everyone this evening. He stated that he will once again be in the minority in the House for the next two years. He stated that he will continue to be on the Transportation Committee and will also be serving on the Committee to Prevent Homelessness and the Housing Policy and Financing Committee. He stated that one of his top priorities will continue to be funding for Highway 10 while also learning more about housing and helping to prevent homelessness.

Representative Scott commented that she continues to serve on the Ways and Means Committee and provided input on the Governor's proposed budget which includes tax increases that would place the State in the top five for commercial taxes and the second highest for taxes on the wealthy. She noted that those would not help to attract people and businesses and would most likely cause higher income people to leave the State. She commented that in order to replace a high-income person that has left the State, you need about 30 average or above average families. She stated that she continues to serve on the Education Policy Committee noting that her top priority is getting

children back to school and to make sure that assessment tests are done to determine the learning loss that has occurred and create a plan to address that. She stated that she is also the lead for the Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee which covers the financing of the judiciary branch and any civil law or data practice issue. She affirmed that her top priority will be getting children back to school for both educational and psychological reasons. She commented that she also believes that reforms to Chapter 12 are needed to ensure that the legislature can share in the decision making related to pandemics and other emergency situations. She stated that she has signed in support of the third lane for Highway 10 from Hanson to Round Lake.

Senator Abeler commented that will be quite a session as the Governor proposed \$1,900,000,000 in tax increases. He stated that he is the Chairman of the Human Services Reform and Finance Policy Committee along with the Licensing Committee and Aging Committee. He stated that it is tough to predict how the legislative session will go as communication with the Governor continues to be difficult. He stated that everyone is interested in working on the priorities of Ramsey and the communities they represent, providing an example of the sales tax exemption the City previously requested. He commented that it is his job to represent the communities that elected him and welcomed continued input.

Councilmember Musgrove thanked everyone for attending. She asked if there was information available with the priorities of the City, as she did not notice those in the case.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that would be included in the next packet when the formal legislative platform is reviewed as that would be based upon discussion tonight.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that it is very important that the Governor's powers be returned to the legislative body that represent the communities. She stated that residents and businesses continue to ask for that as people are struggling not just from COVID but from loss of business. She stated that Highway 10 funding continues to be a priority of Ramsey as well.

Representative Scott thanked Councilmember Musgrove for reinforcing that message. She stated that the Statute never considered a pandemic such as this and was meant to address emergencies such as fire or tornado. She stated that something of this length was never considered and what has happened runs contrary to the intent of the government. She commented that about the second month of COVID, the powers should have been shifted from emergency based to management based and the legislative body should have been allowed to contribute to the decision making. She commented that section of the Statute needs to change but recognized that this Governor will be reluctant to make that change. She agreed that one person should not be making all the decisions. She commented that it has been a frustration for citizens, parents of school children, and business owners. She stated that the justification for the decisions made do not always seem to align with the data.

Senator Abeler stated that the three representatives present tonight agree. He stated that he attempted to reach out to the Governor 13 times since July and only recently received a response. He encouraged the Governor to share the load as that is a lot of responsibility. He stated that the focus should be on nursing homes, hospitals and prisons and the remainder of organizations are well suited to make their own decisions such as schools. He noted that the County Boards could

be placed in charge of the business regulations which could involve City Councils. He stated that 40 percent of the people do not care what the Governor says at this point and therefore there needs to be an adjustment to how things are sorted out. He stated that this budget cycle would be a good opportunity for that and to open communications.

Representative Heinrich agreed with the previous comments noting that it is important that there are up and down votes on decisions. He stated that with the Governor making decisions it lets people off the hook on making tough decisions related to Saint Paul. He commented that people need to know how their representatives vote. He agreed that language should be changed in Chapter 12 and noted there is some bipartisan support for that. He noted that some representatives are working to change that language to ensure that this situation does not reappear in the future. He stated that currently the House majority is not willing to remove the emergency powers, so there it sits. He commented that it could go forward to court, but if the courts upheld the decision of the Governor it would die there.

Senator Abeler provided background on the funding that has been allocated thus far, noting that the State funding could have been backfilled by the Federal funds, but the Governor chose not to do that and will continue to have control over the Federal funds allocated. He stated that the discussion should occur at the legislature rather than one person making the decision on where the funds are allocated. He stated that the Ramsey City Council could submit something to the Governor if interested.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the Council is going to go through a process to provide a group opinion on the Council. He noted that if there is specific legislation that should be addressed, that could be included.

Senator Abeler stated that he is unsure how that would be received but perhaps statements from cities would be heard but noted it is another step that could be taken.

Councilmember Woestehoff appreciated the efforts of the representatives and commented that he does not support such an action. He stated that he loves the attitude of Senator Abeler and appreciates the openness and dialogue but stated that his priority for the legislature is Highway 10 and the things on the list. He stated that any other efforts, in his opinion, would be wasted and he would not want to contribute to a political farce.

