

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, January 9, 2024, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Mark Kuzma
Councilmember Chelsee Howell
Councilmember Debra Musgrove
Councilmember Chris Riley (attending remotely)
Councilmember Dan Specht
Councilmember Matt Woestehoff

Members Absent: Councilmember Michael Olson

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
Police Chief Jeff Katers
Planning Manager Todd Larson
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan
City Attorney Fritz Knaak
Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Craig Swalchick
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson
City Clerk Katie Schmidt

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Kuzma called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:34 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Discuss Council Organization

City Clerk Schmidt reviewed the Staff report in regard to the Council organization.

Mayor Kuzma shared that he would like to see Councilmember Riley continue to serve as Acting Mayor in his absence.

The Council was in agreement to keep Councilmember Riley as Acting Mayor.

Mayor Kuzma discussed the positions on the Environmental Policy Board, which are currently being held by Councilmember Howell and Councilmember Woestehoff as the alternate.

Councilmember Howell shared that she has difficulties with Monday meetings this year. She asked if Councilmember Woestehoff would be interested in taking her spot and she would become the alternate.

Councilmember Woestehoff was in agreement with this.

Mayor Kuzma discussed the Highway 10 Committee. He noted that last year the seats were held by himself, Councilmembers Riley and Specht, and City Administrator Hagen.

The Council was in agreement with these appointments.

Mayor Kuzma discussed the positions on the Parks and Recreation Commission, which are currently held by Councilmember Musgrove with Councilmember Olson as the alternate.

Councilmember Musgrove shared she is willing to serve on this Commission again; however, there is interest from other Councilmembers.

The Council was in agreement to keep Councilmember Musgrove as the primary and have Councilmember Riley as the alternate.

Mayor Kuzma discussed the Planning Commission, whose positions are currently being held by Councilmember Woestehoff with Councilmember Olson as the alternate.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested keeping this the same for this year.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that he is happy to keep this as is or swap positions with Councilmember Olson if he desires to.

The Council was in agreement to keep the current appointments.

Mayor Kuzma discussed the Public Works Committee, whose positions are currently being held by Councilmembers Musgrove, Riley and Woestehoff with Councilmember Howell as an alternate. He shared that the positions will be held by Councilmember Howell, Musgrove, and Olson. He asked Councilmember Riley if he would be the alternate for this Committee.

Councilmember Riley said yes.

The Council was in agreement with these appointments.

Councilmember Musgrove shared she was in agreement with the other contracts to be approved, including the contract with the Anoka County UnionHerald, Timesaver Off-Site Secretarial, and the City's legal services.

The Council was in consensus to move forward with these appointments as presented.

2.02: 2024 Legislative Priorities

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning the updates to the 2024 legislative priorities which has been updated based on past success. He introduced Mario Nozzarella from IDTS Medical, Inc. who does research in the medical industry.

Mr. Nozzarella from IDTS Medical, Inc. came forward and reviewed his professional background and the background of IDTS Medical. He shared he is requesting State funding to expand their operation of providing respiratory care to people whether they can afford it or not. He noted the long term goal of this is to build a hospital for respiratory care. He shared he believes Ramsey is the perfect place to have this facility and to improve the viability of what they can do within the community as this will create a lot of jobs and drive revenue to the community.

City Administrator Hagen asked Mr. Nozzarella to explain what he will be asking the legislature for and how this connects to Ramsey.

Mr. Nozzarella shared there are a few grant opportunities that they have available. He added they are working with Senators to try to pass a bill for respiratory advancements and COVID relief. He noted this would be a one-time grant that they would look to bring to the community. He shared they would be looking to Ramsey for a pass through of opportunities so that the State would fund this to the City and the City would fund the project. He added that having the City involved will be paramount to the success of this project.

Economic Development manager Sullivan asked why all of these steps are important for the end goal of building a hospital.

Mr. Nozzarella shared that when he started RespirTech in 2000, he created a program to have cystic fibrosis vests be able to be reimbursable through the insurance industry. He noted that the steps in his current process is to have these other respiratory aid devices to be reimbursable through insurance as well. He stated the first step is to get these services working in their facility to build accreditation with the insurance companies so these items can be reimbursed.

Councilmember Howell asked if the current wellness and medical center is in St. Paul.

Mr. Nozzarella shared they are proposing at the end of January to use this center as a stepping stone as he recently purchased this facility. He shared that doctors do not want to work in St. Paul due to traffic and patients also do not want to be treated in St. Paul due to the traffic as well. He noted they offered many free services at this facility and they could not get people to come. He shared they would be moving all the operations of the current facility, with the exception of the chiropractic care, to Ramsey. He noted that they do not want to bring anything into town that already exists, but rather support existing businesses to have the same end goal.

Councilmember Howell asked if the goal is to bring the hospital to Ramsey.

