

**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 24, 2021, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

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

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Finance Director Diana Lund
Police Chief Jeff Katers
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher
Interim Community Development Director Bruce Westby
Senior Planner Chloe McGuire Brigl
Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Bria Raines – attended remotely
IT Manager Jason Fredrickson – attended remotely

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Kuzma called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:38 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Continued Discussion on 2022 Budget/Levies

Finance Director Diana Lund stated the preliminary budget document provides three options, including a proposal regarding road funding from Councilmember Heineman.

Councilmember Heineman stated he reviewed the proposed increase in taxes and the current proposed budget, as well as what the budget would have looked like since 2014 if there had been a 15% increase dedicated specifically to roads. He added that averaged the increase of 7.5% in taxes that occurred from 2014-2021, and what that would have looked like if there had been a 5% increase in the general tax levy and an extra 15% to pay for roads.

Councilmember Heineman stated, based on the general levy, the City can easily fund roads, and be in a healthy position by 2030 for road funding, without the franchise fee. He added franchise fees from 2022-2029 would create a deficit every year with the exception of 2025 and 2030 and reduce the surplus of \$425,000 to -\$276,000. He noted, alternatively, a 5% annual increase and 15% dedicated to roads would create a surplus of \$1.4 million.

Councilmember Heineman stated residents with a home value of \$336,000, or 81% of Ramsey homeowners, will see no real difference in taxes.

Councilmember Heineman stressed the importance of having an honest conversation about this issue. He requested feedback and comment from Finance Director Lund. He added it will be important for residents to understand the implications of having a franchise fee, as opposed to raising taxes by 15%.

Mayor Kuzma asked whether there would be assessments.

Councilmember Heineman stated there would be no assessments, as the burden of road funding will be on the general levy, and not on the franchise fee.

Finance Director Lund reviewed the 2022 preliminary budget levy, with a general fund levy increase of 5.45%, including roads, EDA and debt service. She added the 5% increase as proposed by Councilmember Heineman would represent a further reduction in the general fund of \$53,000. She noted the road levy, or 15% of the general levy, would provide \$1,673,227 for roads.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated the 15% road levy was in the CIP for next year's roads projects.

Finance Director Lund stated next year's CIP is approximately \$1.947 million, with \$74,000 reimbursed later for special assessments franchise fees.

Finance Director Lund reviewed three options for the general levy:

1. 5.45% general fund levy increase with no other funding, for an overall levy of 5.29%, including debt service and EDA budget.
2. 5.45% general fund increase and an additional \$1.637 million for roads funding, for a total increase of 18%
3. Councilmember Heineman's proposal for a 5% general fund levy increase and \$1.637 for roads, for an increase of \$2,311,471.

Finance Director Lund stated the difference between options 2 and 3 is \$53,000.

Finance Director Lund stated the County provided a taxable value for 2022 of \$30,936,000, including \$350,000 from de-certification of TIF District #8. She added this is a good estimate at 9.6%.

Finance Director Lund reviewed the pavement management fund, with an estimate of \$1.5 million by October if road projects are to be completed. She added the estimated \$1.9 million in roads projects leaves a balance of \$300,000, for a total of \$1,206,298. She added the roads levy for 2024 is \$1,846,170 with a 5% levy increase.

Councilmember Heineman stated the balance appears to decrease every year except 2024-2025.

Finance Director Lund confirmed that the fund begins to increase in 2024 or 2025, but roads projects will be held constant at 1.9%.

Councilmember Riley asked why there is a beginning balance of \$1.5 million.

Finance Director Lund stated the pavement management fund had a beginning balance that was calculated to complete roads reconstruction over 9 years, which was estimated at 1.9%. She added, after the franchise fee was instituted, approximately \$95,300 was transferred for the business park.

Councilmember Heineman asked whether the balance at the beginning of the year will be enough to fund projects in 6-month increments.

Finance Director Lund stated that is an estimate as the City has not finished paying off the project and collecting franchise fees. She added she is estimating \$1.5 million.

Councilmember Heineman stated if the balance is estimated to increase to 15%, there will be enough funding to continue road projects and increase the balance starting in 2029.

