

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Special Work Session on Tuesday, February 16, 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
Fire Chief Matt Kohner
Police Chief Jeff Katers
Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood
Public Works Superintendent Grant Riemer
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher
Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill
Communications and Events Coordinator Megan Thorstad
Councilmember Elect Ryan Heineman
Planning Commission Chairperson Randy Bauer
Planning Commissioner Gary VanScoy
Planning Commissioner Bruce Anderson

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Kuzma called the City Council Work Session to order at 6:15 p.m.

Councilmember Musgrove expressed concern with beginning the meeting early.

Mayor Kuzma confirmed that the meeting was noticed for a 6:15 p.m. start.

Councilmember Musgrove provided input on the process noting that perhaps it is understood that the information in the case was reviewed prior to the meeting with the meeting time more focused on discussion in order to allow the Council to move through topics more quickly.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Discussion Regarding Duty Officer On-Call Pay

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the staff report.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that the case provides a great explanation on the value of the duty officer. He noted that this responsibility has been in place for ten years, but times have changed, and other cities are paying, therefore it is important and the right thing to do to compensate those that are waiting at home for the pager to go off. He stated that there is a big value to having an officer that can respond from their home.

Councilmember Riley asked if people volunteer to be the duty officer.

Fire Chief Kohner replied that they are not volunteers but a group of officers that are designated as duty on-call. He stated that there are seven officers that choose different weeks of availability to be on-call.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she appreciates the restructuring that occurred for the duty officer wages, which resulted in a savings for the City. She asked for more detail on the readiness for the on-call position, specifically whether they are just waiting at home.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that during the specific timeframe they have to be at home and ready to respond to any calls, should the pager go off.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for input on the two options for pay.

Fire Chief Kohner explained that these were examples from neighboring cities. He stated that although the purpose of a duty officer is the same, the hours could be slightly different. He stated that Ramsey would be paying two hours per day, which would equate to 14 hours per week whereas Andover pays 24 hours in one week. He confirmed that officers would still receive compensation when responding to a call.

Councilmember Musgrove referenced the comments that these funds would come from the 2021 budget and asked for further details on how this could have been included in the budget.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the funding listed within the case is the amount that would be required based on the current employee hourly wages and hours staffed. She stated that this has been on the to do list for staff for multiple years and therefore believed that the dollars were built into the budget in anticipation of this action and therefore this would not cause wages to go over budget.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would want to know more about how this was budgeted and the funding available.

Mayor Kuzma stated that the question would be whether duty officers are compensated for taking time out of their lives to commit to an on-call shift. He stated that other cities are paying their duty officers and therefore it would be fair to compensate these employees.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that although the pay structure is different, this would mirror the on-call public works staff compensation.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if firefighters received a cost of living increase each year.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that the pay scale was restructured last year and provided additional details. He noted that officers can increase their wages through years of service and additional training initiatives.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that she would want to ensure that the City is competitive in its wages for firefighters.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that Ramsey is probably a little lower than neighboring communities.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would like to see additional budget information as to the available funds.

Fire Chief Kohner stated that he makes his best guess on what the on-call pay will be for a year but that varies based on the number of calls.

City Administrator Ulrich recognized the desire to have additional information, noting that staff can bring that information forward in the formal Council case to consider this item on a regular Council agenda.

Mayor Kuzma confirmed the consensus of the Council to bring this forward for formal consideration.

Councilmember Riley asked if there are other policy decisions that have been built into the budget.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that he is unsure and is not sure this was built in as a policy, or whether it simply fell within the on-call budget for the year. He confirmed that he could bring that information back to the Council.

2.04: Review Current Multifamily Housing Policies and Receive Update on Current Requests for Interest by Multifamily Housing Developers

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill noted that there were requests from members of the Planning Commission to move up cases 2.04 and 2.03 because of time constraints and confirmed the consensus of the Council to move this case up to this position with case 2.03 to follow.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill reviewed the staff report.

Mayor Kuzma commented that there are 552 businesses in Ramsey that employ over 7,000 people. He noted that not all of those employees are able to afford \$500,000 homes and typically begin in apartment living and move through different housing levels during their lives. He commented that Ramsey needs to provide housing options for all of its residents. He stated that he was approached by a business that would like to locate in Ramsey offering assisted living to seniors, which would provide jobs as well. He stated that he does not want Ramsey to have the reputation of not being open to options and at least consider projects developers bring forward.

Councilmember Riley commented that he would advocate for a pause for all of the development to catch up. He stated that Ramsey was successful getting apartments built, with at least six buildings in The COR. He stated that the housing part has come forward and the eat and shop options need the opportunity to catch up. He proposed that City land not be sold for apartments at this time.