Mr. Nozzarella stated that where the VA building is, he has spoken to the property owners next to him and he would like it on that lot next to the VA. He added that they will be offering services that are not currently offered by the VA.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if Mr. Nozzerella already has a bill for the legislature.

Mr. Nozzerella said no and shared they are hoping to finalize the bill within the next few weeks. He added he has already written a one-pager for the bill and they are working on a two-page report to supplement it. He shared they hope to pass the resolution in front of the Council so they can show the State that they are serious about bringing this facility to Ramsey. He explained they have already been working with a number of Senators and they are aware of this project and mission.

Councilmember Musgrove shared her concerns with the resolution and the City committing to some things that are unknown. She stated she is not sure how they would agree with all of this information without knowing what some of the unknowns are with regard to the funding and the pass through. She asked how important this resolution is as opposed to a letter of support.

Mr. Nozzerella shared that they would like to set a tone to the State that they would like the funding but they would not like it to be overbearing on the community and that they would support this program as long as it fits within the guidelines of the City. He noted the only piece that they really do not know at this time is how the money is reflected into a management package. He added they want it to be minimized as far as the burden on the City, while reassuring the State that they have a proximity and plan and they know who they will serve and what the outcomes will be.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan explained this would be a two step process. He stated that if this bill is drafted and gets to a situation where it may pass, the City would need to be a party to this agreement which would require additional Council action. He noted that they would be able to not accept the grant if it becomes something the City would not be supportive of. He said this resolution just starts the process.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if any of the funding would be able to go directly to the business rather than having to be passed through the City.

Mr. Nozzerella shared that they will not know until the bill is presented. He added that they do have a foundation that is a 5013c registered through the State. He stated that they feel that if it goes through a City partnership then it will have a better opportunity as there are more people who would be involved in the program.

Mayor Kuzma asked if there was a concern of the Council to support this.

Councilmember Specht shared his support for this.

Councilmember Musgrove shared she is slightly hesitant to support this because of the unknowns; however, she loves the idea of the medical aspect.

Councilmember Howell said this sounds very interesting and intriguing; however, she would like more time to contemplate this rather than make a decision right away.

Councilmember Riley noted that pushing a legislative issue like this that would support Ramsey makes sense.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that having the City's support on this would be good. He noted this is an existing and growing business and this location seems to be the perfect spot for something like this. He shared his support for this.

Mayor Kuzma asked about the number of patients that they expect to see at this facility.

Mr. Nozzerella explained that there will be traffic for the VA coming to the facility as well as the general public that will be coming to the facility. He noted that the VA has over 500 patients that come through the facility daily. He added that there is a significant number of these VA patients that are not getting the proper respiratory care that are being sent home or to another facility. He shared they believe they can increase this traffic by 50%, bringing them closer to 750 patients daily.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with supporting this project to the legislature.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the remainder of the legislative priorities for 2024, including the trunk water main improvements, water treatment plant, TIF district 14, the Mississippi River bridge project, the Metro mobility service area, and the closed landfill legislation.

Councilmember Musgrove thanked Staff for putting together the updates for the TIF language for the City to pay itself back. She noted that she would also like to get together with Dayton as a Council a few times a year to discuss the Mississippi River bridge.

Councilmember Riley stated that the metro mobility service area seems to be a situation of taxation without services being provided. He noted the Ramsey residents are contributing to this yet they are not eligible to use it. He stated they should either be able to use it or not be taxed for it.

City Administrator Hagen discussed the State-wide policy priorities of exemption of residential gardens from water emergency restrictions, State-wide licensure of massage therapy, amending the remote open meeting law requirement that requires notification of a remote place accessible to the public, lifting hospital moratorium, the policy of Local Government Aid, and the Metropolitan Council Committee membership. He also discussed the employee sick and safe time (ESST) and shared that Councilmember Musgrove requested they discuss this more.

Councilmember Musgrove noted there are some items in this policy that she would like to discuss. She said there is a proposal that small businesses with 25 or fewer employees should not have the policy applied to their business. She noted that they provide a better product than what is proposed and this would just require the City to do more paperwork and change a system that has been working. She said she is not sure what they can do to make the idea and concept of this better. She noted this puts hardships on smaller employers. She stated that if there is anything that the legislature can bring to the table for recommendations on how to make this product better.

Councilmember Howell stated that she has spoken with a small business employer who noted this is a great concern of theirs. She noted that she would like to see a way to have employers with small numbers of employees being exempt from this.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the League of Minnesota Cities has commented on this.

City Administrator Hagen said he does not think so. He shared that this topic was discussed at the Operating Committee of the North Metro Mayors Association and they discussed some suggestions of different kinds of businesses. He noted that the Operating Committee believed that there may not be any changes to this law this year.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that he is looking at this from the City's perspective as it does affect the City.

