

**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 Monday, April 24, 2023, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Mark Kuzma  
Councilmember Chelsee Howell  
Councilmember Debra Musgrove  
Councilmember Michael Olson  
Councilmember Chris Riley  
Councilmember Dan Specht  
Councilmember Matt Woestehoff

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen  
City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby  
Finance Director Diana Lund  
Police Chief Jeff Katers  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan  
Communications Coordinator Pat Johnson  
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Kuzma called the City Council Special Work Session to order at 6:00 p.m.

**2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

**2.01: Annual Strategic Planning Session**

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff packet and evening's agenda for the 2023 Strategic Planning Session. He stated that this will move into another work session before being officially adopted.

The Council and Staff participated in an icebreaker activity.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the 2022 Strategic Plan. He stated that this plan has been in place for the last few years with a few minor tweaks, but the structure has generally been the same. He added that he will not be deep diving into the values or the mission and will be focusing more on the objectives and strategies. He reviewed the values that were established of ethics and integrity, fiscal responsibility, cooperation and teamwork, open and honest communications, excellence and quality in the delivery of service, treating people with respect and fairness, and

adaptability and continuous learning. He read aloud the vision statement of Ramsey which states, “Ramsey will be a secure, citizen-driven, collaborative community that respects the balance and connectivity between its unique suburban, rural, and natural environments” and the mission statement which states, “To work together to responsibly grow our community and to provide quality, cost-effective and efficient government services.” He noted that these two statements are what dictates what goes into the strategic plan as these are long term focuses of the City for future goals. He reviewed the objectives of financial stability, a balance of rural character and suburban growth, an active and connected community, smart citizen-focused government, and an effective organization. He shared the nine strategies which go along with the objectives, which are, identify and implement operational efficiencies, cost savings and additional funding sources while maintaining and increasing transparency and accountability, promote economic growth and development, create a positive image for residential neighborhoods, business districts and key corridors, improve the safety and mobility of transportation corridors, connect the community through Parks and Trails Capital Improvements along with Recreational Programming, spotlight sustainability and efficiency through public facilities and infrastructure investments, strengthen and enhance our identity, brand and image, improve the City’s communication, and strive for high organizational morale and employee retention. He added that each strategy received a few action items. He stated that there are 25 total action items, and Staff deemed 10 of these items as completed, one was deemed partially completed, eight were deemed as in-progress, and six were deemed as on-going. He reviewed strategy #1, which currently is to, identify and implement operational efficiencies, cost savings and additional funding sources while maintaining and increasing transparency and accountability. He stated that this is wordy and difficult to follow. He recommended finding a way to break this down. He stated that discussing cost savings and additional funding sources is more linked to financial stability, and increasing transparency and accountability is more related to communications efforts. He continued by discussing the five action plans within this first strategy and shared the completed items were, an updated website design and making the website easier to navigate, adjustment of the development review process to provide a better result to the developers, Planning Commission, and Council, a review of turf maintenance of City properties, and communicate cost savings and productivity from the new Public Works facility. He added that the item still in process is soliciting support from Anoka County on DMV operations. He reviewed strategy #2, of promoting economic growth and development. He stated that one of these four action items was deemed completed, which contained many accomplishments, such as, the Riverdale Drive extension, creating a shovel ready site north of Affinity Apartments, completing the Highway 10 infrastructure cost analysis, COR updates to infrastructure, and the digital billboard ordinance and a lease executed for this. He shared the action items that are in-progress, which are, the comprehensive City Code update and soliciting input from the community on zoning. He stated that the on-going item is business retention and expansion efforts, including business visits and networking activities. He stated that strategy #3 is to create a positive image for residential neighborhoods, business districts and key corridors, and one action item was completed, which was supporting and recognizing community volunteer efforts. He mentioned that a local business planted a number of trees including an oak tree along one of the City roadways. He stated that the in-progress items are proactive, multi-family property management program and crime-free, multi-family housing. He reviewed strategy #4 of improving safety and mobility of transportation corridors. He stated that the completed action item was the County Road 5 corridor study. He reviewed the two on-going items of the Ramsey Gateway project and street light and pedestrian safety improvements. He discussed strategy #5 of