Councilmember Heineman asked whether Finance Director Lund can confirm that the balance with franchise fees after 2029 would be \$276,000 as he indicated in his model.

Finance Director Lund stated she did not focus on tax rates.

Councilmember Musgrove stated MSA funding is also used for budgeting for roads projects. She asked whether MSA funds are available to the City, which were recently reviewed, would mean more or less funding for roads.

Finance Director Lund stated the estimated \$1.9 million was strictly for road projects that were not eligible for MSA funding. She added MSA roads are noted in the CIP.

Mayor Kuzma requested clarification regarding MSA funding.

City Administrator Kurt Ulrich stated MSA funding varies from year to year, and every year more cities are eligible. He added MSA funding that is available for Ramsey roads has been decreasing slowly over the years.

Councilmember Riley asked whether the City Council is comfortable with rejecting option #1, so the focus can be on the 2nd and 3rd options.

The City Council agreed to consider only Options 2 and 3.

Councilmember Riley stated City Staff presented a preliminary budget with a 12% increase 2 months ago. He asked why the 5.45% increase is now possible, and what has changed.

Finance Director Lund stated items in the budget highlighted in red have been removed from the budget, including the citizen survey; the Laserfiche upgrade for \$55,000; body worn cameras for \$117,000, which were moved to the American Recovery Fund; \$300,000 related to the transfer; and employee health insurance that was recalculated, for a total of approximately \$900,000 in reductions.

Councilmember Riley stated 15% for roads funding of \$1, 670,000, which is not fully funded now but will be when tax increases are built in. He stressed the importance of understanding that the City is already contemplating a tax increase for future years.

Councilmember Heineman stated the budget would freeze fluctuating tax increases at 5% and will be reduced by 2.5% for previous years.

Finance Director Lund stated the general fund levy increase was proposed at 5%, and the debt service will increase.

Councilmember Woestehoff requested clarification regarding cuts from the proposed EDT budget. He asked whether City Staff will be less efficient due to the Laserfiche upgrade cuts of \$55,000.

IT Manager Fredrickson stated the current system is grandfathered in. He added the proposal of \$10,200 includes the first year of maintenance, which would be an increased cost, but there would likely be increased process efficiencies.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked whether the current maintenance agreement is still eligible, and whether it will sunset.

Mayor Kuzma asked whether the tax increase could be used for funding for police cameras.

Finance Director Lund stated 50% of the total amount has already been received.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated he had some general concerns when he saw that body worn cameras were cut, but it appears they are being funded outside of the levy.

Finance Director Lund confirmed this.

Councilmember Heineman stated he would not want the rejection of franchise fees to be construed as putting officers in jeopardy due to a lack of funding. He added the City Council would find the funds if necessary.

Councilmember Musgrove asked whether laserfiche would qualify for CARES Act funding, due to upgraded technology. She asked whether pay for employees who are viewing body worn camera footage could be covered under CARES Act funding.

Finance Director Lund stated, for tracking purposes, it is preferable to calculate review of body worn camera footage in the general budget. She added she can look into whether laserfiche would be covered.

Mayor Kuzma stated removal of seal coating at \$500,000 will make a big difference.

Finance Director Lund stated the amount is \$300,000, with an additional \$200,000 included for rejuvenation.

Councilmember Riley stated, if seal coating is no longer funded, that would be a reduction of \$300,000.

Councilmember Heineman asked why seal coating is being removed.

Councilmember Riley stated seal coating has been done for many years and has historically been considered a good method of standard maintenance. He added it has recently been discovered that seal coating causes damage to roads by removing the top cover. He added \$500,000 is currently budgeted annually for seal coating.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked whether levy funding for roads will be transferred to the pavement management fund.

Finance Director Lund confirmed this, adding the general levy will be broken into percentages, to determine the total amount of each item. She added the pavement management fund was intended to be the dedicated fund for the franchise fee and not used for budgetary shortfalls, unless the City Council wanted to change that by Resolution.

Councilmember Musgrove asked whether there were some roads that were moved up in the CIP due to deterioration, and some bonds that were available for that. She asked whether a current listing of CIP projects is available on the City website.

