

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, August 25, 2020, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor John LeTourneau
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
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
City Engineer Bruce Westby
Senior Planner Chloe McGuire Brigl
Building Official Jesse Szykulski

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: 2021 General Fund/Lund Review – Continued Discussion

Finance Director Lund reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Riley asked if CARES Funds should be used for the increase in the audit.

Finance Director Lund explained that the audit will take place in 2021 and the CARES funds need to be spent prior to 2021.

Councilmember Musgrove referenced the Community Development positions, which are budget neutral, and asked for details on how those positions are budget neutral.

Finance Director Lund provided additional explanation.

Councilmember Specht asked the estimated completion of the Public Works Facility.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer stated that it is scheduled to be completed in October 2021.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she still would like to discuss the personnel positions. She commented that things are tough in the economy and she is not sure she could support all the positions.

Mayor LeTourneau commented that the property values in the City are increasing and the City is healthy.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood explained that park staffing levels are the same as they were in 2006, even though the City has grown substantially since that time and maintenance demands have increased. He stated that the maintenance worker staffing is tracking below the trajectory of the needs. He stated that if they had additional maintenance staff that would get them above the level of 2006. He explained that they have not been able to find seasonal workers; therefore, they are using higher level staff to operate the mowers. He explained that they need a baseline of maintenance workers to allow the higher-level staff to concentrate on their duties. He stated that this position would help the City to maintain its existing level of service.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer stated that parks and maintenance rely heavily on seasonal workers. He noted that they placed an ad for seasonal workers for the fall and have not had one person apply. He stated that the maintenance worker does more than mowing and helps with snow plowing.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that perhaps some lesser priority items be identified, such as mowing. She stated that perhaps City staff can look at creative ways to advertise for the seasonal help positions.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained how positions are listed for the City, noting that the City attempts to cast a wide net.

Councilmember Riley asked for some of things that are not getting done on time or at all due to staffing shortages.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer stated that weed whipping has fallen behind. He stated that there are hundreds or thousands of children using the fields and parks and people expect those to be mowed and the trash to be emptied.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that there are countless things that need attention in each park and noted that many of the City parks need landscaping work, which has fallen behind. He stated that they are just responding to the bigger items that occur and the basic items have fallen behind.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he has heard comments that the maintenance of the parks is subpar, and he supports the maintenance worker position.

Councilmember Specht asked if there are parks that are not well utilized that could have lesser maintenance with focus on the more heavily used parks.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that there are a few small neighborhood parks on the outside of the community and there was a lot of pushback in the past when maintenance of those parks was lessened. He stated that he could bring forward a list of parks where maintenance could be discontinued or old equipment could be removed, but there will be pushback from the community.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he receives comments from people that are not pleased when their neighbors do not mow their lawns and would caution against the City not following the same regulations it expects residents to follow.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that in a year of COVID and challenges to the economy, she believes that this is an ask two to three years too late as the service matrix are not being met. She stated that perhaps the service matrix should be adjusted higher.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that the projections had showed a maintenance person each year and agreed that this position would have been helpful earlier. He stated that in the first weeks of COVID, the parks and trails were used more heavily than ever before and are still being heavily used. He stated that there is a point where you cannot let mowing get too far behind. He stated that he would love to convert more of the parks space to natural landscaping which would create fewer landscaping needs.

City Administrator Ulrich asked how many acres could perhaps be turned back to natural landscaping.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood estimated that perhaps 10 percent of the area could be converted to native landscaping.

Councilmember Menth stated that he was the worker in the construction field and was shocked when he went into the construction office and found out that they sent the workers to the job late with the expectation that they would work harder. He stated that method only works for so long as people get annoyed and depressed with that method. He stated that he supports the new parks worker as this position is three years behind and additional parks continue to be added and maintenance needs to continue.

Councilmember Riley stated that the parks are a face of the community and he is in favor of this position. He challenged staff to find more savings in the overall budget.

Councilmember Specht stated that after receiving the additional information he would support the parks position if additional savings can be found elsewhere.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that the City needs to take better care of its parks system and supports this position.

