

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, April 11, 2023, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Mark Kuzma
Councilmember Chelsee Howell (left at 5:45 p.m.)
Councilmember Debra Musgrove
Councilmember Michael Olson
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Dan Specht
Councilmember Matt Woestehoff

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
Planning Manager Todd Larson
City Attorney Fritz Knaak
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson
Police Captain Tim Frankfurth
City Clerk Katie Schmidt
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Kuzma called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Receive Update on Proposed Solar Project on Closed MPCA Landfill Site

Economic Development Manager Sullivan reviewed the Staff report and gave updates on the proposed solar Project.

Brian Burandt, VP Power Supply and Business Development of Connexus Energy, provided background on Connexus Energy, the "Brightfield" workshop, and project as a whole.

Mayor Kuzma asked about the timeline of getting this up and running.

Mr. Burandt shared that the goal is to come to terms with MPCA by late summer and would be back in front of the Council with a permit application by spring of 2024. He added that this would put the project completion by the end of the year in 2024.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if this project is additional to the current solar farm south of Highway 10 or if it would replace that farm.

Mr. Burandt said it is in addition to the current farm.

Councilmember Olson asked about the typical life cycle of a solar farm.

Mr. Burandt stated that land leases are typically 30 years or more; however, the underground infrastructure can last much longer.

Councilmember Specht asked if this would be in view from the homes in the area or if it would interfere with the walking path that is there.

Mr. Burandt explained that it will be behind a natural berm area and there are industrial facilities to the south that will screen it as well.

Councilmember Riley asked if this land has always been off limits and it is now opening to be used by Connexus and if this would also open up industrial land that the City could utilize.

Mr. Burandt said yes and explained that the solar panels are step one. He stated that the bonds were prepaid for these solar panels. He said that they will be placed in a way to preserve space for industrial lots. He stated that the City could then buy the land from MPCA.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she does not support solar or wind energy, but she does support nuclear. She asked if Connexus Energy has looked at any nuclear options or any other types of energy options.

Mr. Burandt stated that it would be up to State what this site is used for in the future. He added that they are currently studying small modular nuclears. He stated that they are only 38% carbon free and by 2040 they need to be 100% carbon free. He said that solar fills a niche in the portfolio. He said that using solar energy has also allowed for Connexus to not raise rates. He shared that he will be going to Germany over the summer to learn more about their energy use.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if Germany relies on Russia for supplementing their energy.

Mr. Burandt said no and explained how they conserved their gas to mitigate exposure to the Russian supply.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she is not sure how they will get to the goal of 100% carbon free by 2040. She stated that if they wanted to get to this goal, the City would not be doing a lot of the things it is doing. She reiterated that she would love to see pressure on the legislature from power companies for nuclear technologies.

Councilmember Specht noted the green space and stated that he is not sure how much control the City will have over the green space. He asked if this area should stay as a green space.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the industrial space that was discussed earlier could not happen unless there is solar on the field.

Mr. Burandt said that was correct.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if this is a project that Connexus Energy wants as it could help lower costs and help meet the carbon goal.

Mr. Burandt said yes and explained that the Connexus business model is to do solar that is distribution interconnected, meaning all power stays local. He stated that the projects they have done have helped lower the power supply expense. He added that there used to be a landfill gas generator in the 2000s and the interconnection equipment and infrastructure is still there which will also help lower the costs.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan stated that he is excited about the possibilities of industrial development on this site. He stated that this was listed as one of the legislative priorities; however, there are a lot of hurdles that need to be overcome to do this. He explained that they have presented this to MPCA and they are on hold with them until 2024 as they are making sure that all of the water reclamation wells are working properly. He stated that he presented them with options of where industrial development would make sense in hopes that the project design will work around these areas as potential industrial sites. He said they will keep working with MPCA.

Councilmember Musgrove asked Mr. Burandt if he would be available for future discussions on this topic.

Mr. Burandt said yes.

2.02: Adult-Use Cannabis Sales Moratorium Discussion

Community Development Director Hanson reviewed the Staff report concerning Minnesota legislation on permitting adult use of cannabis products. She stated that the State is giving local governments authority to adopt interim ordinances or moratorium to put together their own regulations and restrictions for these businesses. She added that Staff would work with the Office of Cannabis Management to develop restrictions and procedures.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that it says that there can only be a fee charged for the license based on the amount the State sets.

Community Development Director Hanson clarified that the State will set these fees.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there was any idea what the fees would be.

City Administrator Hagen shared that he believes the license is somewhere between \$2,000 and \$3,000 and the cities can collect up to half of this amount locally for registration and continued enforcement.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the licensing information that the State collects will be available to the City.

Community Development Director Hanson said she can look into this in the legislation.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she is in favor of the moratorium.

Mayor Kuzma asked if they have a moratorium if it can be ended earlier than the January 1, 2025 timeline.

Community Development Director Hanson said yes.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if this is very similar to the licensing for tobacco, other than the City being the licensor.

Community Development Director Hanson said that is correct.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he does not see this process taking very long to implement something once the bill has passed.

