

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, December 11, 2018, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor John LeTourneau
Councilmember Jill Johns
Councilmember Mark Kuzma
Councilmember Debra Musgrove
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Melody Shryock (arrived at 6:35 p.m.)

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Police Chief Jeff Katers
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher
Community Development Director Timothy Gladhill
Councilmember Elect Nadine Heinrich
Planning Commissioner Bruce Anderson

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor LeTourneau called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:31 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Consider Extension for Temporary Fulfilling Needed Building Inspection Services

Community Development Director Gladhill reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Johns asked and received confirmation that the request for the engineering admin to transition from part-time to full-time is as of July 1, 2019.

Community Development Director Gladhill noted that this request will help the department to catch up and stay current with the demands that arise in the spring. He did not anticipate that additional assistance would be needed after June 2019. He simply asked for consensus from the Council.

Councilmember Riley stated that he likes the presentation of this case and believes it to be a flexible solution that he can support.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that there was a previous comment made about concern of burnout of engineering staff and asked if this would put additional stress on the engineering department.

Community Development Director Gladhill noted that transition to a full-time position for the engineering admin is not budgeted until July 1, 2019 and therefore this will not place additional burden on that department.

The consensus of the Council was to approve the extension for temporary fulfilling needed for building inspection services.

2.02: Discussion Regarding the Annual Performance Review of the City Administrator, an Individual Who is Subject to the City Council's Authority (May be closed to the public)

Motion by Councilmember Johns, seconded by Councilmember Kuzma, to recess the meeting to Closed Session at 5:39 p.m.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Acting Mayor LeTourneau, Councilmembers Johns, Kuzma, Musgrove, Riley, and Shryock. Voting No: None.

The meeting reconvened to Open Session at 6:00 p.m.

Administrative Services Director Lasher noted that the City Council discussed the performance of the City Administrator in closed session and will take formal action at the next City Council meeting in January.

2.03: Review Administration and Enforcement of City Code Violations

Community Development Director Gladhill reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Riley asked if it would carry more weight and authority for the police department to follow up on enforcement, as the comment was made that residents sometimes do not take the comments from planning staff as seriously. He noted that could be a poor use of the police staff.

Community Development Director Gladhill provided additional input on enforcement, noting that planning staff sometimes use the police Community Service Officer, but has more recently received assistance from the City Attorney in drafting letters, which has seemed to be more effective. He estimated that perhaps there are two to three cases per year in which planning asks for assistance from the police department. He noted that there are some types of cases that are handled by the police department.

Police Chief Katers estimated that the police department handles about 420 code enforcement cases per year, varying in degree from noise complaints to blight and other issues. He stated that 90 percent of the cases are resolved after the first contact by the police department but explained that the expenses are generated through the repeat offenders. He stated that the goal is compliance and agreed that assistance from the City Attorney is often helpful. He stated that there are problem properties that remain as offenders for multiple years.

Mayor LeTourneau asked how much of the cost can be recovered for problem properties that require abatement.

Police Chief Katers replied that abatement is included as a line item in the budget and will be assessed back to the offending property. He stated that the cost is recovered but it could span a few years before that cost is recovered. He stated that abatement is expensive. He explained that a contractor charges more because they already have contracts for service and therefore charge the City a higher rate because the properties are in a bad situation. He provided the example of long grass in which the grass is one to two feet high when abatement is actually completed.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that when there are hardship issues, staff is willing to work with property owners to get the help they need or provide them with the proper resources.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that staff has the ability to grant extensions and looks for signs of progress. He recognized that not all property owners are aware of zoning code requirements. He explained that some property owners need additional time because of hardships and noted that there is another category where the homeowner simply keeps pushing the extension. He reviewed a proposed process for extensions that could provide a balance of being fair to homeowners but also ensuring that compliance is reached. He referenced the issue of blighted properties and noted that in cases where there is financial hardship, there are sometimes funds available through Anoka County to assist in providing funding assistance.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that sometimes church or community groups are willing to provide assistance as well for residents in the community that need help because of a hardship.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that staff does have connections available for government agencies or non-profits, but stated that while there would be additional opportunities, City staff needs to be careful with which private groups they would recommend. He noted that in a case of financial hardship, it would not be the City's position to broadcast them to obtain offers of assistance.

Councilmember Kuzma recognized that staff is not proactively looking for violations. He agreed that the current method for the first notice would be sufficient but then believed that additional force could be placed on the second contact.

Community Development Director Gladhill further explained the process that staff follows for violations including administrative citations.

Councilmember Riley agreed that the focus should not be on the exceptions and extensions but on the property owners that are ignoring the notices and citations.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that if there is a bank that is not reacting on a foreclosed property, a letter from the City Attorney would probably provide more enforcement.

Community Development Director Gladhill noted that while that was a larger problem in 2008 when foreclosures were high, that has declined as an issue as the number of foreclosed properties has decreased.

