

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, October 24, 2023, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

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

Members Absent: Councilmember Howell

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen  
City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby  
Finance Director Diana Lund  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Building Official Jesse Szykulski  
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson  
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: Review Proposed 2024 Schedule of Rates, Fees, and Charges**

Finance Director Lund reviewed the Staff report and the proposed 2024 rates, fees, and charges. She reviewed all of the proposed changes to the rates, fees, and charges.

Building Official Szykulski discussed the changes in regard to the building permit fees. He noted that there are three different types of building permits, all have different fees due to different Staff and administrative needs. He explained that they will be going from the ICC 2017 rates to the 2021 rates to get them up to the market.

Mayor Kuzma asked how these rates will compare to neighboring cities.

Building Official Szykulski stated that when he spoke with Elk River, they are taking the evaluations that are being provided, which is not consistent. He added that he asked Andover what

their rates were and they did not provide him with any information. He shared that Ramsey seems to be a lot more sophisticated and consistent with these rates.

Mayor Kuzma asked if these rates will cover City costs.

Building Official Szykulski explained the income that was brought in for permits over the last year and how they are currently covering the costs. He noted that they are in a position where they are needing extra help to cover the amount of inspections and permits. He added that the building staff have even been working extra hours. He shared that he may need to request more personnel or more contracted services to keep up with demands.

City Administrator Hagen confirmed that the building department's revenue is exceeding their expenses; however, there are numbers that are not factored into their department's budget, such as vehicles and computers. He stated that with this increase they still would be covering their costs.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there is a reason why the air conditioner and furnace replacement fees are listed as individual fees if the systems are combined.

Building Official Szykulski stated these fees are for if they are separated. He noted that sometimes people will only replace one unit.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the fee for the combined replacement should be higher as it would take more time.

Building Official Szykulski explained that if they replace both at one time, the inspection barely takes anymore time and can be completed in the same half hour visit. He added that it would still only be one visit unless the inspector sees anything concerning.

Councilmember Olson stated that these are essentially one system whether it is heating or cooling as most of it is the same.

Building Official Szykulski noted that keeping all three inspections at the same rate alleviates questions that the residents could have.

Councilmember Musgrove reiterated that it may be beneficial to have the combination inspection be a little bit more than the individual inspections. She asked about the erosion control escrow for home improvements and why it has no charge.

Building Official Szykulski explained that these numbers are set by the engineering department. He noted that there is a charge for erosion control escrow for new home construction. He added that removing this fee will help with the efficiency of getting the review complete if engineering does not have to determine an erosion control amount.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there should be a flat fee for the Staff time for this.

Building Official Szykalski stated that he cannot speak to this as it was set by the engineering department.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked about the difference between the items that are escrow and the items that have permits.

Building Official Szykalski explained that all of the funds will be returned for the escrow items if they are not used.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about the PACT Charter School fee going up and if this covers costs.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood explained that this charge originated to provide a small amount of maintenance to offset what occurred in the park that was shared by the community and the athletic association. He noted that they patterned this same charge for the new facility next to Central Park and made the fee per field. He added that PACT has agreed to these fees. He explained that this fee was indexed from the original fee that was established back in 2006 with a 5% increase every year.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that if PACT could have the private sector do this and considering the understaffing, then she would like to see that they are at least getting ample funding for this. She added that she does not want this to be a detriment to the City.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that this is just a flat fee that recognizes the broad spectrum of maintenance that occurs at Central Park. He added that they still pay separately for the dragging and striping of the fields.

City Administrator Hagen added that they would have this maintenance anyway.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood reiterated that all the work being done would still be done regardless of PACT.

Building Official Szykalski explained that they did adjust the septic fees and added that they may need to contract out work for the biggest systems that the inspectors are not trained on. He added that solar panels were also added to this list as a fixed fee.

Community Development Director Hanson reiterated that they added the septic 'other' system fee.

Building Official Szykalski reviewed the 2024 building valuations and how this affects the fee schedule.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if this went from a 4% cost of the value down to about 3% cost of the value. He asked if the value has increased if the developer would be paying less than they would have before.

Building Official Szykalski reviewed the numbers and the calculations that show that the cost did not go down. He stated that when the valuation goes up and the permit fee goes up, then the percentage of the surcharge that is paid to the State also goes up.