connecting the community through parks and trails capital improvements along with recreational programming. He stated that they have adopted the playground replacement plan which is funded by the gambling proceeds. He added that they will be creating new theme playgrounds in the neighborhoods and planning for two new regional parks is underway. He discussed the on-going action item of explaining the recreational programming opportunities and stated that these efforts have been drastic already. He added that they have gotten great feedback from Recreational Specialist Martinez-Flynn. He moved on to strategy #6 which was to spotlight sustainability and efficiency through public facilities and infrastructure investments. He shared the one action item for this strategy is the water treatment plant construction which will be beginning spring of 2023 and the water main improvements will be the secondary phase. He shared that strategy #7 was to strengthen and enhance the identity, brand and image. He explained that the completed item was focused on the annual holiday lights contest, with improvements such as expanding the voting period and having a better map established. He stated that as a result of these efforts there was a 40% increase in voter participation. He discussed the on-going item of creating a unique zip code for Ramsey. He shared that he met with USPS and that 2026 would be the next time that the City could formally request this. He stated that strategy #8 was to improve City communications. He noted the completed action item was quantifying savings of the Public Works facility and the on-going item of generally improving ways to communicate effectively with the community, provide regular updates to Council, and provide consistent and efficient internal processes for getting messages out to the public. He added that a majority of these messages have shifted to social media outlets. He said strategy #9 was to improve and sustain high organizational morale. He discussed the completed action item of continuing the year-end Employee Recognition event for Council, Boards, Commissions, and Staff. He added that they have also increased other events where Staff can interact with other departments. He stated that they are revitalizing the employee wellness program. He noted that they are still working through the general City policy review, which will include feedback from the employee survey that will help with overall morale and seeing suggestions being implemented. He stated that the bi-annual survey was completed in-house and the results were just received and they are in the process of reviewing them. He concluded by stating that great progress was made on all of the action plans and most of the in-progress items are close or boarder line on-going. He asked if Council had any questions for Staff.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that some of the items discussed in strategy #2 aren't listed in the packet and she asked if these were items for other years.

City Administrator Hagen explained that this is recognized on the Strategic Plan under the progress sheet, this is rolled into the strategic infrastructure investments to prepare more shovel ready parcels. He stated that under the reconstruction improvements they noted the area west of Armstrong and west of Ferret as potential future industrial.

Councilmember Musgrove found the area that discusses Riverdale Drive.

City Administrator Hagen asked if any of the strategies seem to have been fully accomplished or if they want to keep the action plans in place and amend what else can be done under these items. He asked if they wanted to go through by individual strategies.

Councilmember Riley stated that they have already focused a lot on streets and road conditions in the last few years. He added that a lot of progress has been made with the Pavement Management Program, which was not in the packet. He explained that a lot of time has been put into this and there is still a lot to do. He suggested adding this as a strategy or objective as it is a vital service that the City does.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed with Councilmember Riley and added that he has always struggled with the strategies as some of them are cross-departmental, where it is not worth it to remove all of the strategies in the big picture and focus on a departmental structure in terms of each departments strategies. He stated that each department already has their own set of strategies and sets their own outlines that relate to the mission, values, and objectives. He suggested that this may help organize things better as the different departments likely have their own strategies that they would like to identify. He noted that all of the departments are interrelated and point back to the mission, values, and objectives; however, the strategies may come across better with a department mentality.

City Administrator Hagen shared that they can come across better with a department mentality; however, there are a few strategies that aren't cross-departmental, such as economic growth and development, which seems to deal with only Economic Development, but also includes the divisions within Community Development, as well as, engineering, utilities, and streets. He stated that all strategies are cross-departmental to some extent.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed and mentioned that there are certain things that the City is already doing a lot of that do not show up in the strategies, which may just fall into general duties of the City and do not need to be outlined in the strategies.

City Administrator Hagen explained that he looks at the strategic plan as what are things that the City does not do on a regular basis or year-to-year. He stated that he also looks at this in terms of the operating budget, which is money in and money out within the year and the capital plans are the long term investments. He noted that the strategic plan is a long term investment and something that will span the course of a year or two. He added that the overall objective is financial stability, which ties in with the strategies by looking at cost savings, additional funding sources and how the budget is done. He mentioned that engineering took a wide view of the City and determined that 40% of the roads were needing major work over the next 10 years.

Mayor Kuzma stated that when the Council first started with their strategic plan, the amount of work that was put on the Staff was a lot and over the next few years it was reduced. He stated that in recent years with reaching a lot of goals have been more reasonable on Staff. He added that he feels good about the progress that has been made. He stated that the strategic plan gives Staff direction as far as where they need to focus. He noted that he is very pleased to see how many items have been completed.

Councilmember Musgrove wondered if they had considered that some strategies may go and some may stay but looking at the objectives and put ideas under the objectives to see if they fall in line with that strategy before removing or adding strategies. She gave an example of enlisting help from citizens to take care of the fire hydrants during the winter, which could go into community

involvement and helping alleviate work from Staff. She also shared her ideas around stormwater management and how they could enlist the help of citizens to help with street storm drains to keep them clear. She stated that this may involve more communication concerning programs like this.