City Engineer Bruce Westby stated those projects were scheduled for 2022. He added City Staff are working on getting the CIP projects on the City website.

Councilmember Musgrove asked how 13% for roads in the levy will help with LGA funding.

City Administrator Ulrich stated LGA funding will probably not figure into road funding other than the levy and will be based on factors such as aging housing stock and the drop in tax capacity. He noted the current formula does not have much of an impact.

Mayor Kuzma asked whether Laserfiche could be added back in.

Finance Director Lund stated the budget would have to be reduced by \$53,000. She added it would add approximately .5% in the tax rate.

Councilmember Heineman asked whether surplus CARES Act funding has been assigned to projects.

Finance Director Lund stated CARES Act funding was used up last year. She added, were it not for CARES Act funding, the general fund would have been in deficit.

Finance Director Lund stated there will be \$15,000 remaining in the equipment fund at the end of 2022. She added there will be \$60,000 in the capital maintenance fund that goes to parks and

trails, and there will be \$630,000 in that fund at the end of 2030. She noted the facility fund will have \$450,000 left in the fund at the end of 2022, and the PIR will have \$375,000.

Councilmember Heineman asked whether there is consideration in terms of bond ratings for a 5% increase as opposed to a 12% increase.

Finance Director Lund stated the bond rating takes into account population growth, the economy, employment, average income, and debt. She added the bond rating report includes all of these factors.

Councilmember Musgrove asked what the revenue source is for the equipment fund.

Finance Director Lund stated the equipment fund is funded by excess revenue and interest in the year end transfer.

Councilmember Musgrove thanked Finance Director Lund for her hard work.

Finance Director Lund asked for a consensus on a 5% general levy and 15% for roads.

Councilmember Heineman agreed.

Councilmember Musgrove stated she thinks it is a good idea if 5% helps City Staff with planning every year. She added the debt levy will be different.

Finance Director Lund asked whether the laserfiche should be added back in, which was cut from the original budget document.

Councilmember Specht asked whether the laserfiche could come out of CARES Act funding or any other funds. He added he does not think it is a top priority.

Mayor Kuzma stated the contracts are not in yet, and there is potential for that to change. He added he does not want to lock in to 5% at this point until the City knows where it sits with its contracts.

Councilmember Heineman stated, if a 5% increase is agreed upon and a contract comes back very one-sided, there can be further discussion. He added he supports a consensus to move forward with 5%

Mayor Kuzma stated he would suggest a higher increase to provide the ability to bring it back down, so the City is not locked into negotiations.

Councilmember Heineman stated he would rather start at 5% and negotiate up.

Mayor Kuzma stated the preliminary levy cannot be increased.

Finance Director Lund stated the preliminary levy can only be decreased after it is adopted on September 28.

Councilmember Heineman stated there will be more opportunities to discuss this before that date.

Mayor Kuzma stated, in the past, the City Council has started at 5% and worked down from there. He added he thinks it should start a little higher.

Councilmember Howell stated she supports starting at 5% and working down from there.

City Administrator Ulrich stated two non-union contracts have not been settled yet, and potential settlements for other unions. He added the Police Patrol is a big one. He stressed the importance of making the City Council aware of these issues and their impacts. He noted there is some flexibility within the budget that is proposed.

Councilmember Musgrove asked whether the CARES Act funding can be used for wages and revenue.

City Administrator Ulrich stated the plan this year is the American Rescue Plan, the purpose of which was to replace lost revenue, which the City has very little of, as there has been no lost tax base or revenue. He added the American Rescue Plan is more limited than CARES funding, but it can be used for things like water projects and body worn cameras.

Finance Director Lund stated wages relief is focused on front-line workers dealing with Covid-related issues.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated he is comfortable with the budget as written here, excluding the laserfiche upgrade and body worn cameras, at 5.45% increase. He added it would be great to get to 5%. He noted he would like to understand more about the laserfiche upgrades, and how that will increase efficiencies.

Councilmember Heineman stated there is an increase in salt prices. He asked whether there are any stored from last year.

City Engineer Westby confirmed this, adding there is approximately 1200 ton left from last year.

Councilmember Musgrove asked whether it will be possible to make adjustments to keep the equipment fund with more of a balance over the next few years.

