

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Monday, August 10, 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: Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill
Finance Director Diana Lund
Fire Chief Matt Kohner (attended remotely)
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 (attended remotely)

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/Levy Review – Continued Discussion

Finance Director Lund reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Menth asked and received confirmation that staff union contracts have not yet been negotiated.

Councilmember Musgrove asked the positives and negatives in reducing the fund balance account from 50 to 45 percent.

Finance Director Lund provided details on the Fund Balance Policy.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for details on the Train Station and final payment.

Finance Director Lund replied that the final payment was made in 2018 for the Train Station. She stated that TIF 1 and 2 dollars were used to pay for the Train Station. She stated that the remainder would be used for 116 improvements within those districts as those are committed projects with the County.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the remaining funds in the TIF district would impact the budget.

Finance Director Lund confirmed that would not impact the budget.

Councilmember Musgrove referenced the proposed COLA, noting that negotiations with the unions has not yet begun. She stated that she would like to provide input.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the union negotiations process is outlined by State Statute and begins with a notice of desire to negotiate, which must begin 60 days before the expiration of the contract. She stated that the process begins well before that time and stated that she does have all of the notices and negotiations will begin as of August 30th. She stated that the Council does discuss the negotiations, but it would be hard for the Council to provide comments without having the initial proposal from the unions. She noted that she and the City Administrator provide updates and gather input from the Council four to five times during that process.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill noted that discussion does not need to occur prior to adoption of the preliminary levy and budget, as that figure can be reduced prior to final adoption. He commented that there will be time to discuss the negotiations and have that information back before the final adoption.

Councilmember Riley stated that perhaps there should be a closed session at some point for the Council to provide input on the negotiations. He also requested that a Councilmember be involved or present for the negotiation process.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he would be open to the suggestion and asked staff for input.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that she has never worked under that scenario, noting that she has been involved since 2004. She stated that there are frequent closed meetings with the Council to provide updates and obtain input from the Council during the negotiations.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill noted that the management team can discuss that option and bring a recommendation back to the Council.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he would be interested in feedback but would not want to put pressure on the negotiations.

Councilmember Kuzma commented that there was a Personnel Committee and asked why that is no longer ongoing.

Administrative Services Director Lasher provided background information and noted that because each of the Council members want to provide input it was redundant to hold a Personnel Committee meeting and then present and discuss that same information with the full Council.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would have concern with even a two percent COLA due to the current economy.

Mayor LeTourneau asked for input on the personnel requests.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for input on which of the two Police Department requests would be higher prioritized.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill noted that each of the department heads has prepared their own presentation and perhaps now would be a good time for those to occur, beginning with Police.

Police Chief Katers stated that he asked for both positions because he feels that the department needs both positions. He stated that the Patrol Officer is requested because of the increased calls for service. He stated that increased calls for service result in an increase amount of reporting and paperwork, which results in the Records Technician position. He reviewed the population and calls for service numbers that he uses to determine the number of Officers necessary. He stated that the Police run a tight ship and do not have extra personnel they can slide to cover other duties. He stated that these requests are to ensure that the department can continue to provide the same level of service. He stated that if he had to make a choice, he would want the Patrol Officer but noted that the Records Technician is also needed with the increased reporting and requests for data.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that if there is a potential to obtain outside funding down the road for body cameras, he would support waiting on that purchase. He stated that if body cameras are implemented, additional records staff would be needed for that duty as well.

Police Chief Katers confirmed that if body cameras are in effect and there are a lot of data requests related to body camera footage, additional staff would be needed. He stated that the position request in this budget cycle is based on the current needs of the department but confirmed that position could assist with body camera footage to begin.

Councilmember Riley stated that he believed the Records Technician position was related to body cameras and therefore if the body cameras are not included in the budget, he would believe the Records Technician would not be needed at this time.

Police Chief Katers reviewed the duties of the proposed position and noted that his request is based off of the current demands on the department.

Councilmember Musgrove thanked Police Chief Katers for the reductions that the department makes during these budget discussions. She stated that she would feel more comfortable with the Records Technician position starting January 1st as it sounds like the position is needed and the Patrol Officer is removed from the budget.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that while the COVID calls may be reduced in the future, the population continues to grow.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she could support the Records Technician but does not believe she could support both positions.

Councilmember Menth stated that the population is growing and the calls for service have increased. He stated that the Officers are asking for body cameras due to current events but because the Council is attempting the squeeze the budget, that equipment is being taken out. He stated that Ramsey should be cautious about becoming Minneapolis. He stated that he likes the Ramsey Police Department, who can respond to calls within five minutes. He stated that he would have a huge concern with squeezing requests from Police or Fire.

Councilmember Musgrove asked the number of staff members within the parks department.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer reviewed the flowchart for the Public Works and Parks Department and the duties of each of those employees. He stated that the Parks Department relies heavily on seasonal workers, noting that they hired everyone that applied and still only had nine seasonal employees, three of whom have already left. He reviewed the duties that those seasonal employees handle. He reviewed the number of work orders that have been completed and noted that Parks Maintenance Workers also assist with winter snow removal on sidewalks, trails, and skating rinks. He stated that he believes it is warranted to add another Parks Maintenance Worker as they have not requested additional staff for that position for the past 14 years, although the City has grown significantly during that time. He provided a list of the contracted work the City has for some of the duties.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for details on the use of contractors for certain duties and confirmed that as the population has grown, the use of contractors has increased. She stated that she favors the use of contractors as the relationship can be easily terminated and the cost can be negotiated through bidding. She stated that she cannot see the justification of another Parks worker this year due to COVID and the state of the economy.