City Administrator Hagen said that they offer more hours per year as Councilmember Musgrove stated previously; however, the ESST requirement expands the allowed use to a certain degree. He noted that Staff had not discussed opening up the allowed uses. He said that the argument that they offer more hours per year may not be a great argument as the legislature would look at the allowed uses.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she still thinks that there needs to be a limit of what they offer and they are already offering their employees more benefits and more hours than ESST. She noted that there may be a workaround for this where they give employees more vacation time to use however they like. She stated this is a lot of stuff that they have to rethink and move around when they already have a better product. She added that there are also a lot of small businesses in the City and she believes these businesses would appreciate them looking at this for their sake as well.

Councilmember Howell agreed with Councilmember Musgrove and reiterated the stress that this would put on small business owners. She added this could also hurt taxes coming in as businesses will start going under. She noted that this does affect them more than just considering the number of employees that they have at the City.

Mayor Kuzma suggested adding an exemption for businesses with less than 25 employees.

City Administrator Hagen asked if they want to list a specific number of employees or just generally recognize small businesses.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested leaving this open for debate for small businesses.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan shared that they have all seen what has been happening with property values and noted that they will begin seeing rents increasing for small businesses that are renting retail space. He noted this will be tough for small businesses and this will be just another thing that will be added on top of this.

City Administrator Hagen said they will generally recognize small businesses in this and keep an eye on the types of conversations that pop up surrounding this.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the discussed legislative priorities.

2.03: Holiday Messaging on Social Media

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to holiday messaging on social media. He asked how the Council felt about using the term ‘Christmas’ in holiday messaging.

Mayor Kuzma stated he is okay with using ‘Christmas.’

Councilmember Specht noted that he wanted consistency between the City’s social media messaging and the Federal holidays.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if they exclude all other religions if they contradict any ACLU language.

City Attorney Knaak stated that if they exclude all other holidays then it is an issue; however, if they say ‘Merry Christmas’ and they are not showing evidence of preferring or promoting one religion over another then it is not an issue. He noted that there are a lot of different factors that come into play in this.

Councilmember Woestehoff said his only concern is seeming to exclusively support a single religion especially when there is so much antisemitism going around lately.

Councilmember Howell shared that they put ‘Happy Holidays’ language up in red and green while all other holidays that are celebrated around the same time as Christmas have different colors. She noted that ‘Happy Holidays’ seems like a cop out to say that they are acknowledging other holidays. She added that Christmas is a Federal and State holiday; however, it is the one thing that they do not say because some people may be offended. She stated they should either recognize everything, or limit it to Christmas which is a State and Federal holiday.

The consensus of the Council was to use the term ‘Christmas’ in the City’s holiday messaging.

2.04: Nuisance Code Updates

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick reviewed the Staff concerning the nuisance code updates.

Mayor Kuzma asked if dumping rocks on roads is currently prohibited.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said it is loosely prohibited and this is to clarify the code so that it is clearly stated.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked how residents would get approval from the City for temporary accessory structures.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick shared they would need to get approval for an appropriate accessory structure. He noted it would have to be approved through the zoning or building code depending on the size of the structure.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the City has one of these temporary accessory structures as their salt shed.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said yes and explained that this is approved through the building department as it has all the appropriate inspections and meets the commercial standards. He also reviewed the animal ordinance and how it pertains to the nuisance code. He noted that there were items in the nuisance code that belonged in the animal ordinance which is why they opened this up for discussion.

Councilmember Howell shared that the changes made to the animal ordinance look great.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick reviewed the traffic and vehicles draft ordinance. He shared this item may warrant more discussion.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that the order of the traffic and vehicle items seems haphazard. She asked if they would cite someone for leaving their keys in their car.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick shared this was already existing in the code. He explained that most municipalities have a rule or ordinance as such, which he believes mimics State statute. He shared that leaving keys in cars is prohibited as there are a lot of car thefts that come from people leaving their keys in their cars. He noted this also gives the law enforcement officer the ability to remove the keys from the car if they happen to come upon a car with its keys left inside in order to secure the car.

Councilmember Howell asked if since this is a State statute if the law enforcement officer would already have the ability to remove the keys and if it is already a State statute then it does not need its own ordinance.

Police Chief Katers shared that some of these items within the ordinance have just never been removed and the list is building over time. He noted that a majority of car thefts happen when the keys are left in the vehicle and allowing officers to remove the keys helps with crime prevention. He stated he does not know about the State statute and believes that they had to pass this as an ordinance. He noted this was pushed by the Crime Prevention Association of Minnesota.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the nuisance code updates, including the animal ordinance and traffic and vehicle ordinance.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

Noted.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

Councilmember Musgrove asked about moving the Council meeting currently scheduled for February 27 to February 26 due to February 27 being caucus night.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated he would prefer to keep the meeting scheduled for February 27.

Mayor Kuzma stated he would be open to switching the night of the meeting.

The consensus of the Council was to move the February 27 meeting to take place on Monday, February 26.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.