

**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 10, 2019, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor John LeTourneau
Councilmember Nadine Heinrich
Councilmember Mark Kuzma
Councilmember Jeff Menth
Councilmember Debra Musgrove
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Dan Specht

Also Present: City Administrator Kurtis Ulrich
Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher
Community Development Director Timothy Gladhill
City Attorney Joe Langel (arrived at 5:42 p.m.)
Representative Peggy Scott
Representative John Heinrich
Elwyn Tinklenberg, The Tinklenberg Group (arrived at 5:45 p.m.)
Charter Commission Chairperson Joe Field (arrived at 6:06 p.m.)

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor LeTourneau called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:36 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Review of the City of Ramsey's Legislative Priorities

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report.

Representative Scott asked for additional details on the manganese.

City Administrator Ulrich provided additional details and noted that the City continues to provide updates.

Mayor LeTourneau explained how the issue was mitigated during the summer to ensure the City did not reach the manganese threshold during the peak summer usage.

Councilmember Kuzma noted that the City also established a hotline for residents to reach out with concerns.

City Administrator Ulrich continued to review the City's legislative platform.

Representative Scott stated that she is on the Ways and Means Committee, which met the previous day to discuss the surplus. She explained that even though there is a surplus there is additional discussion needed to determine the actual amount that would be surplus as funds were taken from the reserves to balance the budget.

Representative Heinrich stated that it was shocking to him to find out that the Ways and Means Committee just discovered this information the previous day.

Representative Scott noted that inflation is not figured into the budget formula, which also has an impact on the surplus. She stated that while she would like to give the surplus back to taxpayers, it will need to be determined how much is actually there. She noted that another preference would be to complete projects with that cash rather than bonding. She stated that this will be a bonding year and anticipates a robust bonding bill. She hoped that progress could be made on HHS. She highlighted some other topics that could be an issue including facial recognition technology.

Representative Heinrich stated that he is looking forward to learning more about the issues with DHS. He stated that fraud in the CCAP program have also been an issue. He noted that a lot of people use the program legitimately. He stated that Highway 10 continues to be a big issue on his radar. He noted that he is a member of the Committee, which will tour Duluth the following day to learn about their transportation needs. He stated that he is attempting to schedule a tour of the Highway 10 Gateway area in January. He recognized that Highway 10 continues to be an important project for this area and noted that he will continue to focus on funding in the next session.

Mayor LeTourneau appreciated the efforts of Representative Scott on the Ways and Means Committee.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that Minnesota is one state that taxes social security and asked if there is a way to influence that.

Representative Scott acknowledged that Minnesota is one of only 13 states that taxes social security. She noted that if those taxes are eliminated that would leave a hole in the budget. She was unsure that there was an appetite for that with the current mix of the legislature.

Representative Heinrich commented that the issue continues to gain momentum.

Councilmember Riley stated that one of the issues for Ramsey is reform of the Metropolitan Council and asked if that will be a topic at the legislature.

Representative Scott commented that while she is a believer in that reform, she is unsure that the issue is on the radar at this time.

Representative Heinrich agreed that it is not a priority for the leadership in the House currently.

Representative Scott reviewed some of the issues that she believes will be higher priority this year. She commented that she hopes that there will not be a supplemental budget to come forward this year.

City Administrator Ulrich referenced the issue of bodycams for police officers and whether that would be required through the legislature.

Representative Scott commented that she did not believe that would move forward as a requirement at this time.

Representative Heinrich provided an update on the Public Safety Committee priorities which would include discussion related to cameras in road construction work zones.

Councilmember Menth asked for additional input on State tax on social security and asked if neighboring states tax social security as well.

Representative Heinrich stated that he is unsure if neighboring states tax that benefit. He noted that he would support the elimination of that tax.

Representative Scott stated that most people on social security that leave Minnesota tend to go somewhere warmer but would also perhaps choose a state that does not tax that benefit.

City Administrator Ulrich provided information on a tax increment district in Ramsey and the 10-year rule. He noted that perhaps an extension could be granted on the district as that period was developmentally slow.