Community Development Director Hanson explained that there is a deadline of the end of July to have a cannabis department built out.

Mayor Kuzma stated that cannabis is legal for medical use with the Minnesota Department of Health and he imagines that this department will add this in.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he has already seen other cities license the edible side of this, similar to tobacco, and he imagines that every city will be having this same conversation rather quickly. He stated that he is not in favor of a moratorium; however, he thinks this problem will be solved quickly.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would also support a moratorium.

Councilmember Musgrove said she would like to take as much time that is needed to do this right because this is not the same as cigarettes or other tobacco products.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the moratorium.

2.03: Zoning Code Update

Planning Manager Larson reviewed the Staff report in regard to updating the Zoning Code and reviewed the proposed changes.

Mayor Kuzma asked if this will all be handled in house.

Planning Manager Larson said yes and explained that they are trying to work on this now before he and his staff are busy with other things in the warmer months.

Councilmember Musgrove asked how giving these businesses administrative permits is looked at as treating everyone the same. She asked if the process is all spelled out so anyone who meets all the criteria is funneled through.

Planning Manager Larson explained that in the site plan review section of the ordinance, it spells out what needs to go in front of the Council, the Planning Commission and what can be done administratively. He said that there are some procedures that are unclear and they are expanding on these things. He added that a lot of the regulations are also outdated and do not line up with State law, which has now been updated in the ordinance.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked when the public hearing is done for the Zoning Code updates if it includes the zoning map.

Planning Manager Larson stated that the map does need to be updated; however, they do not want to go through the effort of making changes to the map until they are confident that the districts have been updated. He stated that they do not anticipate a whole lot of change to this for business use.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that all of the work Planning Manager Larson and his team has done has been phenomenal. He stated that there are a lot of changes that are not actually affecting anything, rather just reorganizes everything very well. He expressed the importance of notifications when rezoning properties so that residents and businesses understand what they can and cannot do with their land.

Planning Manager Larson concluded his presentation by reviewing the draft of the zoning code updates and changes. He stated there is a work session case scheduled for May 9th to discuss Home Occupation Permits.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the Planning Commission meetings are online through QCTV.

Planning Manager Larson said yes.

Councilmember Musgrove asked how the process of this will go and questions on this can be discussed as the draft document is very robust. She asked how typos and edits will be addressed.

Planning Manager Larson stated that if a typo is found, email him with the edit and we will correct it. He said that if anything is found that is worth discussing those items can be brought to a larger group for discussion. He asked if there are any items that the Council would like to discuss at a future meeting.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would like to discuss the minimum sizes of lots.

Councilmember Riley suggested updating the language around ‘urban’ as Ramsey does not have many urban areas.

City Administrator Hagen shared that Councilmember Howell noted a discussion on the Home Occupation Permit section and the uses allowed in relation to ammunition and firearms dealers.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that he would like to discuss notification requirements.

Councilmember Olson stated that he received an email about ‘mother-in-law’ apartments and asked if this was included in the draft.

Planning Manager Larson said that there are a few edits to this in the draft. He asked if Councilmember Olson could direct the resident that emailed him to the Planning Staff and they can address their questions.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked about the helicopter section.

Planning Manager Larson stated that there was a helicopter that took off from a resident’s property. He noted that this, and other similar items in the draft, are in there for in case these situations ever happen. He added that some of these definitions are in there as a requirement from the State.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about the sound wall definition and why they are not regulated if they are looked at in development plans.

Planning Manager Larson explained that fences and sound walls are looked at similarly and if these are in the highway right-of-way it is not regulated.

City Administrator Hagen stated that these are looked at as a part of the development review process. He added that regulation of this is based on Staff being diligent and checking the plans.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if a definition would help guide this.

City Administrator Hagen said no and that a detailed review of plans will be what guides this.

2.04: Discuss Polling Locations

City Clerk Schmidt reviewed the Staff report concerning changing polling locations for two of the larger precincts. She stated that she visited each polling location during the last election and had trouble finding parking at both Independent Baptist and Fire Station #2. She shared the recommendations to switch the polling place at Independent Baptist to Fire Station #1 and Fire Station #2 to Ramsey Elementary.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that Ramsey Elementary makes sense and suggested asking the school if the poll workers could gain access to the gym earlier for set up.

Councilmember Woestehoff added that Fire Station #2 would be a huge improvement from Independent Baptist.

Councilmember Specht asked if these polling locations get financial compensation for the City using their facilities for the day.

City Clerk Schmidt said they do not receive any compensation. She stated it is possible they would need to pay a rental fee if the facility is used the night before for set up.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with changing these two polling locations.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/Calendar

The Council discussed priority items and discussions for the upcoming months as there are many future topics to be covered.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested adding the budget to the future topics list and moving up the last item regarding applying COLA to other positions prior to the first budget discussion.

City Administrator Hagen stated the budget discussions will begin with the first meeting in July and continue until December if needed.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

Councilmember Specht asked if the City had heard back from the large format retailer that was interested in Parcel 46.

City Administrator Hagen said no.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt

City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Rokosz

TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.