Mayor Kuzma stated that he sees this as an action plan.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that this is a great suggestion and does cover the objectives. He shared that this can fit into some of the strategies. He explained his perspective as looking at this as what is the most useful for Staff. He used the example of wanting to have an active and connected community, so this plan could give Staff the ability and flexibility to address issues that fall in line with the goals and objectives of the City. He added that these things may not directly relate to a strategy but the tactics get handled by Staff. He noted that the strategies that are currently in place should not be erased; however, he sees this as cleaning up the strategies, as some have been accomplished but new tactics can fall into these strategies. He asked if these strategies are the right ones to start with. He added that everything on the first page of the packet is great and when they get into the strategies, they can look at these more strategically. He shared that he would like to discuss the strategies as a large group before splitting into smaller groups.

City Administrator Hagen again reviewed the objectives and goals of the City. He asked if financial responsibility should remain as an objective. He stated that this is the City's goal and it will be worked down to addressing the strategies that will help achieve this. He asked about keeping the other objectives of, the balance of rural character and suburban growth, an active and connected community, smart citizen-focused government, and an effective organization. He requested to hear Council's opinions on what a smart, citizen-focused government is.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that in 2019 or 2020 this list of objectives was weeded down to a very focused number of objectives and she sees this as the objective to be removed. She explained that this objective can mean two things, focusing on the needs of the citizens and having the citizens involved.

Councilmember Howell shared that the word 'smart' in this objective seems odd. She asked if 'smart' in this objective refers to using technology or how citizens are handled. She added that she would switch this objective to say a citizen-focused government with an efficient and effective organization.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed and suggested merging strategies #3 and #4, making this one objective that creates an active and engaged community, as engagement is what he would be looking for with a citizen-focused government. He agreed that the word 'smart' in the objective bothers him as it is not well defined.

Councilmember Specht stated that citizens are at the top of their organizational chart. He stated that this is an all-encompassing objective and everything seems to fall under a citizen-focused government. He stated that this objective should stay separate.

Councilmember Howell agreed with Councilmember Specht, as the Council is elected to represent the citizens and they should be serving them as their priority.

City Administrator Hagen asked if this identified that Council, Staff, Boards and Commissions are to focus on what the citizens want and desire or if it is an effort to get the citizens more involved with the government.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he thinks of this as an effort to get the citizens involved with the government through engagement.

Councilmember Musgrove shared her thoughts around this is that the City provides customer service to the community and she sees this objective as the City being a service organization to the residents.

City Administrator Hagen suggested keeping the citizen-focused government and then add engagement to objective #3.

Councilmember Specht asked for clarification on the word 'active' and asked if it means engaged.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that to him, 'active' invokes Parks and Recreation.

Councilmember Olson asked to differentiate this from engagement.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that 'engaged' invokes the Parks and Recreation Board and it encourages participation in Boards and Commission and encourage feedback and participation at Council sessions.

City Administrator Hagen asked if the last objective of an effective organization should stay.

Councilmember Howell suggested adding the word 'efficient' to this definition.

City Administrator Hagen asked if there is a goal that seems to be missing.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if one was needed concerning core services, such as roads, or if this ties into an effective and efficient organization.

City Administrator Hagen said it could fall under that umbrella. He shared that these five objectives are really good goals to have for the City. He stated that he did not have any ideas of what to add as an objective.

Mayor Kuzma stated that they need to be aware of not adding too much to the objectives. He stated that the current objectives seem good.

City Administrator Hagen stated that with the strategies, he is not exactly sure which strategy was implemented to accomplish the objective. He suggested that as they move through the strategies, if it applies to more than one objective this should be identified as this helps Staff remember when they are bringing forward proposals they are able to rely on the strategies to see if it fits with the goals of the City. He reviewed strategy #1, which had four out of five of the action items

accomplished. He encouraged Staff to jump in and share as they see fit. He asked if there was anything additional that the City could be doing to identify and implement operational efficiencies, cost savings and additional funding sources while maintaining and increasing transparency and accountability. He noted that maintaining and increasing transparency and accountability has been dropped off for now and is being thought of as a separate strategy.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if, due to the change in the objective, this strategy applies locally to every other strategy. He asked if there are specific operational efficiencies that they want tactics on how to execute. He stated that he can think of additional funding sources, similar to the older gentleman who lobbied at the Capitol for funding for Highway 10. He added that when it comes to additional funding sources this tactic helps make the strategy make more sense.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan explained an example of operational efficiency when he started with the City was converting their handwritten licensing to e-licensing. He stated that this is a change for the customers, but they like it better and makes it more efficient for everyone.

Councilmember Woestehoff said he agreed but asked what is next.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan stated that there are still some licenses that need to be converted to e-licenses.

Councilmember Specht shared his thoughts that as things come up they will look at things, such as zoning, and look at how to make this more efficient, how to save costs, and finding other funding sources. He suggested using this kind of mindset with all new items that come up in the City.

Mayor Kuzma asked if everyone was comfortable with keeping this strategy as is.