Representative Heinrich confirmed that he could work with the City to author a bill for that extension if desired.

Mayor LeTourneau commented that he appreciates the work Representative Heinrich does on the Transportation Committee and asked for input on the amount of information received from Ramsey on its Highway 10 project.

Representative Heinrich commented that Ramsey continues to be an engaged community. He stated that between Ramsey and Anoka County, they are drawing attention to this local project. He stated that the engagement of Ramsey will help to push the project forward as it is more than he has seen most cities do. He recognized that there are other transportation needs in the state but believes that the Highway 10 corridor should be a priority.

Representative Scott commented that it is effective when Councilmembers and the Mayor come down and lobby for the project.

Councilmember Riley stated that Ramsey wants to be a good team player with the other communities in the corridor but also standup for what Ramsey wants and needs. He stated that the Council has been adamant that the railroad overpass is needed at Sunfish and Ramsey.

Representative Heinrich noted that he does not want to water down the message and will focus on the Sunfish and Ramsey Boulevard interchanges. He stated that Highway 47 and the railroad crossing is important as well, noting that it has gained the attention of the Governor.

Mr. Tinklenberg commented how well served Ramsey is by these two representatives and the committees they serve. He stated that in terms of transportation, he agrees that this is a year where Ramsey can make significant progress. He provided an update on recent meetings he has held with different members of the House and Governors office. He stated that there is a lot of momentum behind the project and these representatives are helping to keep that up. He noted that the work Ramsey has done in terms of design preparation have helped to put the project in a better position for funding.

Representative Scott stated that there is movement afoot to reform the bonding bill process, which would allow members to vote on individual sections.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that the Highway 10 effort has been targeted and focused. He recognized that each piece of the puzzle will help to improve the corridor. He hoped to continue great communication between the City and the two representatives present tonight.

Representative Scott asked and confirmed that the Councilmembers subscribe to the updates.

Representative Heinrich suggested setting up a Highway 10 Coalition Day at the Capital. He stated that when people show up in numbers, it tends to catch attention.

Councilmember Heinrich referenced the TIF district and clarified that the entire Council has not yet discussed that issue and therefore that discussion would occur prior to bringing something forward to one of the representatives for assistance.

Mayor LeTourneau thanked Representatives Scott and Heinrich for attending tonight and for their continued service.

2.02: Discuss Ordinance Amending the Charter by Repealing and Replacing Chapter 4 – Nominations and Elections

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report.

Councilmember Specht commented that he had a concern with totally eliminating primaries, using an example where there are ten candidates running.

Charter Commission Chairperson Field stated that the issue was discussed in depth by the Charter Commission and the main concern in making these changes was to become compliant with State law and elimination of duplicative language. He stated that the Commission also asked what is discretionary for Charter cities. He stated that the turnout for primaries is very poor and that is a costly process, therefore the Charter Commission came to the consensus to eliminate that requirement. He stated that there was discussion that perhaps an exception should be made if a

certain number of candidates were running, but that option was problematic due to the filing deadlines. He stated that there has been a deterioration in interest in running for public office. He stated that because people are not showing up for the primaries, the consensus was to eliminate that requirement.

Councilmember Musgrove referenced the situation where a primary could be held with the general election primary.

Charter Commission Chairperson Field commented that there was less resistance to that because it would not have much of an additional cost.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that it seems that the Charter Commission recommended elimination of primary elections for city government elections.

Charter Commission Chairperson Field agreed that because the trend has been that people are not showing up for those primary elections, it would seem practical to eliminate that requirement.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that the changes seem to be mostly cost driven. He stated that the number of special elections in the past few years seem to be an anomaly. He stated that he likes the process of holding primaries. He stated that poor voter turnout is not the fault of the process and would not be in favor of eliminating that step.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that the reality of the last two special elections had a higher percentage of turnout than the City typically has for special elections. He recognized that special elections typically have an inherently low voter turnout.

Councilmember Specht asked the cost to hold a primary election.

Administrative Services Director Lasher estimated about \$25,000 for an at large seat while a ward seat would be about \$10,000.