Finance Director Lund stated the police have pushed out two vehicles into 2023, and the scrubber was removed from the building to be used as part of the larger Public Works campus. She added Public Works uses a point system rather than going by years.

Mayor Kuzma stated his recommendation is to go with 5.45% right now but not lock in until contracts are settled.

Councilmember Riley stated he is supportive of the equipment and the 5.45% increase, with the idea of getting it to 5%.

Councilmember Howell asked whether capital outlay items will be reviewed item by item.

Mayor Kuzma stated the major concern right now is getting contracts settled. He added he was not going through it line by line.

Councilmember Howell asked whether there would be free maintenance service with a new printer.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated there can be some advantages to leasing printers at \$300-400 a month.

Councilmember Heineman stated, in my experience, renting a printer is a bad idea.

Councilmember Howell stated, with regard to printers, if one is in bad shape, it could be replaced but hold off on the other two for now. She added that would eliminate \$30,000 from that expenditure.

IT Manager Fredrickson stated the existing copiers are approximately 8 years old, and the City typically purchases new copiers through the CIP at around 10-12 years. He added the idea was to add a second copier and move the existing copier for better placement and use by other departments.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated, to follow along from Councilmember Howell's point, two copiers could be replaced this year and two copiers next year, to get on a plan for replacement but not incur \$40,000 all at once.

Councilmember Musgrove agreed that sounds very reasonable.

Councilmember Heineman stated a copier could be replaced every year for the next four years.

City Administrator Ulrich stated this issue can be reviewed further by City Staff. He added the CIP would be a good subject for a future work session.

The consensus of the City Council was to support a levy of 5%.

Mayor Kuzma stated he believes it is a mistake to decide now, but the City Council is not locking in a decision.

Councilmember Heineman stated there was a lot of doomsday feeling about getting rid of the franchise fee, and how roads will get repaired. He added, based on a 5% levy, it is safe to say the City is on a good track to get road repairs funded, and start going in the direction of a surplus after a few years.

Mayor Kuzma stated he would be careful about predicting surpluses, because it is impossible to predict what will happen with the roads.

Councilmember Heineman stated the bigger issue is that the money is there. He added the City Council took the responsible route, as there has been a lot of fear mongering about getting rid of franchise fee. He added Finance Director Lund's hard work has shown that some of that was premature.

City Administrator Ulrich stated there is one more work session agenda item. He proposed reconvening the work session after the regular session. He added an alternative would be to hold a special work session on September 7 or August 31 or add it to the regular agenda this evening.

The consensus of the City Council was to reconvene the work session after the Regular Session.

Councilmember Musgrove asked whether the minutes issue can be discussed as it will affect the budget.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that can be continued as part of the budget discussion.

RECESS TO REGULAR MEETING

Motion by Councilmember Musgrove, seconded by Councilmember Howell, to move the work session into recess at 6:54 p.m.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Mayor Kuzma, Councilmembers Heineman, Howell, Musgrove, Riley, Specht, and Woestehoff. Voting No: None.

RECONVENE THE WORK SESSION

Mayor Kuzma reconvened the City Council Work Session at 8:26 p.m.

Mayor Kuzma stated, before the regular session, the City Council was discussing concessions for levy targets. He added Councilmember Musgrove requested a discussion regarding minutes and minute-taking.

Minutes and Minute Taking

Councilmember Musgrove stated she reviewed City Code related to procedures for minute taking, under Section 2-51, which states that minutes are to be reduced to typewritten form and signed by the City Clerk, and copies delivered to each Councilmember as soon as practicable, before approval by the City Council at a Regular Meeting, calling for any additions or corrections.

Councilmember Musgrove stated she believes City Staff are getting the minutes ahead of time from TOSS to review and edit during staff time. She added other department heads have the ability to review the minutes. She noted she would like the City Council to receive the draft minutes as well.

Councilmember Musgrove stated, in other committees with which she is involved, the minutes are submitted to the committee, reviewed and returned to TOSS. She added she is not requesting that

City Staff should be checking attendance and other details, but rather that the City Council should get the minutes sooner, to have time to review them while the meeting is still fresh in their minds.