City Administrator Hagen shared that they can leave the part that says to identify and implement operational efficiencies, cost savings, and additional funding sources. He stated that this strategy would tie back to financial stability, as well as, an effective and efficient organization. He noted that from these they would look at the actual plans. He stated that the objectives and strategies tend to be more broad. He explained that these are similar to other cities and they will make the plan more unique to Ramsey through the action items under each objective.

Mayor Kuzma asked if they were removing the section that says maintaining and increasing transparency and accountability.

City Administrator Hagen said yes and that the transparency and accountability remain in some fashion but will be dropped from the first strategy. He discussed maintaining and increasing transparency and accountability and stated that they have talked about this in detail over the past year and that this ties back to being a citizen-focused government. He asked if the Council would like this strategy to stay.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if this could be merged with improving the City's communication.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that these seem to be two separate thoughts.

Councilmember Woestehoff explained that this is where action items come into plan as there are internal engagement and external engagement.

Councilmember Specht stated that transparency and accountability is more than just through communication.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan asked if adding this could be as simple as commitment to increase or promote transparency and accountability.

Councilmember Musgrove stated she liked the idea.

Councilmember Howell agreed and stated that it otherwise seems like a subset and is being lost so she would like to see it separated out to some degree.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan stated that the goal seems to be making sure that the citizens know what the City is doing and the City is being held accountable. He stated that having a commitment to this is a strong understanding as mistakes do happen.

Councilmember Olson stated that the transparency and accountability piece all come through one way or another. He stated that he would tie it to improving communication as it is cohesive.

City Administrator Hagen shared his thoughts of dropping the strategy of improving the City's communication as a subset and recognize action plans to improve the communication under increase transparency and accountability.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for clarification that improving the City's communication is more of an action versus a strategy.

City Administrator Hagen explained that if the objective is to have a citizen-focused government and connected and engaged community, this would accomplished by having good transparency and accountability, and in order to have this there are various communication efforts.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that other than separating this to address internal and external communication, she still thinks that these items are two separate strategies.

City Administrator Hagen argued that unless they feel as though the City's communication is still needing a lot of improvements, a lot of efforts have already been made to satisfy the statement of improving this and it becomes more of a question of how this can be expanded upon.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that it relates to the item before it of strengthening and enhancing the City's identity, brand, and image.

Councilmember Specht asked if changing these words will change the day-to-day and what they do.

City Administrator Hagen said it would not but the uniqueness comes from the action plans.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that if this is just thought about from a framework standpoint that this strategy is to maintain and increase transparency and accountability if there are specific action items that can relate to this.

City Administrator Hagen said that some can be identified.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that overall it is mandatory that transparency and accountability are part of the City's strategies; however, he is not sure where they best fit. He does not want to see this dropped off. He thinks it makes a lot of sense to tag this onto communication; however, the communication could just be an action item if there are specific communication tasks.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested separating them and moving on to the rest of the strategies and then can come back to address this.

Mayor Kuzma stated that he likes this to be with the communication improvements as well.

City Administrator Hagen moved on to discuss promoting economic growth and development. He stated that this is generally a good strategy. He discussed the next strategy of creating a positive image for residential neighborhoods, business districts and key corridors. He shared that he wonders what else this could mean beyond the crime-free multi-family housing and proactive rental housing licenses and things that are already in Code. He argued that this framework has already been created to have this positive image. He asked if this should shift to a more reactionary item from a proactive item.

Councilmember Riley shared the opportunity with construction of the corridors.

Councilmember Musgrove shared background of when she was first on the Council that this was discussed in the area of Highway 10 and Highway 47 and the businesses in the area and how they can improve these business areas. She stated that they discussed street signage along Highway 47. She asked how they focus on some of the areas that have been neglected.

Mayor Kuzma stated that a lot of people thought that all of the City's energy was being focused on the COR.

Administrative Services Director Lasher shared that a former Councilmember wanted to look at Nowthen Boulevard and make it look nicer, which was attached to this strategy.

Mayor Kuzma stated that they are big on roads right now.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested adding taking care of roads as an action item of the positive image for the City. He stated that having something like this staying in the plan is important. He noted that the Planning Commission is eager to talk about signage and the COR design framework

will need a review at some point. He stated that there are enough things like the corridors that will need to be adapted to when there are new intersections.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there needs to be an action item under all of the strategies listed or if they can say that there are no action items recognized or acknowledged for this year and keep the strategy in place. She stated that this should be kept in as there is some potential for action items as the City grows.

City Administrator Hagen stated that could be fair to do if something pops up mid-year. He moved on to discuss improving the safety and mobility of transportation corridors. He stated that this is broad and includes work such as filling potholes. He noted connecting the community through parks and trails capital improvements along with recreational programming. He asked if the strategies are generally good to go. He stated that it is now the time in the schedule to move into small group discussion.

## **RECESS AND RECONVENE**

The Council took a 15 minute break.