Councilmember Howell commented that she has an opposing view. She noted that she has seen people lose 50 percent of their business and some on the verge of suicide. She stated that those voices need to be heard and the job of representatives is to be the voice of the community. She stated that people are being crushed by the decisions. She noted that some people are losing business because they choose to be open, and in one year, she receives the number of customers that casinos receive in one day, yet casinos are allowed to be open by the Governor. She stated that it is awful to see people lose what they have worked for and she does not see this as a political issue but more an issue of people hurting. She stated that the top level has made this political, but this is an issue of people hurting.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed with those comments but does not believe that is an issue of the Governor versus the legislation. He stated that the legislature can bring forward ideas.

Councilmember Riley commented that Highway 10 continues to be a priority for Ramsey, noting that if one more funding round could be passed that would be complete. He stated that Ramsey is in the process of building a Public Works Facility and is planning a Water Treatment Facility and therefore the sales tax exemption would help to provide substantial savings to the City.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that Ramsey does not receive LGA and therefore the sales tax exemption would help to equal that disparity.

Representative Heinrich stated that he signed the Bill that included the sales tax exemption that was forwarded from Senator Abeler.

Representative Scott referenced the Water Treatment Plant and asked if that will be solely Ramsey's or whether that would be regional.

City Administrator Ulrich replied that the City was involved in a regional treatment study using surface water from the Mississippi but that was proven to be not feasible and therefore Ramsey is pursuing its own Water Treatment Plant in order to address its issues with manganese.

Representative Scott asked the cost.

City Administrator Ulrich replied that the estimated cost is between \$32,000,000 and \$36,000,000 which will be funded primarily through water utility revenue by the utility users. He stated that they will be researching whether capital dollars are available for water treatment based on health issues.

Senator Abeler stated that they could support that effort.

Elwyn Tinklenberg commented that it is a treat to work with these legislators as they are informed, engaged and supportive of City issues. He commented that part of that effectiveness is evident by the support for Highway 10.

## **2.02: Receive Update on Highway 10/169 Planning, Design and Funding Efforts**

Joe MacPherson commented that the legislators have been very supportive in gaining funding for Highway 10, noting that if everything goes well, they could be at \$92,000,000 in funding which would leave a gap of \$46,000,000. He commented that a lot of work has been done over the past six months and reviewing the estimate to ensure it is accurate and true prior to the 2021 session.

Jason Orcutt commented that it is good to have a supportive team for this project. He stated that they are currently in the layout development phase and are expediting the required process as quickly as possible while still hearing input from the community. He stated that public involvement is important and recognized that the past year has created challenges. He stated that they are working with Bolton and Menk as to how the presentation can be shared online and how

that can be done equitably to ensure all members of the community can be engaged. He stated that this is a large project and identified the area in which information and notification will be provided to ensure that both residents and users will be informed. He reviewed the base concept that was previously shown and identified the refinements that have been identified through the value engineering study.

Councilmember Specht referenced the Sunfish right-of-way that would be needed and asked for details.

Mr. Orcutt replied that they are looking at Do All Printing and Plants and Things. He stated that the parcel next to the hotel had previously been identified but the refined design has avoided that as well as providing more consistent access to businesses. He reviewed the adjustments that were done and the benefits that were able to be provided through that process. He highlighted the next steps for the process.

Representative Heinrich asked for information on the traffic counts compared to 35.

Mr. Orcutt commented that there has been a decline with COVID, but they will continue to base their projections on pre-COVID numbers.

Senator Abeler asked if PDF's could be forwarded to the representatives to share to increase awareness for the project.

Councilmember Specht referenced the area where the postcards are being sent and commented that it would be great to spread that area because not all residents go on Facebook or the City website.

Jerry Auge commented that with the virtual settings of meetings they are looking at different ways to target people. He stated that they are looking at using GPS notifications for drivers that travel through the area along with social media. He stated that mailers will be sent to the corridor because those people have direct interest, but the network of interest is much larger than Ramsey and therefore they continue to explore additional opportunities.

Mayor Kuzma asked for input on how large trucks handle the roundabouts as there are many semitrucks that use this area.

Mr. Orcutt commented that as long as the roundabout is designed appropriately, they have been proven to be accommodating for large trucks. He stated that this team is experienced and would ensure it is large enough to support that activity.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill asked the level of comfort of the Council for the open house meeting. He stated that staff has thought about using the hybrid format, opening this room for those that wanted to attend in person with presentations to be provided virtually and additional attendees also allowed to participate remotely.

Mr. Tinklenberg commented that there is a great opportunity to finish the funding this year, and next, as there is momentum that has been gained. He appreciated the comment of where this has come from, especially where Ramsey was just a few years ago. He commented that the City is close to having \$92,000,000 in hand and that says a great deal about the leadership of the City in keeping that momentum going. He commented that the work the City and County have been doing to improve the design to not only improve traffic flow but also realize cost savings.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there would be an invite extended to Representative Emmer in regard to the Federal dollars. She asked when it would be known as to the cost savings that could be gained.