Councilmember Musgrove requested feedback from the City Council regarding the potential for getting verbatim minutes. She added Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher has indicated that this would be an increase in the professional services budget.

City Administrator Ulrich stated City Staff can provide information for the City Council regarding the difference in cost between verbatim minutes and staff time spent reading minutes.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated City Staff can forward draft minutes out to the City Council immediately upon receiving them from TOSS, without reviewing them first. She added comments and corrections could be directed to her or City Administrator Ulrich.

Councilmember Musgrove agreed, adding it is part of the Ordinance and City Staff should not have to do all the detail work. She added it is helpful to go through the minutes sooner rather than later.

City Administrator Ulrich stated we can start that process immediately.

City Administrator Ulrich stated there would be a budget impact related to moving to verbatim minutes. He added a full set of verbatim minutes would still need to be reviewed by the City Council and City Staff.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated she has estimated that verbatim minutes would cost approximately 25-30% more, and true verbatim minutes require an on-site stenographer, which is not a service that is offered by TOSS anymore. She added City Staff can rely on City Council comments regarding minor corrections. She noted, in addition, TOSS may not have a recording secretary available at this time to provide that service.

Mayor Kuzma stated he does not support verbatim minutes for an extra 25-30%.

Councilmember Howell stated it is worth exploring what the actual costs would be. She added the City Council had discussed the importance of ensuring that all recorded meetings are available for the public, potentially on QCTV, and City Staff was going to provide more information on that issue.

Councilmember Howell stated she has done some research on available video services and there would not be any charge to the City to have work sessions recorded. She added she wishes this would have been brought to the City Council's attention by City Staff. She noted that would provide a cleaner recording for the transcriptionist, although maybe not completely verbatim. She stressed the importance of increased transparency, with the potential for additional expenditure.

Mayor Kuzma stated he does not have a problem with putting the meetings online. He added, however, he does not want to spend any more money on minutes.

Councilmember Heineman stated Google Meets has a record function that sends you a transcribed summary. He added it works best when people are in front of their computers, but it is an option. He noted he agreed recording the meetings is the easiest way to go about it.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated she would spend some time figuring out pricing. She added she agrees that having more detailed minutes would be a good way to avoid inefficiency. She noted there are different types of software for recording meetings. She agreed to look into it further. She apologized for not having this information ready, as it was not her intent to drop the ball, and she will put her efforts into this.

Councilmember Riley asked whether additional detail is necessary if City Staff and Councilmembers can make corrections and additions when they receive the minutes.

Councilmember Musgrove stated it would improve efficiency because there would not need to be as many adjustments.

Councilmember Musgrove stated this can be done in stages, but she would like to get minutes earlier. She added she agrees more price checking should be done to see how this will affect the budget. She noted these adjustments would not be made right now.

Councilmember Specht stated he loves the idea of making work sessions available to the public. He added anything we can do to get these published is good. He noted he is not as big on the verbatim minutes but having them ahead of time is good.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated City Staff can figure out if it costs more and go from there.

City Administrator Ulrich stated City Staff will distribute copies of the minutes to the City Council when they are submitted by TOSS. He added City Staff will look into audio or Zoom recording of work session minutes to be archived for reference.

Councilmember Howell asked whether the QCTV option is being pursued, to broadcast the meetings to the general public. She added there is no cost, and it will create transparency. She noted she does not know why the City would not do that.

Mayor Kuzma stated the meetings would not necessarily have to be broadcast live.

Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher stated she did a survey of local City Clerks regarding this issue and received 12 responses. She added she has not had a chance to summarize the results. She noted, if this is of interest to the City Council, she can provide a brief update on what other cities are doing.

2.02: Discuss Code Enforcement Process

Interim Community Development Director Bruce Westby provided a review of City Staff's current Code Enforcement process and requested feedback and comment from the City Council on any improvements that should be made. He added there may be parts of the process that City Staff

should review and potentially change or follow differently. He noted this is a collaborative process between the Police Department and Planning Department, depending upon the type of violation.

Interim Community Development Director Westby stated Police Chief Jeff Katers is in attendance tonight, as well as Senior Planner Chloe McGuire Brigl and Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Bria Raines.