Councilmember Howell stated that she would also like to focus on allowing other types of development to catch up and pause multifamily housing within The COR.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if potential projects would come in on parcels already zoned for high density residential.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that there has been a request for multifamily housing on the old Diamonds parcel, which is not currently zoned for that use. He stated that typically multifamily housing comes with some type of economic assistance request.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would agree to pause apartments and focus on the other types of development. She asked if there is information known as to the availability of the apartments in The COR.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill replied that before the pandemic the workforce units were filling prior to completion of the building with a waiting list developed. He stated that market rate apartments were filling within one year to 18 months. He stated that he has not yet received information on the senior and market rate apartments that have recently been completed.

Planning Commissioner Chairperson Randy Bauer stated that the Planning Commission is very interested in this topic. He stated that this was scheduled for a previous worksession discussion, but the time ran short. He stated that when reviewing the plan for The COR there are areas designated for multifamily, both developed and not yet developed. He stated that retailers want to see rooftops before they felt it economically feasible to open retail in The COR, therefore the two developments work hand in hand. He stated that pausing multifamily with the desire to attract retail could actually create the opposite action. He stated that many retailers are not going forward because of COVID but housing continues. He stated that this would be an opportunity to allow additional multifamily housing developments to come forward in The COR which will in turn attract retailers when they come back to the market after COVID.

Councilmember Specht commented that in a previous case related to the potential for billboards a comment was made that population is no longer the issue deterring retailers but instead it is related to visibility from Highway 10. He stated that the City can continue to offer affordable housing in small detached single-family homes and pause multifamily development.

Planning Commissioner Gary VanScoy commented that the development Councilmember Specht referenced has houses beginning in a value of \$350,000, which he would not consider affordable. He commented that not all jobs are located within The COR and therefore there should be

consideration for affordable housing outside of that area. He did not understand a desire to pause development on land that is already zoned for that purpose.

Planning Commissioner Bruce Anderson stated that he also does not understand the desire for a pause as there are two or three additional parcels within The COR designated for multifamily. He commented that once those parcels are filled, it would require a change to the Comprehensive Plan to consider additional multifamily housing. He stated that he would not support changing the Comprehensive Plan at this time but would want to see the designated land allowed to be developed.

Councilmember Musgrove asked the percentage of land that is left within The COR designated as R-3.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that previous calculation was based on acreage rather than unit count. He noted that there are a few parcels within The COR that have a flex designation that could be further reviewed in the future.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed that the Council needs to continue to discuss this topic. He stated that in terms of the housing options for residence he would want to know where Ramsey rates in its offering of affordable housing.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that balance needs to be determined by the Council. He noted that in the past the guide was set as ten percent for rental housing. He stated that he is hearing support for a pause on City owned land and development that would require subsidy.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he sides with the Planning Commission and does not understand why the City would stop the sale of its City owned land for development if the land is zoned appropriately. He stated that many people are having to downsize and change their housing situation and therefore it would make sense to have a variety of housing options.

Councilmember Howell stated that she has heard comments from residents that the shops in Ramsey do not cater to the people in apartments, which is why the shops leave the City.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she believes the City needs to focus and be more receptive to businesses. She stated that there was a business that wanted to come into The COR in the hotel location, but it was determined that was not appropriate. She stated that an auto parts store was also deemed inappropriate for the proposed location. She stated that she would like to see staff and other Commissions work harder to bring in retail. She commented that the City has a good mix of housing options and wants to see more of a drive to attract retail. She believed that once that happens there would be more support to allow additional multifamily housing. She commented that within her HOA there is a cap of 10 percent of rental units in order to maintain property values. She believed that there is a balance of housing options and the effort should be focused on attracting businesses.

Mayor Kuzma commented that O'Reilly Auto Parts is coming in and the hotel project is on pause because of COVID, not any action of the City.

Councilmember Woestehoff noted that the other business that proposed to locate on the hotel site was Suite Living, which located to another site in Ramsey.

Mayor Kuzma stated that he agrees with the Planning Commission that it does not make sense to pause land that is already zoned for that purpose. He believed that additional housing would help to attract retailers.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill recognized that there are good points on both sides, but it seems that the majority support keeping the current policy.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that there are some multifamily housing developments that are owner occupied. He stated that the units do not fall within the affordable range but do provide nice developments. He asked if the Council would be open to that type of owner-occupied multifamily development, because those are good projects that could help support areas such as this.

Councilmember Howell stated that her opposition is not related to affordability and therefore she would like to focus on economic development and pause multifamily.

