

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, May 9, 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 Clerk Katie Schmidt  
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson  
City Planner Brian McCann  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Planning Manager Todd Larson  
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: Discuss Recommendation to the Charter Commission regarding Chapter 4 - Nominations and Elections section 4.5.4 and 4.5.6**

City Clerk Schmidt reviewed the Staff report and the recommendations from the Charter Commission regarding Chapter 4 of the Charter that was recently updated. She reviewed the four options for updating section 4.5.4 and 4.5.6 of the Charter.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for more information regarding the thought process behind option #3 of switching 4.5.4 and 4.5.6.

City Administrator Hagen explained that option #3 moves things around to make it flow better.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if these were switched around why 4.5.6 would be needed.

City Administrator Hagen stated that 4.5.6 establishes what happens when a vacancy happens with less than a year left in the term.

Councilmember Musgrove added that they had previously talked about the timeframe of this and if it was less than a year and could still be many months before the next election.

City Clerk Schmidt stated that if they move up the special election it could shorten the timeframe.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she liked option #3 without the second part.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that in option #2 where there is no timeframe around the appointment process, this does not particularly state if someone gets appointed if there would still be a special election after this. He asked if someone is appointed to a term that has three years left if there would still be a special election as soon as the dates align.

City Administrator Hagen said that was correct.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the longest timeframe for this could be a few months.

City Clerk Schmidt said yes.

Councilmember Specht stated that option #3 is likely to be the closest to what they are looking for but would not want 4.5.6 in the Charter.

City Administrator Hagen stated that the Charter is silent if a vacancy occurs with less than a year left in the term.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if this speaks to this in option 4.5.4.

City Administrator Hagen said no and explained that 4.5.4 is just a carry on from what has already been approved with what was recently adopted in 4.5.1, stating that in the event of a vacancy of an elected office occurs with less than 365 days remaining in the term it will go to a special election. He stated that 4.5.2 refers to when the elected official will start immediately and 4.5.3 refers to the procedure to hold the election. He explained that 4.5.4 is a carry on of these prior sections and discusses what happens when they attempt to hold a special election and no one signs up and rather than restarting a seven to nine month process, it gives Council the opportunity to appoint until a successful special election can be held. He stated that 4.5.4 discusses what would happen if they have attempted to hold three special elections.

Councilmember Specht noted that if it is less than a year they can leave the vacancy open until the next general election.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if this has to be a majority vote or if they could ask the Charter Commission to make it a unanimous vote.

City Attorney Knaak stated that they could do this; however, it would add difficulty.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that this would be a good middle ground for this.

Councilmember Specht stated that he understands the need for this in extreme cases. He mentioned that this would give the appointed individual an advantage in future elections if they are already serving in the seat.

Councilmember Musgrove asked which section the change to make this unanimous would go.

Councilmember Woestehoff said it could go anywhere. He stated that the timing does not bother him because at most it would be nine months, whether it is a three year term that is remaining or a one year term. He added that he is indifferent to whether this deals with terms with more than 365 days or less than 365 days.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that she is okay with it open and allowing it to go to the vote.

Mayor Kuzma stated that if they cannot all agree then this will just remain open.

Councilmember Musgrove asked for clarification that they are looking at option #3 and changing this to unanimous.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that 4.5.6 would still be needed.

City Administrator Hagen added that they would also want to build in a unanimous vote by Council in both 4.5.4 and 4.5.6.

Councilmember Howell asked if this would eliminate the option for the Mayor to appoint someone.

City Administrator Hagen said yes and that there would be no tie breaker vote at that point. He asked if the unanimous vote would be from all current Councilmembers or just those present at the meeting.

Councilmember Howell stated that she would like for it to be all current members.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if this would include a member that had stepped down.

City Administrator Hagen said no.

There was a consensus of the Council.

## **2.02: Discuss Filling a Vacancy on the Environmental Policy Board**

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the Staff report in regard to deciding which of the three remaining candidates from the last recruitment should be appointed to the partial term on the Environmental Policy Board.

Mayor Kuzma asked who was the liaison on the EPB.

Councilmember Howell stated that she was. She noted that the candidate that stood out to her during the interviews was Michael as he showed lots of initiative.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that all three of the candidates were good. He commented that Megan put EPB as a second choice and shared the importance of her having a desire to serve on that particular Board.

Councilmember Howell noted that when Megan interviewed she did not know what any of the Boards were.

Councilmember Musgrove shared support for appointing Michael.