### **2.01: Annual Strategic Planning Session (continued)**

Councilmember Howell suggested not going into small groups.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she would like to hear everyone's opinions.

Councilmember Specht asked what will be discussed in the small groups.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the small groups would be to see if there are any other strategies and give a better opportunity for weighing in and diving into action plan items.

Mayor Kuzma said it seems like they should forgo the small groups and continue to discuss strategies.

City Administrator Hagen continued the discussion of connecting the community through parks and trails capital improvements along with recreational programming. He stated that this strategy should stay as there is still work to be done. He added that they just got into the replacement program and there are gaps in the trail system. He noted that they should hone in on finding funding sources for these.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if it would take away anything by just saying parks and trails capital improvements along with recreational funding.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed and stated that he would also remove the part concerning capital improvements as well as that is already implied.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that he likes using the word 'connect' as it speaks to something for everyone which is the goal of the Parks system.

Mayor Kuzma stated that there is still a lot of work that can be done on parks.

City Administrator Hagen recommended rewording it to say 'connect the community through parks, trails and recreational programming.'

Councilmember Howell supported this.

Councilmember Olson stated that this could be reduced even further to say 'connect the community through recreational programming and infrastructure' as the infrastructure would include the trails, parks, and playgrounds.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that a large part of the parks are natural resources and the environment which is one of the many layers of value that the parks system has.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she likes City Administrator Hagen's suggested language.

Administrative Services Director Lasher agreed that his language is more understandable.

City Administrator Hagen discussed the next strategy of spotlighting sustainability and efficiency through public facilities and infrastructure investments. He stated that there is only one action plan on this item.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that this can be removed and if there are certain things that the City wants to communicate it can be put under the communication strategy.

Mayor Kuzma agreed.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the next strategy of strengthening and enhancing the identity, brand, and image. He asked if this strategy is related to City communication.

Councilmember Specht stated that in general they are doing a great job with communication, consistency, and branding. He said this is important to who the City is.

Councilmember Riley agreed.

Mayor Kuzma explained that when this item was added, the City had the COR logo and the Ramsey logo which were conflicting and he wanted to focus on the City logo.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan added that with the Highway 10 improvements there will potentially be opportunities with signage and designs also on the frontage roads to enhance the brand.

City Administrator Hagen circled back to the strategy of improving the City's communication through transparency and accountability.

Councilmember Specht stated that they do not want to use the word 'improve' as that implies that a great job is not already being done. He suggested using the word 'maintain.'

Administrative Services Director Lasher added that there are always ways to improve.

Councilmember Specht clarified by saying that there was a time in the past that they realized they need to improve this and now they are on the right track and continue to grow.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that one strategy already starts with the word 'improve' and she recommended using a different word, such as, 'enhance.'

Mayor Kuzma stated that he likes this.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that they are under utilizing a lot of GIS and map tools through LOGIS and he suggested making this more accessible.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the last strategy of striving for organization morale and employee retention.

Councilmember Specht stated that this is important.

Administrative Services Director Lasher shared that she recently attended a League of Minnesota Cities workshop and shared that the city of Burnsville has something they call Burnsville University. She added that Burnsville is so committed to employee morale, growth, and retention that one of their strategies is organizational culture. She read the information from Burnsville's website that says that they want to create great experiences for their employees so that these employees will do the same for the community.

City Administrator Hagen asked if there was interest in broadening it to include organizational culture.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the discussion was on changing what the strategy is.

City Administrator Hagen explained that Burnsville's strategy is broader and references the organization as a whole. He stated that if the City did this, a subset would be the action plan of focusing on the employees. He suggested the strategy be striving for high organizational morale and employee retention.

Mayor Kuzma shared his support for this.

City Administrator Hagen asked if there were any more strategies that there was interest in adding to meet the objectives.

Councilmember Riley asked again about the streets. He shared that in his mind, the streets are a crisis and until the streets are under control he does not care about anything else that is on the list. He stated that either the streets need to become imperative under each item or become its own. He reiterated that few of these things matter until the streets are under control.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that the roads seem to be an action item under improving safety and quality of the transportation corridors. She stated that working on the streets and getting them done are just an action item. She asked if Councilmember Riley wants this as a strategy as well as an action item.

Councilmember Riley stated that he does not know where it should go but until the roads are under control, not many other plans matter.

Councilmember Olson agreed with Councilmember Riley that roads need to be elevated, which may be an action plan at its core; however it needs elevation based on its importance and so that the residents see that the City is working on the roads and taking them seriously, which is critical. He added that fixing the roads feeds into a lot of the other items, such as improving the image and making the City more safe.

Councilmember Specht agreed that this needs to be a top priority. He stated that this could be an action plan under almost every strategy. He agreed that this is the number one issue facing the City. He stated that he does not think this needs to be a strategy.