Interim Community Development Director Westby stated the City Code is enforced to take reasonable measures to prevent activities that degrade residents and businesses; prevent enjoyment of the city; endanger the health and safety of others; and disturb the public peace. He added it is a complaint-based system, and Community Service Officers generally work on nuisance violations while Planning handles zoning violations. He noted City Staff reviews complaints and sends out a first notice of violation within 2 days, allowing the property owner 14 days to address the violation. Repeat offenders receive a \$250 citation, followed by an appeal process.

Interim Community Development Director Westby stated, after reinspection, a second notice is sent with a \$75 citation and a request to contact City Staff. He added, if the property owner does not respond, they will receive a \$250 citation following another reinspection.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated the first notice of violation does not notify the property owner that the process is complaint-based. He asked whether that is intentional, as it prevents resident disputes. He added the structure seems very reasonable. He noted he would not want to change that process.

Councilmember Heineman agreed, adding the complaint-based format protects the City from liability.

Councilmember Musgrove stated she agrees with the comments that have been made. She asked whether the person who is making the complaint is informed that it could take up to a month to resolve the situation.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated the \$250 citation is for repeat offenses, which have been cleared and then occur again. She added if someone complains multiple times, they are informed that City Staff can contact them to follow-up. She added often people do not want to give out their personal information.

Councilmember Musgrove asked whether the complaint follows the property or the person.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated the complaint follows the property until one year after the closing of property purchase.

Police Chief Katers stated the cases that are reviewed by the Police Department are tracked by person. He added nuisance call Code violations are handled and resolved immediately, but criminal and civil processes are more complex. He noted he wants the officers to enforce criminal law, and not civil law.

Police Chief Katers stated property complaints are confidential by Statute and names of complainants cannot be released. He added no City is the same and it is generally based on the input of the City Council.

Councilmember Specht asked whether information can be compiled from other neighboring cities to find out some of the things they do. He added he knows City Staff are very busy right now.

Mayor Kuzma stated the system in place right now is working well. He added there is always someone who will have a problem.

Councilmember Howell asked whether a business owner would get a \$75 fee with a first citation because the business might have been owned by another person who had other complaints. She asked why a first notice would have a \$75 fine.

Interim Community Development Director Bruce Westby stated there may have been other contact with the property owner, and that might not have been the first citation. He added the violation letter is actually the 2nd citation. He stressed the importance of following the process as closely as possible.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Raines was hired approximately 5 months ago. She added, in terms of process, an informational letter was sent to property owners that was not considered a first notice of violation, which was generally ignored. She noted the process was changed so that the educational letter is officially the first notice of violation.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Raines stated the 2nd letter was sent with a \$75 citation, and the 3rd notice would be a \$250 citation.

City Administrator Ulrich, stated, in the case in question, the issue could have occurred when the property was between property owners.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Raines looked into that question, and the citation had the individual property owner's name on it. She added a record is kept of every violation ever sent to a property.

Councilmember Heineman stated his recommendation would be to ensure that the process is followed consistently in every case. He referred to a recent case when a property owner threatened legal action because there were a few steps that were skipped.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl requested City Council feedback and comment on whether the process should be 2 notices or 3 notices of violation before coming to the City Council.

Councilmember Heineman stated he likes the process as it is, without skipping any steps.

Councilmember Musgrove stated it depends upon the situation, and there is a little room for judgement. She added, from City Staff, there should definitely be a 3rd citation, but if the property

owners want to talk to the City Council, that should happen after the first citation, so there can be a discussion about it. She noted a possible solution would be to have a City Council work session.

Councilmember Heineman stated he would support bringing the issue to the City Council after steps 2 and 3 have been attempted.

Councilmember Howell stated property owners and residents are customers, and when they are upset and angry, they should all be treated the same. She added it is important to inform them and help them a little bit. She noted that would be better public relations.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated property owners are customers of City Staff, and they can sometimes be difficult, but complainants are also customers. She added she does not want her staff to be yelled at and threatened, and no department wants its staff to be subject to that kind of language. She added Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Raines is great at her job and should not have to quit because she is mistreated every day by property owners and residents. She noted the City Council has provided feedback on this issue in the past. She stressed the importance of ensuring a safe workplace that is free from verbal abuse.

