

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Special Work Session on Tuesday, April 20, 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  
Public Works Superintendent Grant Riemer  
Deputy City Administrator Timothy Gladhill  
City Engineer Bruce Westby  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
City Attorney Joe Langel  
Utilities Supervisor John Nelson

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Kuzma called the City Council Work Session to order at 6:39 p.m.

**2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

**2.01: Review Water Treatment Plant Schedule and Construction Method**

Utilities Supervisor Nelson reviewed the staff report.

Mayor Kuzma asked if RJM would be used as the construction manager.

Public Works Superintendent Riemer replied that is the construction manager for the public works facility. He stated that for the water treatment plant, staff would propose to use the design bid model because the inside of the water treatment plant is very complex.

Councilmember Howell asked, in the design bid build model, would those engineering firms be more specialized to this industry.

Utilities Supervisor Nelson confirmed that to be true.

Councilmember Howell asked if there are fewer firms that specialize in that area.

City Engineer Westby replied that the design bid model is the standard model the City uses. He replied that there are at least a dozen firms that specialize in this area.

Councilmember Riley asked for clarification, if there are a dozen firms that specialize in water treatment facilities.

City Engineer Westby confirmed that there are at least a dozen firms that would have all the specialties inhouse to design the different elements of a water treatment plant.

Councilmember Heineman asked if there are typically cost savings when a project is brought inhouse to one firm or whether there would be cost savings to bidding different elements to different firms.

City Engineer Westby replied that in theory it should be a more cost-effective process to use one firm, as the people working on the different elements would know each other and could easily communicate with each other.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that this will come back to the Council again to select contractors.

## **2.02: Review Past Charter Proposals Concerning City Elections**

City Administrator Ulrich reviewed the staff report.

City Attorney Langel commented that the Charter Commission has been working on this for quite some time. He provided additional details on the conflicts with elections within the existing Charter language and State Statute and the difficulties it provided for staff. He stated that the information was presented to the Charter Commission in depth in 2019, it moved forward to the City Council but there was not support to adopt the changes. He stated that the first category for the changes is related to primary elections and provided additional background on the elements that were considered to determine how much benefit is provided in Ramsey from primaries versus the cost and staff time necessary. He stated that the Charter Commission recommended to eliminate the primaries. He stated that the other option out for discussion was to eliminate primaries except for those occurring for general elections as those would align with State primaries. He stated that a unanimous vote is required and not all members of the Council at that time supported that concept, therefore the amendment process stopped.

Mayor Kuzma asked the process that would be followed if there were multiple people running and there was not a primary.

City Attorney Langel replied that multiple people would then be on the ballot and the person with the most votes would win.

Councilmember Heineman asked and received confirmation that there would not be an issue with runoffs.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that she likes the idea of having a primary if there are other elections going on. She was unsure that a primary would be needed for a special election for a vacant position.

City Attorney Langel agreed that it causes additional problems to have primaries for special elections because of the timing and specific dates allowed for special elections.

Councilmember Heineman asked if eliminating primaries for special elections would allow for someone to be elected as soon as possible.

City Attorney Langel confirmed that would allow the position to be filled more quickly as it would eliminate that additional primary process.

Councilmember Heineman stated that he would support eliminating primaries outside of a regular general election.

Councilmember Howell asked if there could then be three to five or more candidates for a special election.

City Attorney Langel confirmed that a special election could have any number of candidates if there is not a primary.

Councilmember Howell commented that she would perhaps favor a primary.

Mayor Kuzma stated that he was opposed to this in 2019 and remains opposed. He believed that a primary serves a purpose in finding out additional information on candidates. He stated that if there are five or more candidates it would be difficult to have useful information to base a decision off. He stated that he would favor continuing with the existing process.

City Attorney Langel advised that if there is not support for the changes related to primaries, the Council could choose to update the Charter to at minimum match the State Statute languages where it is outdated and conflicting. He provided details on another option the City could pursue to fill vacancies. He stated that State Statute would allow for the Council to appoint someone to a vacant seat when there is less than two years on a term. He noted that the Charter Commission reviewed that option and suggested that appointments be allowed when there is less than one year on a vacant seat term.

Councilmember Riley commented that the City has had a problem for a number of years which has resulted in an open seat almost consistently for the past five years because of the City rules for special elections. He believed that primaries are not necessary as there are other government positions that have multiple candidates to vote for. He stated that when he vacated his seat, he aligned that with the seat vacation falling under a regular cycle. He asked if the language could be written in a manner that would eliminate special elections, allow appointment, and instead have an election on the next State held election day.

City Attorney Langel confirmed that aligns with option four and reviewed those details. He noted that a special election could still occur, it would simply align with November.

Councilmember Riley confirmed that he would prefer that option.

Councilmember Specht commented that he believes that a primary provides value. He stated that allowing the Council to appoint someone would seem to be a conflict and commented that person would have an unfair advantage because their name would be out there already ahead of the election.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he would believe there should either be primaries for everyone or primaries for no one. He stated that he would be interested in additional information related to runoffs. He stated that he is torn on the idea of appointments. He stated that in a perfect world an appointment would be unanimous. He stated that it would also make him nervous for the Council to make an appointment rather than the residents electing that person.

Councilmember Howell agreed with Councilmember Specht that the election process is important and would not want to appoint members.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that the Charter Commission also discussed the cost for special elections. She recognized that there are a number of inconsistencies between the Charter language and State Statute which has caused additional staff time and resources. She stated that it does not appear the Council is unanimous on these issues. She stated that perhaps the discussion should focus on the inconsistencies rather than primaries and special elections.

City Attorney Langel confirmed that the original intent of the update was to simply and clarify the language to be consistent with State law without changing the existing process. He confirmed that could be done without adding the primary and special election processes.

City Administrator Ulrich confirmed consensus that there is not unanimous agreement related to primaries and special elections and therefore this could be brought forward as more of a housekeeping item to address the inconsistencies with State law. He provided additional details on the lengthy process for special elections with primaries.

City Attorney Langel commented that the City could approach the legislature to request additional dates for special elections, but he was unsure how receptive the legislature would be to that idea.

Mayor Kuzma commented that Ramsey is fortunate to have seven members and a full Council at this time. He stated that it appears the consensus at this time would be to clean up the language to be more in line with State Statute.

Councilmember Heineman commented that he would not support a runoff option as that would cause more confusion and time.

Councilmember Musgrove agreed that would add more time for staff and cost for the City to continuously run elections.

City Administrator Ulrich stated that another option would be to place this on the ballot and let residents decide.

**3. ADJOURNMENT**

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Kurtis G. Ulrich  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

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Katie M. Schmidt  
Deputy City Clerk

Drafted by Amanda Staple  
*TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*