Mayor Kuzma stated that this could go under the communication strategy by communicating to the public that work is getting done.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan stated that having the roads in more than one strategy is okay; however, he would just add it to the strategy concerning improving safety and mobility of transportation corridors by adding local streets to the end of this strategy.

Councilmember Olson shared his thoughts that rather than relegating this to action items, he would be more inclined to bring it up to an objective. He stated that this would be an on-going objective forever.

Mayor Kuzma noted that the residents give the City a hard time about how the roads are. He stated that they have been bringing this forward to work on and a lot has been getting done, proving that this is priority number one of the City.

City Administrator Hagen suggested adding an objective about high quality basic needs.

Councilmember Riley recommended high quality infrastructure.

City Administrator Hagen stated that water, roadways, emergency responses, and others are all the basic needs and core services of the City. He said there is not an objective that addresses these things. He noted that if there was an objective on core services with strategies on this that have a high focus on roads and the water treatment plant.

Councilmember Specht asked if infrastructure is considered a service.

City Administrator Hagen stated that this is generally recognized as a service.

Mayor Kuzma stated that was a good idea.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested language to say ensure City infrastructure and core services meet the needs and demands of the residents through maintenance and implementations.

City Administrator Hagen said that is too wordy.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that if there are the basic objectives that are already in place, and under them there are action plans and better communication of what the action plans are, no new objective is needed because it does not add anything to what is already there. She added that they are doing a lot with roads already and she thinks that getting the communication out there about what is happening with the roads is more important than another objective.

Councilmember Specht agreed; however, still strongly agrees that there should be an objective on it as it shows that this is one of the main objectives to the City, it will show residents, or people or businesses wanting to move into the City, that Ramsey has a strong infrastructure and good services. He asked if they should be worrying about a new program when they still have the roads to deal with. He shared that he liked Councilmember Woestehoff's suggestion, although it is a little wordy.

Mayor Kuzma asked for a consensus to add this objective.

Councilmember Musgrove asked what the wording was.

City Administrator Hagen said that the wording was along the line of the core services that are provided.

Councilmember Woestehoff reiterated his suggestion of ensuring City infrastructure and core services meet the needs and demands of the residents through maintenance and implementations.

City Administrator Hagen asked if they wanted to use terminology like 'high quality' or just 'quality.'

Councilmember Specht said he likes the second option.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested prioritizing the City infrastructure.

Councilmember Musgrove said she likes that suggestion.

City Administrator Hagen stated that we will work on the word to fit with the objectives. He suggested that the strategy under the objective would be to address aging infrastructure.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested prioritizing the infrastructure.

Administrative Service Director Lasher suggested the word 'expedite.'

Mayor Kuzma stated that he liked the word 'prioritize' and addressing the aged infrastructure in the strategy. He suggested moving this to the top of the list.

City Administrator Hagen moved on to discuss some of the action items. He reviewed the completed action items under each strategy. He stated that the lease with Anoka County is through June 30, 2025.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that Finance Director Lund had shared with her that the lease has a reup option in 2025 to go through 2030.

City Administrator Hagen suggested adding in new staffing support until 2030.

Finance Director Lund stated that they have the additional five years in the lease to bring it to 2030.

City Administrator Hagen asked about removing the five action plans.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that he likes action item #3 and asked if everyone was open to retitling #3 to 'continue to analyze grounds maintenance on City properties for an appropriate return on investment.' He stated that they are mowing areas that do not need to be mowed. He added that 20 acres have been taken out of this already. He stated that by retitling this it will help Staff to focus on items that give an appropriate return on investment as direction from the Council.

Mayor Kuzma asked if there is a consensus to change this.

The Council was in agreement to change it.

Councilmember Riley asked Finance Director Lund if she sees any opportunities to save money.

Finance Director Lund said Happy Days.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked her to expand on this.

Finance Director Lund shared that she lives in Coon Rapids and they have a company that runs their event and the City does a donation to the event. She stated that there is a lot of money that goes into Happy Days, between Staff hours and everything else that goes into it.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said the cost was around \$11,000.

Finance Director Lund stated that all in the City probably puts over \$150,000 into this event.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that they talked about having vendors come in for Happy Days to save money.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that this was discussed for food vendors. He stated that they would still have to provide power for the stage and lighting, but he thinks that those power packs can provide some additional power to save money. He added that every year that he has taken estimates of Happy Days it is always over \$100,000 in estimation and when they run costs it is even higher. He shared concern with this being a one day event. He stated that Councils in the past have discussed maybe more events throughout the year and not just focusing on one big, one day festival. He noted that they have tried the carnival approach to this but it is still a lot of money and a lot of Staff time.

Administrative Service Director Lasher added that there are things that they have done in the past that will not be able to get done.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that Recreation Specialist Martinez-Flynn has made a positive impact on the recreation programming; however, she is not doing anything else and is focusing on the recreational programming.