Councilmember Menth asked if the Charter discussed right choice voting.

Charter Commission Chairperson Fields noted that was determined to be a separate discussion that the Commission will discuss in the future.

Councilmember Musgrove asked how many Charter cities choose to hold primary elections and how many do not.

Charter Commission Chairperson Fields stated that most Charter cities do not engage in primary elections.

Councilmember Riley stated that the Charter Commission was provided the detailed information, while the Council did not hear the same details. He stated that in regard to primaries it seems that the City would either need to choose to hold primaries or not hold them. He noted that if primaries are kept that seems to negate some of the work to streamline the process.

Charter Commission Chairperson Fields agreed that is an excellent point as detailed information was provided to the Commission for review by the City Attorney and excellent discussion was had. He commented that it would be helpful for the Council to have access to those meeting minutes to review the process the Commission went through to come to this recommendation.

Administrative Services Director Lasher noted that the draft minutes from the Charter Commission were distributed to the City Council to provide them with that information.

Mayor LeTourneau asked for information on the history and background on why Ramsey chose to use the primary system.

Charter Commission Chairperson Fields stated that he did not have that information but noted that Commissioner Deemer would perhaps have that information because of his tenure on the Commission.

Councilmember Specht stated that he has concern with the Council making direct appointments. He used the example of Big Lake, which currently has four out of five members appointed rather than elected.

Charter Commissioner Chairperson Fields stated that it was his belief that process was mandated by State law but noted that he could be mistaken.

City Attorney Langel stated that he was unsure if that exact process is mandated by State law. He noted that if there is an opening on the Council it needs to be filled as soon as possible. He noted that the timelines and allowed dates for an election have an impact on the ability to fill that position quickly and therefore the proposed guide was developed which would allow appointment dependent upon when the vacancy occurs. He stated that the guide was developed with the intent of balancing the need to fill a vacancy on the Council in a timely and cost-effective manner, while still allowing public input.

Administrative Director Lasher commented that the total cost for a special election, including the primary would be about \$30,000.

Mayor LeTourneau commented that there still seem to be a lot of questions and does not expect there to be a unanimous vote tonight at the regular meeting.

Councilmember Heinrich asked what would happen next if the vote is not passed.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that if there was clear direction and consensus of the Council, the proposed changes could be suggested to the Charter Commission. He stated that he would suggest that the Council hold another worksession, with members of the Charter Commission, to discuss options that would work for everyone. He recognized that the language needs to be amended in order to clean up the language and become compliant with State law.

Councilmember Specht asked if there are any deadlines to become compliant with State law.

City Attorney Langel stated that when there is a conflict in the Charter with State law, the City has been following State law and ignoring certain details in the Charter. He stated that staff would continue to do that until the Charter is amended.

Mayor LeTourneau agreed that it would be helpful for the Council to have further discussion on this topic with the Charter Commission.

Charter Commission Chairperson Fields noted that the Charter Commission has spent a significant amount of time on this topic and it would be helpful to have specific direction from the Council.

Councilmember Heinrich asked if any of the Councilmembers that are not in support of this are prepared to provide specific input on the topics they are struggling with.

Mayor LeTourneau stated that his concerns are that some Council members are confused and that there has not been much discussion on this topic as of yet.

Councilmember Heinrich stated that this is not the first time the Council is seeing the redline document and therefore she is surprised by that.

Charter Commission Chairperson Fields stated that bullet points would be helpful. He noted that he would need to speak with the Charter Commission to determine if there is support for a joint meeting. He noted that the topic has been beat to death for the Charter Commission and he would want specific bullet points for discussion if there is a joint meeting.

Councilmember Kuzma referenced the desire for the Charter Commission to hold a separate study on franchise fees, even though the Council spent a large amount of time researching the issue. He noted that this would be a similar situation where the Charter Commission spent a large amount of time, but the Council has not yet had that ability. He stated that he is not willing to eliminate the primary election simply because of the anomaly of the recent vacancies.

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 6:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kurtis G. Ulrich
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
Administrative Assistant

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.