

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, March 26, 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

Members Absent: Councilmember Matt Woestehoff

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
Planning Manager Todd Larson
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson
City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby
Senior Planner Chris Anderson

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 Survey Results for Potential Pedestrian Trail Connection Between Bowers Drive and Riverstone South

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby reviewed the Staff report and survey results for the pedestrian trail between Bowers Drive and Riverstone South. He shared that they sent out 120 surveys and they received feedback from 50 residents. He said that only 17 residents responded in support of the trail, seven being from Bowers Drive, and 10 from the Riverstone South neighborhood.

Councilmember Specht suggested that they not move forward with this project and wait another 10 years before they discuss it again out of respect for residents who have provided feedback against this project twice in the last few years.

Councilmember Musgrove agreed. She asked if they are looking at a trail connection to the Mississippi Park area that they may look at that rather than this. She reiterated that they have heard from the residents in this area twice now that they are not interested in a trail connection between Bowers Drive and Riverstone South. She asked about the easement in this area.

Councilmember Howell agreed as it seems like a majority of the residents are not interested in this.

Councilmember Olson said he likes Councilmember Specht's suggestion of not discussing this again for a number of years as it is irritating for the residents to continue to tell the City that they are not interested in this.

Councilmember Riley agreed with the other Councilmembers. He shared he personally believes there should be a trail connection here; however, they are representing the residents and the residents do not want one. He added that this discussion will not come up again anytime soon as the only reason they are discussing it right now is because they are doing a project in this area.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby noted that the easements contain the water main that runs from Snowy Owl down to the hydrant on Bowers Drive. He stated he would not recommend vacating these outlots or removing the easement as it is needed for water main maintenance.

The consensus of the Council was to not move forward with this project as the surveyed residents are not supportive.

2.02: Update on Recycling Program

Senior Planner Anderson reviewed the Staff report in regard to the City recycling program and SCORE (Select Committee On Recycling and the Environment) funding. He reviewed the current contract with ACE Solid Waste.

Mayor Kuzma shared that he has seen other communities where they have people put items out on their curb for recycling and allow other residents to look through the items to see if there is anything they would like to reuse rather than recycle.

Senior Planner Anderson said they have not explored doing this. He said it would be a great way for reuse; however, it could result in messes in a lot of neighborhoods. He noted this is something they could look into.

Councilmember Riley said the cardboard recycling after Christmas is a great idea as many people take advantage of this. He asked if there is a need for year-round cardboard recycling.

Senior Planner Anderson stated that several years ago this idea was brought to the Public Works Committee. He noted that ACE has opened up a customer convenience center where additional recycling can be dropped off if it is more than what will fit in their bin. He explained that when the idea of a City recycling donation center was brought to Public Works they did not see a need for this because of the ACE center; however, now due to the number of deliveries people receive in cardboard boxes he believes a City recycling location would be well utilized. He added that he would need to have some discussions concerning this with Public Works Staff to make sure it is not going to be disrupting any of their day-to-day operations. He noted that this would be something that could utilize SCORE funding.

Councilmember Specht asked if the SCORE funding could help reduce the cost of recycling to the residents.

Senior Planner Anderson explained that if Council were to direct him to apply all of the SCORE funding towards the curbside recycling costs that the residents pay then it would not go very far and would not ever provide a free month of recycling to all of the households in the City. He noted there is nothing that would restrict them from using these funds for the existing program.

Councilmember Howell said she likes Councilmember Riley's idea of the cardboard recycling location. She noted there were questions about this to the EPB when she was on the Board. She asked about the State Statute that says that residents who recycle cannot be charged more than residents who do not. She asked if they were to not have a recycling contract after the current contract expires if this means that people who get services through a provider directly if it would be a flat rate for both trash and recycling.

Senior Planner Anderson explained that this statute is confusing when they are in an open hauling system because the rate that is charged for recycling should be applied to every customer that is subscribing to the hauler, whether or not they choose to recycle. He stated there are fluctuations with this when it comes to trash hauling but the recycling portion should not be different.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that her curiosity around the recycling system is not geared at ACE, but more towards the big picture of where the recycling goes. She noted that recycling over the last five to six years has changed dramatically on what does and does not get recycled. She said she wants to make sure the SCORE funds are used wisely. She asked if they are required to have a certain tonnage of recycling that changes every year.

Senior Planner Anderson said yes and explained that Anoka County sets the tonnage goals for each municipality based on the number of households. He explained that the recycled materials go to what is called a material recovery facility where all of the sorting takes place. He noted that if there is contamination in any of the materials, there are thresholds that are allowed; however, if there are too many contaminants in a load it can render the whole load as contaminated.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the City's tonnage is calculated before or after it has been determined to be contaminated.

Senior Planner Anderson said the tonnage is based on when it is collected not when it gets to the facility.

Councilmember Musgrove said she wants the residents and taxpayers to know that the tonnage may not all be recycled if there is too much contamination. She asked if they could get data on how much gets recycled and how much is contaminated. She said she would like to have these numbers if they choose to continue with a City program. She stated that this could help show the residents that they should not be putting contaminants in their recycling. She asked who gets the taxpayer dollars and makes or loses money on this. She shared that it has been her understanding over the last few years as there is not money making in recycling. She said she would like to have this kind of information if it is available to know.