Mayor Kuzma stated that they are committed to Happy Days this year for sure and could be looked at closely in the future.

Councilmember Specht shared that he likes the ideas of having outside groups and partnering with organizations that can help. He stated that this event always has a good turn out and brings the community together and he would hate to see it go away. He stated that he would also prefer one large event over several smaller ones throughout the year. He noted that if they were to outsource the event it could save money.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested a youth sports organization.

City Administrator Hagen suggested something along the lines of reviewing Happy Days sourcing more funding or outsourcing.

Mayor Kuzma suggested having options.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood suggested developing a menu of all options and alternatives for the execution of Happy Days. He stated that Staff will do the recap after the event to bring forward recommendations for the future. He said if there was an organization that the event could be handed off to they would; however, there are not any in the community presently. He stated that the Ramsey Lions focus on the threshing show and their revenue has plummeted with ARAA getting in the game.

City Administrator Hagen asked if there were other operational efficiencies or cost savings that anyone can think of. He shared the suggestion of reviewing efficiency and effectiveness of

advisory boards and committees and analyzing operations and develop plans/strategies to eliminate inefficiencies and streamline the organization.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested adding these. She shared that Andover has recently done away with their Public Works committee because of redundancy and that there were certain Councilmembers that felt like they were not getting information. She stated that this helped to minimize Staff time. She suggested this idea to City Administrator Hagen and asked for opinions on this.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that this is the line of thinking when they eliminated the personnel and finance committees.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that a lot of the information that the committee discusses, such as the roads, is important information that the Council should be discussing. She acknowledged that Ramsey is a bigger City than Andover. She suggested looking at all committees to see if there are any potential savings in these areas. She stated that Staff does a good job at canceling meetings when there is nothing to discuss.

Councilmember Specht agreed and shared that as they were looking at the boards and commissions they also looked at the EPB to see if that could be merged with another board. He stated that this would be a good thing to discuss and review as an action plan.

Mayor Kuzma disagreed as he believes that the Public Works committee does a lot to help guide the Public Works department. He stated that there is a lot of stuff that the committee is able to dive in depth into to bring out the areas that need to be focused on, especially when there is a resident that brings an issue forward. He said this is a valuable service that this committee is able to offer.

Councilmember Riley stated that he would be concerned that they would add this as another work session item to get the level of information needed. He said that this still needs to be discussed and if all that happens is they add the rest of the Council to these committees then no time has been saved at all.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed that generically the Public Works committee is an interesting committee as it is Councilmembers only who review cases and advise Council on what to do. He stated that the level of detail and opportunity for feedback is something that he appreciates. He gave an example of this on 167th and shared that he thinks there should be a separate pedestrian facility. He stated that the Public Works committee was an opportunity to express that. He agreed with Councilmember Riley that if this goes to the whole Council then it is just taking more time. He wanted to hear City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby's perspective. He asked him if the committee gives him feedback that is otherwise not heard.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared his perspective that Staff finds great value in the Public Works committee as the committee acts as a sounding board to get perspective on what Council finds value in. He added that when the residents have requests for stop signs or other concerns of operations of the City, they come in and have that discussion that is less intimidating than sharing those concerns in the Council Chambers.

Councilmember Specht agreed that it is all great information but he does not have enough information on the Public Works committee to have a true opinion on it. He stated that there should be more of a discussion surrounding this and other boards and committees. He mentioned that when discussing if the EPB could be merged with something else, some people thought it was worth looking into. He suggested an action item of looking at ways to improve the community structure without making a decision this evening.

Councilmember Howell agreed with the idea of this being an action item to explore and evaluate the value of each board.

Councilmember Musgrove requested Staff's feedback on how the Council can get all of the information that is discussed at Public Works. She stated that Andover made this decision as they felt their Public Works committee information was relevant to the whole Council. She said her goal was to just gauge the appetite for this.

Councilmember Woestehoff noted to also explore other boards and commissions that the City should have but does not. He stated that at one point there was an HRA committee. He stated that other cities have other boards and commissions that he would like to potentially explore other opportunities that residents may be wanting the City to pay attention to.

City Administrator Hagen suggested leaving this on as an action item in the interest of time. He stated that Staff can go through this and can bring back information on what each board does. He noted that there was a discussion that the EPB and Planning Commission may be redundant. He added that they can also look at what other cities have that Ramsey is missing and they can have a discussion on this. He stated that it has been a number of years since a broader organizational study has been done. He asked if there was interest in something like this.

Councilmember Howell shared her idea of bringing on a consultant to the City. She asked if there was any value in bringing in someone as a consultant to figure out how to make the organization more efficient. She shared that she is more concerned with all of the tax increases and costs that will be going up.

Councilmember Specht asked if there has ever been a consultant hired to review these things.