Councilmember Olson stated that he also supported Michael.

The consensus of the Council was to appoint Michael Heifner.

### **2.03: Review the Findings of the 2023 All-staff Employee Survey**

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the Staff report concerning the all-Staff survey. She noted that the Labor Management Committee will meet at the end of the month to formulate a work plan. She reviewed the results of the survey.

Councilmember Howell asked if the questions about employee benefits were broken down at all into smaller categories, such as life insurance or health insurance.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that this is addressed. She said that people are mostly commenting on the health insurance. She explained that the City does not fund higher than single level plans in full, which makes the plans expensive. She added that there are also high deductibles. She stated that other comments made in regard to benefits were about offering short term disability, paid family leave, and others.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if this was the first year under the new insurance, as she remembered that they had recently switched.

Administrative Services Director Lasher noted that they are under rate caps right now with Health Partners that go through 2024. She explained that the plan design has not changed as they have always been on a high deductible plan.

Councilmember Musgrove discussed question #11 concerning the strategic plan. She added that this question may not be as valuable to Staff as the strategic plan mainly deals with managers and them passing work down to employees. She also discussed uniforms and the budget for this.

Administrative Services Director Lasher commented that this is a negotiated item through a contract and is a competitive and rich benefit.

Councilmember Musgrove noted the question on training and how some answered that they feel as though they did not have enough training.

Councilmember Riley acknowledged that the survey is anonymous' however, he asked if they are able to see which answers come from the same individual.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said yes. She noted that the information provided to the Council is all Staff responses pooled together. She stated that the report can be run by groups as well.

Mayor Kuzma stated that the survey has been good overall.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the average of strongly agree and agree answers was 70.66%.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that he looked at all results that were in the strongly agree and agree categories and there were only eight questions that fall below the 70% threshold. He stated that it is important to talk about those items. He noted that there were three questions that had low results dealing with Council. He stated that these results are disappointing and wants to solve some of these issues.

Councilmember Specht stated that it seems like there is a downward trend for whether or not employees would recommend a job at the City to someone they know, which is down from 96% in 2016. He asked if this was something to be concerned about.

City Administrator Hagen agreed that this is a sizable decrease from one survey to the next. He stated that this survey was done in house and they can do more targeted survey questions to drill down and get more information on some of the lower scoring areas.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there could be more feedback on items such as training, which scored low on the survey. She added that when she was first elected to the Council she was directed to not get involved with employees. She stated that now it seems as though there is a different trend and a push to get to know the Staff. She added that there are opportunities for Staff and Council engagement.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he assumes that all teams are aware of all training opportunities, but based on some of the feedback he asked if they do not have the capacity and time for these training opportunities.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said this was possible. She added that they can drill down on this. She explained that the City's personnel policy states that the Council will set a training budget and stated that they can get more information on this. She acknowledged that time may be a big factor in this as well.

Councilmember Riley asked what the next step was in this process.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that she has a list of ideas of things to work on and will be grouping these things based on different categories. She added that she will also meet with the Labor Management Committee and come up with a work plan. She noted that she also wanted to hear recommendations from the Council on what to work on.

City Administrator Hagen stated that he looks at this from a budget perspective and explained that if the Council starts noticing training budgets increase then it will be as a direct result of the feedback that was received from Staff.

Mayor Kuzma said that there are contracts set for health insurance for the next two years. He asked how this could affect things.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that the labor contracts go through December 31, 2024 so there is not anything that can be done with these very easily. She noted that the City's contribution is also set; however, if the Labor Management Committee or the Council decide that they need to take a harder look at different plan options they can do this.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there will be negotiations starting next year.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that they will start negotiations early 2024.

Councilmember Howell asked when they look at training and all of the information is anonymous, how is the training pinpointed so that the efforts go to where they actually need to be.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that this is where employee communication with their supervisor or department head will come into play.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if there has been a compensation study done recently.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said no. She stated that a compensation study could cost around \$100,000. She noted that the Police Department has been very stressed with being understaffed and there are some cities in the area doing hiring bonuses. She added that the Police Department pay is competitive for similar sized cities; however, a lot of the compensation comments came from non-management police and fire.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested that some research can be done this year even though the union contracts are through 2024.

Councilmember Musgrove added that she thinks that the employees would rather have the money go to their salary rather than spending \$100,000 on a compensation study. She suggested finding this data another way to aid with next year's discussions. She pointed out that under the water and utility category, the uniform budget is at 125%, whereas the training is at 9.64%. She stated that this may need to be looked at to reallocate training funds.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said that they can look into this.