City Administrator Hagen explained that in 2023 the permits were 3.5% of the value; however, in 2024 the permits will be 3.19% of the value.

Councilmember Riley stated that the City needs to cover their costs; however, he asked if they are adding too much to these fees.

Finance Director Lund shared that she has to submit a report every year in regard to building permit fees that shows the revenue that comes in versus the expenditure. She added that there is also an inspection budget; however, this does not include any overhead related to building, vehicles, the computer system or any other Staff time that is involved with these permits.

Councilmember Musgrove asked why there was no increase for maps and if there should be an increase.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the City Clerk Schmidt oversees this and has done a lot of the leg work on putting these rates and fees together. She noted that if City Clerk Schmidt did not propose a change, then it was still looked at and does not warrant a change in cost.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about the increase in meters being cost plus 5%.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that the 5% is for the administrative time spent for these meters.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if this fee was where it should be and not charging too much or too little.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated that this is an average charge.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked whether the bituminous charge of \$38 a square yard is within market rates and asked if this is charged frequently.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated that he is not sure how they arrived at this number.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood explained that this comes into play if a contractor damages a piece of roadway as part of underground utility work and did not properly patch it. He stated that the street supervisor looked at these numbers and thought they were fair to charge.

Councilmember Woestehoff noted that all of the tobacco charges are listed on the schedule. He asked if the goal in 2024 is to look at the cannabis licenses fees to add these to the schedule or if this will wait until the moratorium is lifted.

Community Development Director Hanson shared her thought is to wait until the moratorium is lifted to discuss these fees.

City Administrator Hagen circled back to the question concerning the erosion control escrow for home improvements.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that this fee has changed over the years. He stated that in 2022 the fee was \$100 plus an assessment fee and in 2023 there was a \$100 minimum and a \$1,000 maximum fee. He noted that these home improvement projects do not typically result in a lot of erosion issues. He added that they had discussed removing it, which they did do. He stated that he would like to go back and look at this to make sure it should have been removed.

City Administrator Hagen noted that if there is a case that they need to have this fee they can still fall back on other MS4 requirements and still have the property or the contractor correct any issues that may arise. He reiterated that they do not see this issue come up very often.

The consensus of the Council was to support the proposed 2024 schedule of rates, fee, and charges.

## **2.02: Discuss Employee Sick and Safe Time**

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the Staff report concerning employee sick and safe time. She shared that a new law is going into place on January 1, 2024 called Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) which was part of the legislative session. She explained that this law grants up to 48 hours or more, if an employer so chooses, of sick and safe time. She shared the recommendation to administer ESST to the minimum requirement since this law is new and likely has bugs that need fixing.

Councilmember Specht asked if this is a good idea legally.

City Attorney Knaak stated that he is in agreement with this. He noted that the recommendation is conservative and sound.

Councilmember Specht asked if there is an easier way to manage this.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said she is not aware of any software or systems that would make this easier for Staff.

City Administrator Hagen added that there has been a lot of support to go back to the legislators to try to clean this up specific to cities. He noted that this law applies to both the private and the public sector. He said that the easiest way to move forward with this is to focus on what is minimally required so that they can work this out and hopefully have the legislators clarify some of the questions that are out there.

Councilmember Olson asked if the current sick time allowed carries over year to year.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said yes and explained that the City has an extensive sick leave policy which has worked very well. She added that it would be difficult to make any revisions to this. She stated that anyone is an employee if they work more than 80 hours a year and they are not an independent contractor. She noted that all seasonal and part-time Staff will also get this ESST as long as they work 80 hours in a year. She reviewed what is considered a family member under this law. She added that there is also a rule within the law that if someone leaves their employment and has ESST left, it would be paid out to them; however, if they return to their position within 180 days, then they will get the ESST back.

City Administrator Hagen reiterated that there is a lot of confusion surrounding this.

Councilmember Olson asked if these ESST hours carry over as well.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that 48 hours or more can be accrued in the first year and in the second year they could cap this at 80 hours, which is what the City would plan to do with this.

Councilmember Olson asked how this compares to the regular sick leave.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that full-time employees earn 12 days a year, or 96 hours a year, and the hours can be accrued up to 960 hours.

Councilmember Riley applauded the decisions that have been made with this so far. He noted the odd nature of those who are considered employees, including City Councilmembers. He asked if this would be a time to reconsider this to see if they should be considered private contractors.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that she would not recommend that at this time.

