

**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 23, 2024, 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 Westby  
Finance Director Diana Lund  
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson  
Planning Manager Todd Larson  
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan  
Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Craig Swalchick  
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: Anoka County Assessor Property Valuation Process**

Alex Guggenberger, the Anoka County Assessor, reviewed the report on the County property valuation process. He reviewed his assessment process, the appeals process, the changes in values over the last 10 years, and the 2024 assessment that they are wrapping up in the next few weeks.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the trends come from the State.

Mr. Guggenberger said yes; however, they do calculate their own trends when it comes to appeals.

City Administrator Hagen shared they plan on summarizing Mr. Guggenberger's presentation into the upcoming newsletter.

Councilmember Musgrove thanked Mr. Guggenberger for his presentation and his work at the County being proactive with businesses trying to ward off the 5-10% increase. She shared that she had her assessment done wrong for a few years then it jumped up right away. She asked how they internally track this kind of stuff so a resident can be assured that their property is being assessed accurately year after year.

Mr. Guggenberger shared that some of this had to do with former processes that were in place. He explained there are certain situations where they need to add obsolescences that would reduce the value. He shared that when they do the sales ratio analysis, they are expecting the values to move 4% or 5%. He stated that the obsolescences were being added for years and never removed. He noted they have changed some of their internal processes that were in place for a long time.

Informational only.

## **2.02: Anoka County Housing Study**

Karen Skepper, Director of Community and Government Relations for Anoka County, reviewed her report on the Anoka County housing study. She shared that this study is done approximately every 10 years. She reviewed the data found in the study concerning housing and employment in the County. She shared her recommendations for the City of Ramsey based on the data she presented.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan asked if there is a map from 2000 to show how jobs were distributed and how they have changed over the last 20 years.

Ms. Skepper said she can try to get a map that would identify this. She noted that the map may not show a great migration of jobs.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the recommendation of rental demand of 695 units is in addition to what the City already has.

Ms. Skepper said yes.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if the recommendations for the senior limits are included in these 695 units.

Ms. Skepper said no.

City Administrator Hagen asked if there have been any studies done that look past 2040 when there will be a housing surplus.

Ms. Skepper said people are starting to talk about this and added that there has been a shift in how they are talking about the life of a building and if it could have a second use.

Councilmember Riley asked if they are measuring different numbers when they look at the median income and the average wage.

Ms. Skepper said they are not measuring different numbers and noted that many households have more than one income earner. She noted these numbers reflect that more households have two income earners.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about rental units and rural areas and if this refers to apartment buildings or rental homes.

Ms. Skepper explained that there is a need for both apartment style buildings in rural areas, as well as rental homes. She noted they need to be able to develop smaller units as this is an unmet need.

Mayor Kuzma thanked Ms. Skepper for her presentation.

Ms. Skepper stated that once they have made their final edits to this report there will be a final version that will be available on their website and made available to Staff.

Informational only.

### **2.03: Consider Economic Development Manager Request to Interview and Serve on CMDC Board of Directors**

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to Economic Development Manager Sullivan's request to interview and serve on the CMDC Board of Directors. He noted that Staff does not believe that there is a conflict of interest with this and that Economic Development Manager Sullivan would just abstain from voting on something that pertained to Ramsey.

Councilmember Riley shared that he also does not see this as a conflict of interest. He added that this could also give Economic Development Manager Sullivan a lot of experience and gives the City a seat at the table with CMDC.

Councilmember Musgrove asked what occupations some of the other members of the board have. She asked if this is a non-paid position.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan shared there are real estate agents, bankers, former city administrators, and other people who are around the development world on the board. He shared this is something he has wanted to do for a while. He added that he looks at this as a professional development opportunity for himself. He appreciates the opportunity to apply.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she sees the benefits and trust that Economic Development Manager Sullivan will recuse himself when it comes to any conflict of interest.

The consensus of the Council was to allow Economic Development Manager Sullivan to apply for the CMDC Board of Directors.

**RECESS AND RECONVENE**

The meeting recessed at 6:48 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 7:31 p.m.