Councilmember Elect Heineman commented that there has to be a goal. He stated that if you are bringing people in there has to be a quality of life to support those people, such as retail, entertainment, and established boulevards. He stated that there are new apartment buildings but that simply brings in a large group of people without the supported infrastructure and needed amenities. He believed that bringing population into the City in this manner is not a viable solution.

Planning Commissioner Anderson commented that Ramsey has a lack of communication to its residents on what it takes to bring businesses in. He stated that residents do not understand that it takes a certain population and level of income in order to attract retailers. He stated that there is a communication problem in explaining this to residents and there needs to be an education campaign aimed at residents, explaining what it takes to bring retailers to the City.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill commented that the general consensus seems to continue the current policy to pause City owned land and projects that request subsidy.

Councilmember Woestehoff was unsure why the City owned land would be taken off the table. He asked if there would be opposition to a market rate project that sells City owned land and does not require a change in zoning.

Councilmember Howell stated that she would still want to see a pause as she believes The COR has too many apartment buildings and they need to review options for the land and allow the other markets to catch up. She stated that the stores available in Ramsey do not suit the needs of those living in apartments.

2.03: Review Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Ordinance Update

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for more information on the definition of tall grass and vegetative removal and how residents would be made aware. She asked about the segment of Sunfish that goes on the other side of 10 and whether that would impact Highway 10 construction.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that vegetative removal is related to significant trees rather than mowing. He stated that of the complaints related to the river, the most complaints are received for tree cutting. He stated that when the district was established there was not authority to change the outside boundaries, which is how the subdistrict came forward, as separated from river. He stated that the boundary lines were created following section boundaries of the river rather than specifics in the area.

Councilmember Musgrove referenced the standards comparison within the case and asked for more clarity on the items that generally remain unchanged. She stated that when she thinks of vegetation she thinks of grasses and plants rather than trees. She stated that it would appear people on private property would follow City Code rather than the district.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill replied that City Code administers these provisions. He explained that these rules have been provided by the State through the DNR and City Code enforces those regulations. He stated that there were questions related to vegetative removal during the rule making process and advised where additional information can be found on that aspect.

Councilmember Riley stated that he is concerned with the undeveloped properties, noting that the City should watch what is being limited for the Nathe property and the parcel closer to Sunfish Lake Boulevard.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill replied that the Sunfish Lake Boulevard guiding would better match the Comprehensive Plan guiding and provide more flexibility. He stated that the City asked about the Nathe property and made official comment. He stated that the City comment was not accepted but there was a compromise and provided additional details. He stated that if the City wanted to be more proactive it could ask the legislature to make a change but noted that could open up more review of the corridor. He stated that the DNR would possibly be willing to provide flexibility, providing an example in the City of Champlin that was allowed by the DNR in order to allow the City's project to move forward.

Councilmember Specht stated that it sounds like this will benefit residents in some ways, like expansion on nonconforming uses but asked what some of the negatives may be.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill recognized the need for a vegetative permit but stated that overall; the rules will be relaxed in Ramsey. He commented that staff feels the benefit will far outweigh any negatives.

Councilmember Specht asked what would happen if the City were not to adopt these changes.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill replied that the City is required to adopt these changes, noting a deadline of 2022 for the City's update. He noted that Ramsey is advancing the process more quickly in order to assist a potential project.

Councilmember Howell asked if the permits would be a requirement of the DNR.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill confirmed that the DNR delegated that authority to the City to issue the permits. He noted that there are minimum standards for the permit, but it would be the choice of the City as to whether to charge a fee for the permit. He stated that he is not concerned with charging a fee for the permit.

Councilmember Musgrove referenced statements within the staff report related to Park Boards for other municipalities and asked for additional explanation.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill replied that this is a model ordinance, and it provided those examples. He noted that in this area, Anoka County would manage its regional parks areas. He noted that park agencies have no jurisdiction over private property but must comply with the rules for its own parks.

Councilmember Howell referenced the language shown in blue, which was noted as optional and asked where that came from.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill noted that those were best practices suggested by the DNR and advised that staff did not include the optional pieces unless directed otherwise.

Councilmember Riley commented that Anoka County has a large park in this area and asked if the County provided input.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill confirmed that Anoka County was involved in the rule making discussions and provided input similar to Ramsey. He stated that the river communities in this area worked together to express a common voice.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill confirmed the consensus of the Council to bring the ordinance forward for its first reading on a regular Council meeting agenda.