Mr. MacPherson replied that over the next few weeks they will look at the original estimate and compare that to the value engineering to ensure that everything is well identified and in the right categories. He stated that they may choose to move forward with the original estimate or may choose to reduce the project estimate consistent with the value engineering estimates. He commented that this project is going in the right direction with a great team.

Mr. Tinklenberg commented that they have a great working relationship with Representative Emmer's office, and they have been working on language issues that provide context for this to continue to move forward. He noted that is also true of the offices of Senators Smith and Klobuchar as well.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that it is good to hear that support to help move this forward.

Mr. Tinklenberg commented that a lot will depend on what happens with COVID and whether people will host in person meetings. He stated that it may be helpful to consider a trip to DC in the spring to have some conversations about the project and reinforce support for the project.

Representative Heinrich asked for input on whether this would be competition for Highway 65.

Mr. MacPherson acknowledged that Blaine is excited about that project and that is their priority. He stated that the priority of Anoka County continues to be Highway 10 at this time until that project is done. He noted that Blaine is attempting to move forward on a segment of 65 this year, south of 105<sup>th</sup> and will pursue bonding for a design development at this time. He stated that the County continues to focus on Highway 10.

Representative Heinrich thanked Mr. Tinklenberg and Mr. MacPherson for their efforts and open communication throughout this process.

Mr. Tinklenberg commented that one of the huge advantages for Highway 10 is that these would be the last dollars to complete the project. He noted that this would also add value to job creation and economic development.

Mayor Kuzma thanked everyone for coming and speaking tonight.

### **3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION**

#### **3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar**

City Administrator Ulrich commented that a list of future topics was included and asked the Council for input on the priorities of those items. He asked if the Council would be open to holding some special worksession meetings as well in order to address additional topics.

Councilmember Musgrove asked whether the Council would be open to starting worksessions at 5:00 p.m. rather than holding additional worksessions. She recognized that there are certain topics that take up the entire length of a worksession, such as budget and union negotiations.

Councilmember Specht stated that he could agree with a 5:00 p.m. start time or holding an additional worksession. He noted that some City Councils choose to continue their worksessions after regular sessions to continue discussions.

Councilmember Riley commented that rather than beginning early, he would prefer to hold a special worksession. He used the example of perhaps holding an extra session after the Public Works Committee meeting as three members of the Council are already present that night.

Councilmember Howell commented that she could support either.

Mayor Kuzma stated that he would support holding an additional worksession after the Public Works Committee meeting.

City Administrator Ulrich commented that for the time being, staff will schedule a regular worksession to follow the Public Works Committee meetings until these topics can be addressed.

### **4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT**

Councilmember Howell commented that her job as a Councilmember is to represent the residents and in order to do that, she needs to have accurate information in a timely manner. She stated that she requested information on Ordinance #21-04 15 days ago and still does not have that information. She commented that if the Council is intended to vote, the Council needs to have that information available to them. She stated that she requested financial information on January 13<sup>th</sup> and received that on January 21<sup>st</sup>. She stated that she was told by City Administrator Ulrich that it would take the Finance Director one day to gather that information but was told by Finance Director Lund that it took 30 minutes. She commented that the previous night at the EPB meeting she was cut off by the camera almost the entire length of the meeting. She stated that the power does not sit with the recommending bodies but with the Council. She commented that she finds this behavior unacceptable and feels that she is being hazed as a new member of the Council. She stated that she has asked for three things since she joined the Council and is unsure why those things cannot be provided. She stated that she is disappointed by the actions of staff.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that he treats all requests by the Council the same, noting that there is no interest in not responding to requests. He stated that he follows the capacity of staff.

He noted that while some financial things can be done with a push of a button, other things require a day of gathering data, therefore there is perhaps a difference in interpretation. He stated that a lot of information is being made available related to water conservation, noting that will come forward to the Council. He stated that staff is working on the underlying statutory language related to the model ordinance. He stated that they have reached out the League of Minnesota Cities but do not feel an adequate answer has yet to be provided. He appreciated the input and noted that staff does the best job they can and will continue to do so. He noted that many of the answers are not immediate and are not always black and white. He stated that if there is a strong priority, staff will attempt to do so, but if the request allows additional time, staff would appreciate that flexibility because they have to complete their typical duties as well.

Councilmember Howell stated that she understands that but believes that 15 days is adequate time to address her concern.

City Administrator Ulrich noted that item was removed from the agenda based on input received from the Council. He stated that an ordinance requires two readings, with two weeks between readings and advised that changes can be made between the first and second readings. He noted that the introduction is meant for the purpose of introducing the idea and gathering input from the Council. He commented that it was not meant to be a final ordinance or to rush it through. He stated that ordinance has been rescheduled for a worksession based on the concerns of several Councilmembers.

Councilmember Howell stated that her question was not replied to.

Mayor Kuzma commented that the point has been made.

Councilmember Specht commented that when he has made a request, staff has often replied that it may take a few days to get that information which has been helpful.

## **5. ADJOURNMENT**

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kurtis G. Ulrich  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

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Katie M. Schmidt  
Deputy City Clerk

Drafted by Amanda Staple, *TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*