#### **2.04: Continuation of Nuisance Code Update**

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick reviewed the Staff report in regard to the continuation of the review of the nuisance code.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked about the exemptions for prohibited parking and shared an example of a box truck breaking down and the contents of the truck having to be loaded in another truck. He asked if something like this would be covered by an exemption.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick noted that would fall under the emergency repair exemption.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if this also includes buses.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said no as buses have their own category under State statute.

Councilmember Musgrove stated she made comments on the whole body of the work and not just the sections being discussed today. She asked how she will know what the other parts were that were or were not changed in order to discuss them.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick explained that if they would like to open up the entirety of the code then they can do so. He noted that for the purposes of time he was asked to just bring forward changes. He added that they can go back and review the existing codes if the Council desires.

Planning Manager Larson noted that this project was to update the Nuisance Code and there were some things that worked better in other codes. He stated that there are a lot of things in these other chapters that are not nuisance related which is why they were not brought forward.

Councilmember Musgrove shared she understands the purpose of this; however, it seems like a duplication of services and staffing to handle the same thing as another agency.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick explained that in these situations, a police officer would have to cite the property owner, not necessarily the vehicle of the problem. He noted that the Police Department Staff is already overworked and understaffed, he gets a majority of these complaints during the day and if his department is able to address these issues rather than the police officers then they would have the potential to reach a resolution without issuing a ticket. He added that the goal in code enforcement is education over enforcement action. He noted that this was an opportunity to work with property owners to get their issue into compliance without involving the police. He stated this makes things streamlined for the enforcement of properties.

Mayor Kuzma stated he likes the fact that they are trying to work with property owners rather than penalizing them.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick reiterated that he would rather not involve the police in this case if it is not necessary and added that he was hired to try to educate property owners and work with them to reach compliance.

Councilmember Howell asked if it would lengthen the process by this going through code enforcement rather than the police.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said it would likely shorten the process. He noted if the Police Department was to issue a court ticket, it would likely be a long time until these would be assigned court dates. He shared that through code enforcement they could penalize the property owner, abate the nuisance and charge it back to the property owner, and take other actions to correct the issue far faster than a court may be able to do so. He said if they do need to write a ticket they would do so.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if they are writing this code for only one incident of plowing snow into handicapped spots that has occurred or if these are often occurrences.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said he has dealt with this situation 15 times since he started in his position. He noted that it varies by location. He added that even some of the public parks have had these incidents. He shared they are already working with the Parks and Recreation Department to fix all of the City owned properties to make sure they are in compliance. He added that they want to make sure that this is being enforced across the board for everyone. He explained that these parking spots not being able to be used is a big thing for those who need to use these spots.

Mayor Kuzma asked if there was a consensus on this ordinance.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the changes to Chapter 54 pertaining to traffic and vehicles.

Councilmember Howell shared that they had previously discussed items I, M and R under General Nuisances and they do not appear to be changed from the discussion that took place.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said he does not recall this discussion; however, they can make changes to these items as needed. He shared that these items were existing in the prior code and can be changed or removed as the Council sees fit. He noted he believes that item I is in the code because there are certain buildings and structures that have a roof that hangs over a sidewalk and if the snow starts to come down on the sidewalk, it could injure or hurt someone and they should try to insure that these properties do not have any of these issues. He added they have also had issues with sump pumps pumping water across a right-of-way or sidewalk which then freezes in the winter.

Councilmember Howell said she knows it was discussed in a previous meeting and encouraged Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick to go back and listen to the recording from the Work Session on December 28, 2023 so he can revisit these updates.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick explained that for log and brush piles there are requirements for size, height, location, and being placed off of the ground to eliminate some of the rodent concerns. He shared that there are a lot of residents in the City who burn wood logs; however, they also get a lot of complaints on location and storage of logs and brush piles.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about item C under Obstructions of Right-of-Ways and noted this covers things in a better way than item I under General Nuisances.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said both of these items are existing in the current code and have just been rearranged. He noted this item covers trails and walkways whereas the other covers debris falling from roofs so there is a difference between these two items.

Councilmember Riley asked if the City follows the 48 hour requirement of removing snow or ice from sidewalks and trails.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said this would be a question for Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood. He added this is a part of the existing code so he would hope they were complying with this.

Mayor Kuzma stated he does not believe they are currently clearing trails and sidewalks in 48 hours.