City Administrator Hagen stated that a better gauge for this would be looking at past year budgets.

There was a consensus of the Council

#### **2.04: Temporary Increase of Hours to Planning Administrative Assistant**

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report and shared that City Planner McCann has turned in his resignation. He shared the request for the Council to temporarily authorize the increase of the Planning Administrative Assistant hours to 29 hours per week. He added that they plan to have the City Planner position posted by the end of the week.

Councilmember Musgrove wished City Planner McCann well. She shared her support for this plan.

There was a consensus of the Council.

#### **2.05: Discuss Home Occupation Permits**

City Planner McCann reviewed the Staff report concerning Home Occupation Permits and potential code revisions.

Mayor Kuzma asked if there was a team that will be working on this and coming up with recommendations.

City Planner McCann stated that they are looking for Council direction.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that for having businesses in townhomes, most covenants do not allow them.

Councilmember Riley asked if they were suggesting that the City should deny these permits based on the fact that there is potentially a covenant.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that even if the City gives the permit, the covenant board can still penalize the individual. She said this would be a waste of time for the City. She suggested that the applicant first check their covenant documents to determine if it would even be allowed.

City Administrator Hagen added that Staff does make these suggestions and the applicants do not even realize that they need to look into these things. He stated that the direction from Council that they are looking for is whether or not they would want to allow these things if there were not covenants or HOAs that restricted them.

Councilmember Howell stated that the City should allow for opportunities for everyone and the applicant would then have to work things out with their HOA. She stated that she would hate to see a low impact business in an accessory building go away.

Mayor Kuzma stated that in the scenario where there is manufacturing and trucks coming and going it can become more disruptive and would be considered a commercial operation.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked about commercial building codes and if there are triggers that force commercial rather than a building permit.

Planning Manager Larson stated that it is the way that plans are labeled and when they are labeled with rooms such as offices and conference rooms, those are not residential uses.

Councilmember Howell stated the size of the property should be taken into consideration rather than just pigeonholing and not allowing certain things. She said she likes the idea of being more flexible and working with people.

Councilmember Specht agreed that he would like this to be more flexible, especially for low impact practices. He asked if, based on these new standards, an individual wanted to open a gun shop.

City Planner McCann explained that this would depend on how it was formatted in the revisions.

Councilmember Specht asked if all Home Occupation Permits come to Council.

City Planner McCann said yes. He stated that there used to be an administrator permit and if there was an interest to bring this back, these permits would not go to Council.

Councilmember Howell stated that level 1 is low impact and would like to see it stay that way. She noted that in the zoning code draft, it contained firearm sales and repair as not allowed uses.

Planning Manager Larson said that they can take the sales and manufacturing portion out of the current draft and just leave the ammunition manufacturing.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked about the not allowed uses in other cities. He stated that Ramsey is rather liberal with what is allowed. He added that this is worth reviewing.

Councilmember Specht said that it would depend on how the scope of the work is defined. He stated that he is in favor of allowing firearm sales and repair.

Councilmember Howell asked what is allowed currently on residential properties as far as body shops and machine shops.

Planning Manager Larson stated that this is currently not allowed as it is related to an internal combustion engine. He noted that there are some State regulations that go along with auto repair shops.

City Administrator Hagen shared that they focused on the fact that home occupations are supposed to be low impact to the neighborhood. He asked if there was an appetite to limit the square footage that an applicant can operate out of.

Councilmember Woestehoff said he likes this perspective. He asked how the square footage of a home occupation such as a bed and breakfast would be calculated.

City Administrator Hagen clarified that this would focus on using an accessory building for the home occupation.

Councilmember Howell asked what it is to the City how someone uses their property if the use is compatible with not disrupting people and remains safe.

Mayor Kuzma added that this is why things would come back to Council to discuss.

Councilmember Woestehoff noted that if it is not a restricted use then there is potentially no recourse to say no. He emphasized the importance of outlining what is or is not allowed.

Planning Manager Larson stated that other cities treat these as interim uses where there is a timeframe for these permits, with the intent of getting the business up and running from your home and then moving it to a commercial or industrial space.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the building code guides an accessory building.

City Administrator Hagen stated that building code only addresses the mention of construction.

Councilmember Specht agreed that the size does not matter as much as the activity.

City Administrator Hagen stated that they will work on these updates to be brought back to Council.

There was a consensus of the Council.

### **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 6:55 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.*