

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, July 11, 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  
Fire Chief Matt Kohner  
Police Chief Jeff Katers  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan  
City Attorney Fritz Knaak  
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson  
Streets Supervisor Shane Turner  
City Attorney Fritz Knaak

**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: Preliminary 2024 General Fund Budget/Levy Review**

Finance Director Lund presented the first review of the 2024 General Fund budget. She stated that the numbers that are discussed tonight would lead to a 14.06% increase in the General Fund tax levy. She reviewed all requests and costs that make up the first draft of the budget. She reviewed the different levies for a total increase of 10.35% increase. She discussed the revenue of the City.

Councilmember Specht asked about City revenues with all of the new buildings that are coming forward in the City. He asked if there is a list of when these new buildings will come on the tax rolls.

Finance Director Lund explained that it depends on where it is being built. She stated that if it is within the COR area, it is within the TIF district and those are not coming into the general fund. She stated that the valuation numbers will be received from the County at the end of the week.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about the intergovernmental revenue and the State paying for the officer cameras. She asked where the ARPA funds are being dedicated.

Finance Director Lund explained that the ARPA funds will be going towards patching the roads. She stated that the officer worn cameras were funded through ARPA funds but the squad video cameras were funded through the State.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked for more information on investment earnings. He asked how much is being tied up in investments to yield the return.

Finance Director Lund stated that the water treatment plant will basically cut the investments in half. She explained that the City does pooled investments. She continued her presentation by discussing the items that were not included in this budget.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the personnel requests for the City.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked about the three new streets employees that were requested. He asked if this is to maintain the current standards while still contracting out some work or if the request is just because more streets workers are needed.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that these three workers are needed to reallocate some of the duties that the Streets Lead who is supposed to assist the Streets Supervisor, but because of the demand he has turned into a working lead and spends all of his time out working in the field. He stated that the other roles are to continue to catch up with road maintenance and to replace the worker who currently spends most of his time in the sign shop.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if it would be a better investment to add four or five more streets workers rather than continuing to contract work out and help the City get caught up on potholes.

City Administrator Hagen stated that potholes are a need and will continue to be a need for the future. He stated that in the next five years the roads are going to be so much better as they are front loading the work with bonding dollars.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby added that they also hire seasonal streets workers in the summer, but getting seasonal help has become more difficult.

Mayor Kuzma asked City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby to speak about hiring challenges.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that it is difficult to find qualified workers who actually want to work. He noted that they have been able to find some good workers recently even with a lower number of initial applicants.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if all three of the streets workers' salaries would be the same. She asked about the request for a signs worker and if that worker would be the only one in this area or if it would be in addition to the worker that is already there.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that the new signs worker will replace the worker who is currently there. He shared that the starting wages would all be the same for the new workers. He noted that if there is a better candidate who could be started at a higher rate they may be able to offer this person more.

Councilmember Specht asked why there is now a request for three new streets workers.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that this request is due to the condition of the roads. He shared that there are many social media posts of residents complaining about their streets not being swept, which is due to the low staffing. He added that there are also sight distance concerns and trees becoming overgrown which are things that they have not had the capacity to get to in years. He stated that they have already been falling behind with these duties and now with the need for pothole patching these other items are not getting done. He noted that with a few more bodies they would also be able to get these other items finished.

Councilmember Specht shared that in the past they have discussed more maintenance workers. He asked if this would be strictly a parks workers.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that there are maintenance workers for all different departments. He noted that sometimes the different departments do help each other out when there is a need.

Councilmember Specht asked if the new parks maintenance workers would be hired to help keep up with things that they have not been able to keep up with in the past.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood explained that they have developed a ten year maintenance worker forecast, and in the forecast they are showing a minimum of a two maintenance worker deficit. He stated that as the City's population grows, there is more and more work for these maintenance workers.

Councilmember Riley stated that they have added one street maintenance worker in the last five years.

Councilmember Musgrove noted that she read through the description of the job for the parks maintenance worker and it stated that part of the job is to keep up with the demands of residents and athletic organizations. She asked if these services are charged for or if they are just done as a service to these organizations.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that these services are requested and they only charge anywhere from 25%-40% of the actual cost. He added that many cities perform this maintenance for the athletic associations. He noted that the athletic associations also pay for some services directly outside of what the City does.

Mayor Kuzma stated that this also creates revenue to replace dugouts and other similar items.

Councilmember Musgrove asked where the \$85,000 salary would come from.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood explained that they bill the athletic association twice a year and this money comes into the general fund.

Finance Director Lund noted that the revenue that comes in from the athletic association is reflected on the revenue portion of the budget.

City Administrator Hagen asked if the Council has anything else to add in regard to the personnel requests.

Councilmember Specht shared that he appreciated the information. He asked if these workers are approved if the streets department will be set for the next ten years.

City Administrator Hagen stated that it is dependent on how the City grows. He stated that there may continue to be a request for an extra worker or two per year just to keep up with demands.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood reviewed what the Public Works maintenance team does. He highlighted the categories of need which is the driving force for needing these new maintenance workers. He reviewed the ten year forecast. He shared that there are items at parks that have been damaged and destroyed that the workers have not had the capacity to repair.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the deficit of 2.8 maintenance workers is post-request or if the two requested workers will alleviate the deficit.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that is the current deficit and the reason for the request based on actual needs. He noted all of the future needs and projects that they would like to get ahead off. He stated that all of the maintenance worker requests are due to demands, needs, and future forecasting.

Councilmember Riley asked if this forecast includes both streets and parks workers.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood said yes. He added that these maintenance workers also plow snow all winter long.