City Administrator Hagen stated that this can be approached in two ways, as internally done or externally. He stated that it would depend on the depth that they were interested in. He shared that the City has just under 100 employees which is a lot to look at. He added that there are third party consultants that would look at Ramsey and provide insight on other cities comparable to the City to look at how the City might grow in the next few years. He stated that this would not necessarily look into the operational inefficiencies. He stated that outside organizational study would touch on different components of this.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would not be against this and stated that he would not want to spend a large amount of money to find a small amount of savings but if this would be beneficial he would be happy to get outside ideas.

City Administrator Hagen stated that he can ask if there are other cities that have ever done anything like this.

Mayor Kuzma emphasized keeping in mind that Ramsey is a growing community and they are not a City that is already built out. He stated that in Ramsey they are continually growing and the City already runs pretty efficiently and he does not see where this would pay off as there is not a lot of excess items in the budget that could be cut out.

Finance Director Lund stated that it comes down to more of being efficient than cost savings. She gave the example of the e-licensing permits and how this is more efficient for the residents but there is still a cost that went into this. She stated that there is now Tungsten in the accounts payable which saves a lot of Staff time as everything is now electronic, but there is a cost with this service.

Mayor Kuzma used the example of the body cameras for the police officers, which is a cost but good for the City.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that he liked that they added an effective and efficient organization higher in the City's objectives as it ties into all of this. He stated that there are probably areas that could be looked at where there could be potential for long term investments. He stated that these things are worth exploring but having it as an overall objective helps guide the organization better.

Councilmember Specht asked if there needs to be an action plan along with this.

City Administrator Hagen stated that this can be approached one of two ways, either by looking at this as a growing community and seeing what they can expect, or looking internally to see where they can improve and finding costs savings that may require an upfront cost.

Councilmember Riley stated that something like this is likely done regularly anyway but he asked if they can analyze who the City purchases things from and how they decide what they purchase.

Councilmember Olson reiterated that there are important decisions that are made based on the growth of the City and how they are investing and accommodating that growth. He noted that things can be done cheap and quick and they will not last or they can invest more upfront for lasting value.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that the Lower Rum River is bringing all of their permits online. She asked if this has anything to do within the City and if there are other processes that could go online as well.

City Administrator Hagen stated that there is a lot of stuff that is done online, such as all building permits and development applications. He added that they are working on looking at more of an online tool to let the residents know about potholes. He stated that there are ways to eliminate phone calls and emails. He said that a lot of what they are already doing is all online. He asked if

there were any strategies that the Council wanted to focus more time on. He stated that Staff can work on identifying action plans to bring back for discussion.

Councilmember Specht shared that he thinks the largest one is being addressed by outsourcing some of the potholes with the roads and infrastructure. He stated that some action plans are already in place but this needs to be a top priority.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed and shared that he would love a fresh copy of the strategies and take that as homework and return with action items. He stated that he would like to hear from Staff as to what they see as pertinent action items.

City Administrator Hagen asked if there needs to be a second special meeting to discuss this further or if it can be built into a work session. He added that Staff can go through and come up with a draft to bring back to Council for review, likely at the June meetings.

Mayor Kuzma suggested another special meeting.

City Administrator Hagen stated that the goal is likely not achievable with this special meeting and a regular work session meeting.

Councilmember Specht suggested adding a feature where residents could type in the name of their street and it would tell them when it would be fixed.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed with this and suggested also having the history of the road along with this so that residents can know when the road was last serviced or resurfaced. He suggested making a spreadsheet.

Councilmember Specht stated that residents could also use this to enter where they are seeing potholes.

Mayor Kuzma stated in with the 2023 snowfall it has further damaged the roads. He stated that stronger communication would help the residents understand why the roads are in as bad of a shape that they are.

Councilmember Specht added that there has been good communication surrounding this.

City Administrator Hagen wrapped up the session and stated that Staff will work on the action items and prepare a draft for Council in a few weeks before the next special meeting. He stated that he will schedule the next special meeting for late May or early June to get this done.

Councilmember Olson stated that he will be out of town May 17-June 7.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that it seems like the action items for this year may be less than they have been in the past, which she is okay with as Staff has a lot to work on already. She stated that Staff has accomplished a lot over the last few years.

Councilmember Woestehoff added that if there are things that Council is forgetting about that need to be addressed it would be good for them to know and have Staff share that with them.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that by the time they get to the next strategic planning session it would be useful for Staff to hear the Council's opinion on referencing the strategy plan when they are bringing forward significant initiatives for Council. He added that they made an effort to do this in past years and this will help signal to the public that these things were well thought out Council priorities and was not just Staff bringing things forward. He stated it would be helpful to get a consensus of the Council on this in terms of significant projects.

### **3. ADJOURNMENT**

The Special Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Brian S. Hagen  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

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Katie M. Schmidt  
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Rokosz  
*TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*