Finance Director Lund added that they have spoken with the League of Minnesota Cities and they were of the opinion that the Councilmembers also do not count.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he was in agreement with this. He asked if an employee accrues all 960 hours if they would be paid out for this in full.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said no and explained that there is a lot of detail that goes into this. She noted that some employee groups convert this time to vacation or the post-employment healthcare savings plan.

Finance Director Lund stated that if someone has 960 hours left when they leave the City, they would get 40% severance.

Councilmember Wpestehoff asked if they could look at flattening sick time payout to 80 hours to match the ESST.

Administrative Services Director Lasher noted that this would be a huge cut in benefits to long term employees. She shared that there is another employee benefit that is coming effective January 1, 2026 for paid family and medical leave. She noted that this will be administered by DEED and the City will have to pay a portion of the administration and the employees will also have to pay a portion of the administration. She added that they are not sure what this will look like when it comes about.

The consensus of the Council was to administer ESST to the minimum legal requirements using the accrual method and capping the ESST hours to 80 hours.

### **2.03: Discussion Regarding Upcoming Memorandum of Agreements with the Unions and Revisions to the Personnel Policy.**

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the Staff report in regard to the upcoming memorandum of agreements with the unions and revisions to the personnel policy. She stated that there are several things that are in the works that will be brought to the Council for consideration, including a memorandum of agreement for ESST, addressing Juneteenth, and some items to work out with the unions. She noted that there are also a lot of updates that need to be made to the personnel policies. She added that they will also need to address a memorandum of agreement with AFSCME and when Christmas Eve is celebrated, which differs from the personnel policy.

Councilmember Specht asked if these memorandums of agreement will go on a consent agenda.

City Administrator Hagen stated that they would like to send these through the Council.

Councilmember Riley noted that some of these items seem like contract negotiation items. He asked if any of these memorandums of agreement have to do with any contract negotiations.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the matter of Juneteenth and the issue with AFSCME need to be addressed for this coming year and will not exceed the length of the current contract. She noted that this would be a decision that is made for the current contract only.

Mayor Kuzma asked if they had a choice in this.

City Administrator Hagen said no.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the upcoming memorandum of agreements.

### **2:03: Consider Reduction in Ice Skating Operations and Maintenance**

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood reviewed the Staff report concerning the reduction in ice skating operations and maintenance. He stated that there has been a steady decline in ice skating interest over the recent years. He shared the recommendation to close the ice skating rink at Ramsey Elementary School for the 2023-2024 season as a trial to see if the facilities at Central Park will be adequate.

Councilmember Specht asked if there is a contract with the School District for this rink.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood stated that there is not any kind of formal agreement to have these facilities on school property. He added that he has spoken to the School District's administration who are in support of this as they have seen it in other areas around the District.

Councilmember Specht asked if the District would want to reuse this space.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that he had concerns that the District may worry about the demolition of these facilities; however, they stated that they could just use the warming house for storage.

Councilmember Riley stated that he supports having the ice skating at Central Park.

Councilmember Musgrove thanked Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood and the Parks and Recreation Commission for their discussion on this item as it was a good one to have. She added that it will be good to try this for a season and see the outcome. She shared her support.

Councilmember Olson stated that he is very much in support of this as it is a great plan and well executed. He noted that the costs exceed \$100,000 per facility; however, the cost savings is not that great.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood explained how they arrived at the \$100,000 cost between water trucks, street sweeping, and other items. He stated that closing the facility at the school will save the cost of municipal water that they put on the rinks to make the ice and the lighting. He noted that there will not be any cash costs beyond the more nominal items. He stated that the value comes from the labor that will be able to be assigned to other areas. He added that they have only had a few rink attendants apply for this year.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that he cautiously agrees with closing the rink at the school. He noted that he would not want to dismantle anything at this point. He stated that COVID did close down a lot of things; however, they are back to around the same level that they were at almost 10 years ago.

Councilmember Specht agreed that nothing should be demolished. He stated that there should be some proactive communication with this.

The consensus of the Council was to close the ice skating rink at Ramsey Elementary for the 2023-2024 season.

### **3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION**

#### **3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar**

Noted.

**4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT**

Councilmember Specht stated that when the road contraction season is over it would be nice to get an overview of how the road construction season went and what was learned.

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:52 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.*