Councilmember Riley referenced the communications position and stated that he does not see a full-time job within the description and would like to talk about reducing that position or combining it with another. He recognized that communication is important for the City but would like to find a different way to meet that need.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that this position was added after discussions on how the world was changing and there was a need to be transparent and communicate the good work that is being done by the City with the residents. He stated that perhaps there is a future discussion on how the position could be reevaluated to ensure that the needs and expectations are being met.

Councilmember Kuzma commented that there is often false information circulating and it should be important to have something in place to counteract that. He stated that perhaps the position is needed as a part-time position.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that the communications person is in charge of ensuring that the messaging of the City is consistent throughout all departments.

Councilmember Musgrove noted that the newsletter is not prepared in-house and therefore is not a responsibility of this position.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that the communications position is responsible for editing the articles submitted by departments and placing them into the proper format. He stated that content is generated both by departments and the communications position. He stated that communication was and still is viewed as an important element. He explained that is not just the newsletter but also the website, press releases, and social media. He stated that the position could be scaled back, noting that communications is proactive and could instead be reactive. He noted that the position also handles events and the City could scale those back as well or not hold events.

Councilmember Musgrove asked how those duties were completed prior to this position.

City Administrator Ulrich explained how the newsletter duties occurred prior to this position. He explained how this position has been important in communicating news about COVID. He provided details on how the position duties are being handled at this time.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the position is split between communications and events and provided additional details on the job description.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that while he agrees that the Council could review the scope of the position, he would not want to see it eliminated, as it is important for the City to have consistent messaging.

Police Chief Katers commented that it was important for the City to have this position during the recent challenges of COVID.

Councilmember Menth commented that the City can do the best job but if that is not communicated to the public, it will not be known. He stated that whatever the City does, it needs to be communicated to the public.

Councilmember Riley stated that his frustration is perhaps that the position should be better defined to ensure the desired results are being achieved.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that staff puts a lot into their communications and feels that the existing staff can meet that objective without the additional position.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that if that role is removed, it would become clear as to the void that would be created. He noted that the members of the Council that predate that position are aware of what that situation is like.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that it seems that there is consensus that there is work to do on better defining the position to meet the expectations of the Council.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would be interested in seeing the other side, as to what it would look like without that position.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for details on the public works equipment requests.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer provided additional details on that equipment.

Finance Director Lund asked if there is consensus on the preliminary budget for adoption at the proposed increase rate of 5.72 percent. She noted that the Council can continue to make reductions prior to the final adoption in December but that figure could not be increased.

City Administrator Ulrich explained that his preference would be to have the Council provide the direction on where it would like to be and staff could then come back with an explanation of which items/services could be cut to meet that goal. He stated that originally, the goal of six percent was provided from the Council and staff has met that goal.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the police body cameras could be purchased in halves and the likelihood of receiving grants for the purchase.

Police Chief Katers replied that if the equipment is to be purchased, he would want all officers to have the body cameras and not half of the officers. He stated that the possibility of obtaining grants for that purchase is very low.

Councilmember Menth stated that he is comfortable with the proposed budget as staff met the goal provided by the Council and it would be unfair to continue to move that target.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that she would like to see the budget continue to be reduced. She stated that she would like to have additional discussion related to COLA.

Councilmember Riley stated that he did suggest the goal of six percent. He noted that since that time the City received CARES funds and would like to move the target. He believed that five percent could be the new target as new money was provided to the City that was not expected.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he believes that the wants and needs should be better defined.

Councilmember Specht stated that people in the community are feeling strains and cuts in their own budgets and believed the City should do the same. He believed that additional cuts should be made.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that staff will examine how five percent could be met and the items/services that would need to be scaled back in order to meet that potential goal.

2.02: Discussion Regarding Union Contract Negotiations for AFSCME, LELS-Patrol, LELS-Sergeants & LELS-Captains (Discussion Closed to the Public)

Item not discussed.

2.03: Discuss 2020 Citizen Survey

Item not discussed.

2.04: Discuss Council Committee Appointments Due to the Ward 1 Vacancy

Item not discussed.

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 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:



Katie M. Schmidt
Administrative Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.