Councilmember Musgrove noted that it could also depend on the amount of snow.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said they can lengthen this to 72 hours to give everyone more time to comply.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested adding the need for a special event permit to subdivision 7 of the Noise section, rather than having it in subdivision 1.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said they could move this to the Exemptions subdivision.

City Administrator Hagen asked how the noise of heavy equipment relates to general business operations in an industrial park.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick shared that this needs to meet State statute for noise limits from the MPCA. He explained when there is a large business operation plant that operates 24/7, the decibel limits have to meet the State guidelines, which is what the ordinance says. He noted if a business park has a complaint against them for noise then they would contact the MPCA to have an agent come out with their sound meters and take a sample of the noise at the time the complaint is occurring and the MPCA would address this.

Mayor Kuzma noted that the Police Department has these sound meters.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said he also has a sound meter; however, they have not been calibrated since he started working for the City and that it is hard for them to take an hour sample with their devices.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she thinks some of the titling seems a little inconsistent and lacking in connective terminology between the subtitles.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said they can format this in whatever way possible. He noted that since this is the Nuisance Code, they could eliminate the word 'nuisance' from any titles since it is all a part of this code.

Councilmember Howell shared that she had heard a comment about the licenses being required for tree services and that this is what Minneapolis does and added that the people who do not bother to get a license up in the north metro as they would not have the expectation that they should get one. She noted this will not keep those unlicensed to do this work from coming into town. She said she does not know why they would require a City license for tree trimming unless it is just to collect more revenue. She added that she sees this as an impediment to small businesses and would like to see this be removed.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick shared he has been doing code enforcement for a long time and one of the shadiest businesses he has come across is tree trimming. He noted he has cited more illegal tree trimmers for damaging people's properties and leaving debris across roadways than one could imagine. He added that a lot of metro cities do license tree trimming companies. He explained they are required to be licensed due to tree diseases being spread to parks and with trees being a valuable resource, they need to have an arborist on Staff. He noted that the idea behind the licensing fee is not to prevent small businesses from doing their work, but rather as a safeguard for residents. He said that requiring a license for these companies sets the good people who are doing the right thing up to help the residents.

Councilmember Howell said these stories prove her point as a disreputable person is not going to get a City license either and it would require the homeowner to check and see if they have a license. She noted that a license would not get the City out of this bind, it only puts another burden on the business owners that are doing the responsible thing. She stated that requiring a City license is not going to deter disreputable people; however, it may deter reputable businesses.

Mayor Kuzma stated he likes the fact that City licenses would be required as a lot of homeowners do not think about checking to make sure that the company they are working with is bonded and insured.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick explained this makes things easy for him when he stops at a tree trimming site to ask the tree trimmer if they are licensed in the City. He shared he has written tickets for tree trimmers, and they have then gone to get their license from the City for a very low amount and the City is also able to check their insurances and the requirements so that

they are able to continue to do this work, and if they do not meet the requirements then these are addressed. He added that he has also had compliance issues with licensed tree trimmers. He noted they also require contractors to be licensed in the City for building purposes.

Councilmember Olson asked how this would be different from asking if someone was licensed in the City versus licensed in the State. He stated that the State license just seems to verify that the tree trimmer has a State license.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick suggested tabling the tree licensing questions and have Senior Planner Chris Anderson attend a meeting to address all of these questions.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if a majority of cities in the area and in the State require city licenses for this. She noted that if the State is licensing these businesses and the City is just confirming the license, they would just be redoing what the State has already done. She stated she would like to hear from Senior Planner Anderson and get more data to make a decision on this matter.

Councilmember Specht agreed.

Councilmember Howell stated that if data is brought forward that shows that other cities require these licenses, she would like to look at just the cities in the County and other cities surrounding Ramsey in the north metro area.

Councilmember Musgrove shared she had a question that she previously addressed with Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick concerning agricultural zones and noted she did not see it in the materials reviewed. She asked if this was in a different code that had already been reviewed.

Zoning Code Enforcement Officer Swalchick said this was just in the definitions section of the code.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the Nuisance Code updates, while tabling the section pertaining to trees.

### **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 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Brian Hagen  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

---

Katie M. Schmidt  
City Clerk

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