Mayor LeTourneau used an example of a resident that expressed concerns with a neighboring property that has long grass and home occupation violations. He stated that was a rare example of one of those worst-case scenarios. He recognized how the community has changed over time as the development has continued to change from rural to more developing and the newer residents tend to have less tolerance for some of the violation issues. He stated that it seems as though the standards are more relaxed in the rural areas of the community and stricter in the developed areas because of the resident expectations. He stated that it often seems that some residents know how to “game the system” to get through an entire season without solving the problem.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that originally, the City used certified mail, but residents determined that they could refuse the certified mail and therefore the City discontinued that method.

Councilmember Johns agreed that there is a problem on certain cases with the time that it takes to come into compliance, which can stretch over multiple seasons. She was unsure how that could be addressed, suggesting that perhaps the timeline to address the violation shrinks for repeat violations.

Community Development Director Gladhill agreed that if there is a reoccurring issue the trigger would be quicker, the ability to grant extensions would shrink, and the administrative fines would increase. He stated that in regards to the rural versus developed areas, the process needs to be equitable. He stated that some zoning standards are more relaxed in the rural areas but noted that some of the more complex violation cases occur in the rural areas.

Councilmember Johns stated that she would like staff to review what is allowed as she believes that some of the allowed issues are excessive.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that staff will see how the new approach works in the next season, but noted that it would be dependent upon the development review that is needed in 2019 as well.

Councilmember Johns stated that she would perhaps support being more proactive on the main corridors but would support complaint-based reaction for residential areas. She noted that if there are repeat offenders, perhaps staff should continue to follow up on those properties to ensure that violations do not continue to occur.

Community Development Director Gladhill stated that there is not sufficient staff to switch to a proactive approach City-wide. He stated that there have been times when staff has done proactive violations on the main corridors, but there was a large pushback from the business community.

Ms. Heinrich stated that she has heard comments from the public that they appreciate that the City is not out proactively looking for violations. She stated that perhaps if the public is educated more and alerted that the system is complaint based, that would help to explain the process a bit better.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that once a violator is aware that the system is complaint based, they often bring in a list of violations that they have found in their neighborhood.

Police Chief Katers stated that for police enforcement, the complainant is kept confidential and therefore the police investigate the matter and the police would then become the complainant. He stated that the first question the police are asked when responding to a violation is who complained and because of a fear of retaliation, that information is kept confidential.

Councilmember Kuzma asked for information on whether the violation rates are proposed to change.

Community Development Director Gladhill reviewed the fee information, noting that it is not proposed to change, but noted that for problem properties the ladder could be climbed more quickly.

Community Development Director Gladhill confirmed that he has sufficient input from the Council.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

City Administrator Ulrich noted that January 15th has been set for the road maintenance discussion with the community. He stated that WSB staff will lead that discussion on the different funding options. He stated that the Council should begin to think of a date for a strategic planning session, which typically occurs in February or March. He stated that the annual organizational meeting will occur on January 8th, at which time Committee assignments and Board representation are designated. He stated that additional discussion will occur regarding funding for the public works facility. He noted that the historic townhall building will also need to be discussed as that building is deteriorating. He stated that the legislative priorities will be discussed at a future worksession with the City's representatives, potentially occurring in January.

Mayor LeTourneau advised of an annual cookie visit that the Council has done and noted that perhaps plates of cookies could be arranged and dropped off to each department, as a way of showing thanks.

Councilmember Riley stated that he would be in favor of giving the cookies, if the Council is welcome, but if the department would prefer not to receive the cookies, he would be fine with that as well.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that the public works trailer is already crowded and hot and perhaps it would be better to have the event held at City Hall rather than having the Council go to the trailer.

Ms. Heinrich stated that she believes that it would be important to show thanks to all departments and agreed that having the event at City Hall would be an opportunity for those that want to attend to attend. She stated that she would appreciate the ability to meet additional staff members.

It was the consensus of the Council to hold the annual cookie open house at City Hall with invitations open to all departments to occur on Monday, December 17th from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. in an open house format.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that in terms of the budget, she would need to start the hiring process immediately as a position is set to start on January 1. She confirmed the consensus of the Council to begin that process for those positions, pending the outcome of the budget discussion at the regular meeting tonight.

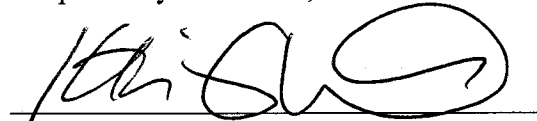
4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

None.

5. ADJOURNMENT

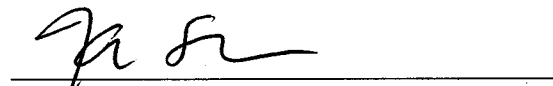
The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:



Katie M. Schmidt
Administrative Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.