Councilmember Specht stated that everything that has just been discussed are all items and requests that the Council has heard before. He asked if there are been tables and equipment at parks that have been broken for over 15 years and why they have not been fixed before now.

Mayor Kuzma stated that maintenance personnel is requested every year and the Council has not been able to approve these requests. He explained that they try to find a balance of needs and staying realistic. He noted that they are now at the point where the City is growing and they need to get these items taken care of. He asked if the Council is comfortable with bringing on these three maintenance workers.

Councilmember Howell asked how the City compared to cities in the surrounding area of a similar size with the number of parks workers.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that they used to look at other cities in the surrounding area of a similar population every year. He stated that they would compare the streets, parks, and utilities maintenance workers. He noted that every time they looked at this Ramsey was way below other cities. He explained that the departments are very efficient but with the population growth it is hard to keep up.

Councilmember Howell asked if there are parks that could be sold off so that they are not maintaining so many parks with a subpar outcome.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that they have discussed selling parks in the past and they are looking at this now. He shared that they received a grant for the 20 acres in the downtown area that they are converting to a native landscape so that mowing can be reduced. He stated that there are other parks that they have converted into native landscape which will help reduce maintenance over time. He added that they have also removed some playgrounds.

Councilmember Olson thanked Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood for the ten year forecast. He asked if they currently have 15 workers and if the number of new workers requested is based on projected needs.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that the number is based off of population growth only and noted that there are also new things that are being added as new requirements.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if street sweeping includes spraying for weeds.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood explained that spraying for weeds is an additional item.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there would be an appetite to bring on two new workers at the beginning of the year and bring on the other two later in the year.

Administrative Service Director Lasher explained that all of the numbers in the packet account for a January 1, 2024 hire. She stated that it would be very optimistic that they would hire all of these workers on January 1 and shared that it would likely be March or April before they were hired. She noted that it has become more and more challenging to hire seasonal workers. She stated that

they are proposing a wage adjustment for these seasonal workers. She also added that when these seasonal workers complete the season they can file for unemployment and the City must pay.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked about the ratio of maintenance workers to the population, if that figure considers single family homes only or also apartments. He asked about the difference in City maintenance for these two different home styles.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that single family homes contribute the largest amount to the maintenance demand. He stated that apartment dwellers use parks as much if not more than homeowners.

Councilmember Riley shared that he is a product of the seasonal work program within the City and stated that it seems to be a great model. He stated that he would like to hear more information on bumping up the pay for these seasonal workers. He noted that these are the types of issues that they thoroughly discussed as a part of the strategic plan. He stated that these infrastructure items are what he would like the City to focus on.

Councilmember Specht stated that he does not like the idea of having to hire so many new workers but the infrastructure needs are a serious issue in the City and they need to get done. He said that if these new workers will help get these things done then that is what they need to do.

Councilmember Howell shared that she would be curious to see what other cities are doing with their parks. She stated that she would like to hear about this before making a decision.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed and stated that he is not comfortable making any kind of decision on anything at the moment. He said that they need more information and also to know what the revenue will be estimated at from the County.

Mayor Kuzma added that he would also like to hear the requests from other departments.

Police Chief Katers reviewed his request for a nominal amount to promote a patrol officer to sergeant to restructure the department. He stated that he does not have a request for any additional hires.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if they would be looking to back fill the patrol officer position.

Police Chief Katers stated that would be a possibility. He shared how they calculate the needs based off of their metrics.

Fire Chief Kohner shared his requests of reclassifying a fire inspector to a fire marshal. He shared that the current fire inspector has already taken over a lot of the fire marshal duties. He shared his other request for an increase on hourly wages for on-call firefighters. He stated that it has been five years since this has been looked at. He noted that other cities of similar size pay considerably more per hour. He shared that the request would be for a 6% increase.

Finance Director Lund reviewed her requests for the reclassification of the accountant 1 to accountant 2 and a new hire as an accountant 1. She stated that they will be starting the implementation of the new LOGIS software in 2024. She added that it will likely take two months of Staff time to get this implemented. She shared that there are a lot of new items that the finance department takes care of.

Community Development Director Hanson shared her requests, including increasing the hours for the Planning Administrative Assistant to 25 hours a week from the current 20 hours. She shared the request to increase the Building Administrative Assistant hours to 28 hours from the current 20. She added the request to reclassify the permit technician 1 position to permit technician 2. She shared the last request for a rental housing inspector, which is contingent upon the Council moving forward with the rental housing inspection program. She noted that this position would be funded by the rental license fees.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared the request for a mechanic. He stated that all mechanic work is done in house and they currently have only two mechanics for all of the vehicles in the City.

Councilmember Riley asked if there could be a cost savings with this. He asked if they are currently having to outsource some of the work due to the demand.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated that they have had to send a few things out for maintenance. He stated that they can quantify this amount and bring it back to Council.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked about the vehicle requests and if there was some data on the age of these vehicles.

Mayor Kuzma noted that there will still be a lot to discuss with this budget. He added that it will be helpful once they know the revenue from the County.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby reviewed the building maintenance worker that is requested. He stated that this department is under staffed and behind in their duties.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about the Public Works garage door repairs.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that there is currently not a dedicated maintenance fund for the Public Works building. He noted that the garage doors need a lot of maintenance.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there was a warranty on these doors.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated that they would already be past a normal warranty period and also it would not cover normal wear and tear.

Councilmember Riley asked if they are considering equipment certificates or debt for capital improvements.

Finance Director Lund stated that she was going to ask Council if this was something they were interested in doing.

Councilmember Riley shared that he thinks that they would like to consider this.

City Administrator Hagen stated that the budget discussion will continue to the next work session meeting.

### **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 6:50 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.*