Councilmember Heineman stated City Staff do not need to take verbal abuse, but they cannot skip steps in the process that are being afforded to other people. He stressed the importance of following the process.

Councilmember Howell stated a letter could be sent, with helpful information, and what they do with it is on them.

Councilmember Riley stated he agrees the system should work if City Staff and the City Council follow the process. He added the informational letter could include steps that people can take to resolve the citation.

Councilmember Howell agreed, stating property owners will have less to complain about if you give them options and work with them. She added it would help on both sides to move things forward but still be consistent.

Senior Planner McGuire Brigl stated City Staff are seeking support from the City Council so cases do not escalate. She added that has become the culture in Code Enforcement, that if you disagree with an officer, you will get your way. She noted some property owners are trying to do things the right way, and they are penalized, so they come into compliance.

Councilmember Specht stated there are 3 issues that have led to this discussion. He added the first issue is that the City Council has overridden City Staff's decision on numerous occasions. He noted Councilmembers are saying that City Staff should follow the process, but this issue needs to be resolved.

Councilmember Specht stated the second issue is that citation issues were moved to the Consent Agenda and are not specifically addressed at regular meetings. He added these types of issues should not be on the Consent Agenda.

City Administrator Ulrich stated the citations have been on the Consent Agenda because discussion is not necessary at the abatement point in the process. He added a work session is a better way to review these issues and solve problems.

Chief Katers stated the Police Department follows an administrative process for resolving these issues. He added, historically, the City Council did not want to hear these issues at their regular meetings because they can be lengthy and involve statutory requirements, so they were sent to an administrative hearing.

Councilmember Heineman expressed his appreciation for Senior Planner McGuire Brigl and Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Raines, for all the hard work they have done putting cases together. He added there are regulations at City Staff level, but the City Council can review complaints in a different way, which are not necessarily contradictory. He noted these are two jobs that need to co-exist.

Councilmember Musgrove stated it would be helpful if the Code violation was listed in the letter along with suggestions for ways to fix it. She added, when property owners bring the letter to the City Council, Councilmembers will have more information about what the barriers are and why the issue cannot be resolved. She noted it would be helpful to have a list of violations and what can be done to abate them.

Councilmember Howell stated City Staff has indicated they do not feel supported by the City Council. She added she finds it difficult from her perspective, because there is a lack of consistency in terms of how property owners are treated by City Staff for similar issues. She noted City Staff wants the City Council to support them, but it is difficult to understand why accommodations are made for some properties while others are singled out for violations.

City Administrator Ulrich stated it will be helpful to articulate in a letter the options that are available to the property owner and follow the process without skipping any steps. He added every case is different, and it is not the intention of City Staff to discriminate or do unequal enforcement. He noted it might be the nature of the Code.

City Administrator Ulrich stated one solution might be to change some of the Codes, if the City Council sees a pattern of objections to Code requirements and receives repeated complaints from property owners.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Raines stated the first notice includes abatement options for property owners. She added these options are usually not taken seriously until there is a citation. She noted City Staff does try to give them options.

Police Chief Katers stated the City Code was written in 1978 and City Staff does not regularly go through and make revisions without City Council direction. He added there is a significant investment associated with making changes to City Code, and some changes are necessary based on what is going on at the State and Federal legislature. He noted the City Code can be reviewed and revised upon City Council direction.

Councilmember Howell stated she would like to propose that the City reach out to Highway 10 business owners to get their opinions regarding Code enforcement along Highway 10. She stressed the importance of hearing from businesses on the Highway 10 corridor.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that is a decent idea. He asked whether there are specific design standards for the Highway 10 business district.

City Administrator Ulrich stated there was a plan 20 years ago to eliminate businesses from the north side of Highway 10, and restrictive zoning was put in place. He added this caused low development patterns in the corridor, as the area was in limbo for nearly 2 decades. He noted the Highway 10 corridor is seeing a new era of development, and new planning standards are required.