Mayor LeTourneau asked why the City does not contract for this service.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer replied that not all services can be contracted for in a timely manner and have to be reacted to when they happen.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that staff has reviewed the effectiveness and cost efficiency of contracted services to determine which elements add value.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that staff reviews that closely and scrutinizes the ability to complete duties in-house compared to contracting. He stated that they contract the maintenance duties they can, but mowing is always more beneficial to complete in-house. He provided examples of troubles they have had with hiring mowing contractors. He

stated that they use contracted help whenever they can. He stated that the public infrastructure and parks are aging and in need of maintenance along with the increased population.

Councilmember Kuzma asked and received confirmation that this additional staff member would assist with snow removal. He stated that as the City grows and additional miles of roads are added, he would want to ensure that staff can keep up with the demands.

Mayor LeTourneau asked if staff has sufficient direction to move forward.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill reviewed the direction received from the Council and additional discussions that will occur related to personnel and employee union contract negotiations.

Councilmember Riley stated that he has struggled with the need for the communications position and would like to have the Council discuss the need for that position, noting that his comments are related to the position not the person.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that communication is a huge need, noting that if the Council would like to have that discussion staff would bring that forward.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that he appreciates Councilmember Riley bringing that forward and asked him to put more thought into the topic.

Councilmember Riley commented that he has had trouble with the communications position since it was approved and reapproved. He stated that the City newsletter is not done by this position, and does not believe that the communications position is necessarily responsible for the City website, or Facebook. He stated that the City has also not held events this year and is then unsure what the position is responsible for. He stated that he would like to have that position looked at.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that this position is a split position, partly communications and partly events and recognized that this year is very different than other years. She stated that staff could bring forward the job description and percentage of time spent on each duty. She stated that some of the things that were mentioned as being unsure of what the position does, she is confident about and would like to explain, but to be prepared for a good discussion she stated that she could bring that information forward for further discussion at another meeting.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the Building Maintenance Worker position could have any carryover with parks. She stated that she is uncertain on that position as it is unknown when the Public Works Facility would be completed and therefore would think that position would be better suited in 2022.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would support the discussion on the communications position. He also supported the idea of the Building Maintenance Worker splitting time between public works and parks.

Finance Director Lund stated that there are two more meetings before the adoption of the preliminary levy and budget in September, therefore the focus of the next two worksessions will be on the budget.

2.02: Receive Update on Purmort Home Complaints and Current Permit Metrics

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Menth asked the last name of the inspector.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill provided the name of the Building Inspector that was brought up at the last meeting. He confirmed that the position is a City employee and not a contractor. He stated that the true issue expressed by the residents at the last meeting were frustrations with the builder, Purmort Homes.

Councilmember Menth stated that the electrical workmanship matter is up to the review of the electric inspector and the City would not have much say in that. He also did not believe the City would have the authority to say a builder cannot build in Ramsey.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill confirmed that the City would not be able to prohibit a builder if they held the proper licensure.

Councilmember Specht stated that the City cannot expect permit revenue at the same level each year, noting that this year may have been busier with people completing projects while they were at home more.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill commented that the actual revenue over what is budgeted is much higher each year because the City budgets the projected revenue conservatively. He stated that the COVID environment did slow down responses, but this has been an ongoing concern. He commented that staff is working late and feels guilty taking breaks because things are coming in so fast and they are struggling to keep up.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that Community Development continues to become more modern and streamlined with technology. She stated that in 2008 there was a Building Official and four Inspectors and compared that to today when the City has one Building Official and contracted inspectors. She stated that perhaps the time has come for the City to expand that.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she was under the impression that the City has an in-house Inspector and contracted when duties went above that level.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill provided details on the staffing related to the Building Official and the contracted inspectors. He noted that these positions are paid for by the inspection fees that residents pay.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there are unusual circumstances in the number of projects this year because of COVID.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that this year is unique, but a second contracted inspector was also needed. He stated that this need has been brewing for some time and there is a continued need. He stated that even with an economic downturn, there would be a need for the Building Official and Inspector to be in-house. He noted that if there is a slowdown, the contracted inspections can always be reduced.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the City can provide input when a model home is constructed by a builder, as to whether it meets the City's standard, using the example of a 2 x 4 as a railing.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that the intent of plan review is to attempt to avoid field issues and determine whether the plans meet the required standards. He stated the field conditions change inevitably and those need to be reacted to. He stated that as proposed a railing was not required but the grade was not done according to plan and therefore a railing was required in order to keep the grade the same.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that his recommendation would be to convert a contract inspector position to an in-house Inspector position.

Councilmember Riley asked and received confirmation that this would be budget neutral and may even present a cost savings. He commented that the need has remained constant for the past few years.

Councilmember Kuzma confirmed that he would support the recommendation of staff.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the need is during the months of May through October or all year.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill explained that construction activity and reporting occur all year round and therefore this position would be warranted all year.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would like to see a cost-benefit of the employee versus the contracted service.

Councilmember Menth asked if this one employee change would be enough to get the City over the demand.

Deputy City Administrator Gladhill stated that this would be a more efficient use of resources. He commented that the City would never be ahead on this and would be responding to the level of requests. He explained that there would be better customer service and consistency through an in-house Inspector compared to a contracted position.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would be interested to know the number of inspectors for other cities when this comes back, for comparison purposes.

2.03: Discuss 2020 Citizen Survey

Item delayed to future agenda.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

Noted.

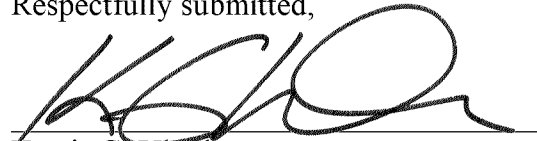
4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

None.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:



Katie M. Schmidt
Administrative Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.