2.02: Discussion Regarding the Planning of 2021 City Events

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad reviewed the staff report.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood provided input on the concerts scheduled for the 2021 season.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill noted that the EDA will not be holding the spring expo but will keep a potential to connect residents to businesses in the fall, pending regulations.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that both police and fire hold community open house events and other public engagement activities which are shown on the schedule and will be dependent on guidance from the Governor at that time.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that overall, she would like to see the City do as much as it can in terms of events. She hoped that the City would not have to use tickets and require residents to register for the concerts as it is open space and people could be spread out. She asked if the expo is already canceled.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill commented with an event of that size they could not plan well enough in advance for April and therefore that has been postponed. He hoped that perhaps that could be done in October if regulations are loosened.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested possibly holding the event during the summer months.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that staff has to use the best guidance estimates and to hold an indoor event during June/July would seem optimistic. He stated that signs would point towards fall being a better opportunity but noted that staff will review the options when it is closer to the time needed for planning.

Councilmember Howell asked if it would be within the purview of the Mayor and the City Administrator to make a decision to drastically change or modify events without input from the Council.

Mayor Kuzma commented that any change would come before the Council.

Councilmember Howell asked if the Council could have input on different changes for events, such as tree lighting. She believed that tweaks should come before the Council if possible.

City Administrator Ulrich agreed that is a reasonable approach. He explained that the tree lighting was shifted on a staff level and recognized the disappointment that some members of the Council expressed. He agreed that it would make sense to bring format changes to the Council for discussion. He noted that events typically have a three-to-four-month lead time and advised that input from the Council could be incorporated into the process.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood provided background information on the difficulties in the tree lighting event, noting a connection that was lost at Connexus as well as COVID challenges and regulations. He confirmed that options can be brought to the Council this year and better explain the known cost.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that Anoka has a large tree lighting each year and perhaps that staff could provide a connection. She noted that there is also a tree business in Ramsey that may be willing to participate.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that staff will gather input from those sources.

Councilmember Riley recognized that there are limits but would like to see staff find a way to say yes for events.

Councilmember Specht agreed that he would like to see as many events move forward as possible.

City Administrator Ulrich referenced the alternative events that were offered and whether the Council received input on which of those offerings were liked.

Councilmember Specht stated that his daughter liked the smaller lit tree since the large tree lighting was not possible.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that she has heard that the residents like the crafts and activities and Santa line events from 2019. She stated that young families like those events and she would like to see a way to make those happen. She stated that perhaps there is a way the City can work creatively with the schools in Ramsey.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that perhaps families could provide homemade ornaments and the City could decorate the tree with those.

Councilmember Specht referenced a private event that was City marketed, the storybook trail, which was enjoyed by many residents. He stated that it would be great to continue to look for those partnership opportunities.

Councilmember Riley commented that the EDA golf tournament was one of the first events and many residents and businesses were happy to participate in that event.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed with those comments. He noted that the parks and rec bingo was a great offering as well. He stated that last year was a great year for golf facilities and asked if there was feedback that the course would rather be open to the public rather than holding that event.

Councilmember Riley commented that the event was shifted to Rum River Hills from Northfork because the banquet facility was not needed.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill commented that Rum River Hills was happy to host the golf event but noted that if the banquet can be held this year the event would need to be shifted back to Northfork.

City Administrator Ulrich confirmed the consensus of the Council for staff to proceed with Happy Days to the extent possible and if certain elements cannot be held, alternatives should be explored.

Councilmember Musgrove asked that plans be flexible in a manner which could adapt if the regulations from the Governor are loosened.

Communications and Events Coordinator Thorstad stated that as related to Happy Days staff will plan for a typical event. She stated that with the unknowns from COVID regulations, they will hold off on signing contracts and ensure that there is a clause that protects the City if regulations prohibit the event.

3. OTHER

Councilmember Musgrove stated that cases are well put together with the Council developing their questions off that information. She asked if it is necessary for staff to summarize the information in the case during the meeting as it takes away from the time for discussion. She stated that would allow the Council to move through topics more quickly and hold fewer special meetings. She clarified that this suggestion would only apply to worksessions.

Councilmember Specht commented that there are times when things are being discussed multiple times when the background is perhaps redundant or drawn out. He stated that perhaps there is a goal for length of staff presentations.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that staff could assume that the Council has read the entire case. He noted that while that works in a worksession presentation, staff would like to provide some background for the public that may be watching.

Councilmember Howell agreed that perhaps staff presentations could be shortened in order to allow for additional Council discussion.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed. He noted that he attempts to provide his questions to staff ahead of time so that answers can be prepared by staff prior to the meeting. He noted that as liaisons or members of other groups, Councilmembers often hear the same presentation multiple times.

It was confirmed that this would apply to worksessions.

4. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
Deputy City Clerk

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.