Councilmember Riley stated the EDA Manager, Sean Sullivan, meets with business owners regularly throughout the year, and maybe this could be something he could work on. He added, with construction progress on Highway 10, the business owners are contacted frequently for a variety of reasons. He expressed concern that they may not pick up on this initiative, although he agrees it is a good idea.

Mayor Kuzma stated some business owners were forced to black top their vehicle parking areas. He added if standards are relaxed now, there could be liability issues. He noted he agrees the EDA would be the best option for coordinating this effort.

City Administrator Ulrich stated he believes that a review of current restrictions would be more of a planning function.

Councilmember Specht stated, with regard to the outdated nature of Code, a resident complaint about garbage containers in front of garages resulted in a review of that section of Code. He added the current Code indicates garbage containers should be covered and not seen. He noted this should be updated to be more in line with the type of garbage containers that are currently being used.

Councilmember Musgrove stated some HOA covenants have restrictions for where garbage containers can be located.

Police Chief Katers stated City Staff can move forward with consistency and flexibility, and work with property owners when there are difficulties. He added property owners can be made aware of their options to address the violation and follow the process. He asked whether the City Council would support bringing abatements to Council meetings for review.

Councilmember Heineman asked whether residents can be informed about who their City Council representative is. He added he would support moving toward abatement, and he does not mind being contacted by property owners. He noted abatements do not need to be brought to City Council meetings unless property owners request it.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Raines stated residents often disagree with the Ordinance, and she explains to them that it is not something she can change. She added she encourages residents to contact their Councilmember. She noted that information could be added to the letter.

Councilmember Musgrove stated the Ordinance does not require that cases must be brought before the City Council. She added abatements could be reviewed at a City Council work session, the same way road projects or development projects are reviewed. She noted there may be some privacy issues and residents may not want to be on the consent agenda.

City Administrator Ulrich stated it is optional for abatements to be reviewed by the City Council, as an extra measure for information sharing. He added a work session would suffice, and it is a really good solution.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked how many abatements the City usually gets. He added many issues could be handled via email, and potentially added to a work session agenda for further discussion. He added he wants to be respectful of the Councilmembers' time too. He noted he agrees that work session is the right environment, but some can still be handled by City Staff.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that is a reasonable solution.

2.03: Discuss Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative Membership

Mayor Kuzma stated he believes the City of Ramsey should be a part of the Mississippi River coalition. He added, if the infrastructure budget passes, there will be a lot of money for the City to go after for the bridge. He noted it would be worth it to be a part of this group, as there is an opportunity for potential funding.

Councilmember Musgrove stated the river crossing bridge project is scheduled for approximately 10 years out.

Mayor Kuzma stated there is no funding for the bridge project. He added there is funding that is earmarked for all the cities along the Mississippi through the coalition. He noted the City should take advantage of this opportunity.

Mayor Kuzma stated the participation fee is \$3,000.

Councilmember Musgrove stated she participated in the river bridge study. She added she would prefer using the \$3,000 participation fee for bridge crossing planning and development. She added Dayton does not even have the bridge crossing in their CIP. She noted it will be necessary to start with meetings and getting buy-in from other communities, for a project that might be planned 10-20 years from now.

Mayor Kuzma stated it is difficult to know what the plans are without being involved in the process. He added this would be a way to jump start the process, and he would like to be proactive about it.

Councilmember Heineman asked whether the City could look at this again next year, or whether that would mean lost opportunities.

Mayor Kuzma stated the City does not have to be involved in the process, but it is an opportunity to get in and learn about how to get the project started.

Councilmember Heineman stated he would support waiting. Councilmember Howell agreed.

Councilmember Specht asked whether staff has had interactions with the group.

Councilmember Riley confirmed that the City was part of the group at one time.

Mayor Kuzma stated the American Recovery Act provides opportunities for funding that could benefit Ramsey.

Councilmember Musgrove stated she is not opposed to it in the future, but right now there are other issues that are timelier.

City Administrator Ulrich stated, with regard to future topics, a final report on the bridge crossing is ready for review, and the consultants have offered to present that to the City Council. He added they are tentatively looking at the first part of October.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

None.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

None.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
Deputy City Clerk

Drafted by Mary Mullen
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.