Senior Planner Anderson explained that it is illegal for a hauler collecting recyclables to bring these recyclables to a landfill. He noted the exception to this is when the materials are contaminated. He added that if someone's recycling bin appears to be over filled with trash and non-recyclables, ACE will notify the resident and let them know that they cannot pick up the recycling until the contaminants are removed. He said they also have cameras that watch everything go into the hopper of the truck, so they are able to identify some larger possible contaminants. He noted that when the materials get to the material recovery center there would not be a good way to collect data on tonnage and contaminates as the materials from Ramsey are mixed in with all other haulers who are bringing these materials to the facility.

Councilmember Specht shared that they were given a presentation a while ago about how they need to get residents to be more thoughtful on what they are putting in their recycling as it is harder to recycle now because of contamination. He noted that it may be worth doing some more education around recycling to get this point across to residents. He said he would not look to end the recycling contract early and that it will be a good discussion when the contract expires.

Senior Planner Anderson stated that the message around recycling has shifted Statewide since China implemented their program on not taking contaminated recycling. He noted that this has changed recycling significantly.

Councilmember Olson asked if there is any feel or gauge for how the City does with the recycling and contaminants.

Senior Planner Anderson said he does not have numbers on this, but he can try to get this information from ACE. He explained that they are meeting and exceeding their tonnage goals and have been for the last 20 years. He stated the residents are proud of their ability to recycle as they have strong participation numbers, 90% and higher, in the recycling program.

City Administrator Hagen stated that if they were to look at moving away from having a City contracted recycling hauler then they should look at this early on in next year. He asked the Council if they would like to continue with the contracted service with ACE or look at getting other proposals.

Councilmember Howell said it is worth looking at other options or what it would look like to move to open hauling for both garbage and recycling.

Senior Planner Anderson shared that in a few years there may be mandatory curbside recycling of organics as this is something that the County just relayed from the State. He noted that if they get to this point there could be countless trucks picking up trash and recycling providing these services.

Mayor Kuzma asked how many trucks they currently have on the roads with existing services.

City Administrator Hagen explained that they have open garbage hauling with around 10 licenses and only one contract for recycling.

Councilmember Riley said he was in support of getting more proposals for single users for a recycling contract.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about the new service that the State may be requiring for recycling of organics. She asked if this is something that the City could have a drop-off location for rather than having to be picked up.

Senior Planner Anderson said he is not sure if there will be any provisions in this that would allow drop offs to satisfy the requirement. He reiterated that what was relayed to him was curbside collection of organics.

Councilmember Howell asked if organics pertain to table scraps and food waste.

Senior Planner Anderson said yes and explained it is food scraps, paper towels soaked in grease or food waste, or other items that have food waste on them.

Councilmember Howell shared that she is strongly opposed to combining organics from people's households.

Senior Planner Anderson explained that the commercial composting sites are set up for heating the organics so that all of the unhealthy bacteria are killed off.

Councilmember Howell asked what temperatures the materials need to get to in order to kill off the bacteria.

Senior Planner Anderson said he does not know the minimum temperature, but he can find out.

Mayor Kuzma asked if they were in an open system then what kind of proposals they would be going out for.

City Administrator Hagen said it would just be for recycling not for trash. He stated they issue one recycling license in the City via the contract. He asked what information the Council would like Staff to bring back for this discussion.

Councilmember Howell said she would like to find out the prices of other services and the amenities that are provided through different providers.

Senior Planner Anderson explained that when they are in an open hauling system it is challenging to compare apples-to-apples on pricing as there are companies that will offer introductory rates and then may lock a customer into a two year contract, fuel charges can fluctuate, and other factors can cause prices to differ from household to household.

Councilmember Specht said he likes the statistic that over 90% of residents are currently participating in recycling through the ACE contact; however, there are still people who do not participate that complain about having to pay for the service that they are not using.

City Administrator Hagen said the way they are billing for the recycling service is through a utility bill. He added that an option for this is to pay for it out of the general fund and not charge the residents directly for it. He noted that at the end of the day the residents would still be paying for the service, they would just not see it on the utility bill.

The consensus of the Council was to seek out proposals for other open recycling hauling and for another contracted hauler.

2.03: Discuss the potential increase in Planning Administrative Assistant hours to full-time.

Community Development Director Hanson reviewed the Staff report concerning increasing the current Planning Administrative Assistant's hours to full time. She discussed the history of this role and the need for full time hours.

Councilmember Musgrove said she will not be supporting this. She noted that during last year's budget discussions it was discussed why this position was only at 25 hours rather than a higher number of hours and now they are coming back asking for more hours for this position. She said this is something that she would consider during budget discussions, but not now. She suggested hiring someone who is efficient and able to do a lot of work. She shared that budget discussions will be starting soon and they can revisit this. She asked why they would wait to hire someone until July when they need help now.

Community Development Director Hanson explained that this hiring would need to be approved by the Council before they post for applications.

City Administrator Hagen added that if the ask was not to increase this position to full time, then they would already have the position advertised. He stated they usually advertise vacant positions for three weeks before they start the interview process which takes another three weeks. He added that they then have to take this to the next Council meeting and anticipate a two-week resignation period for the hired individual before they can fill the role. He noted that the only reason this position is vacant is because the current Planning Administrative Assistant was hired into the Rental Housing Inspector position.

Councilmember Specht agreed that this would be a good discussion to have when discussing the budget. He said he would not be able to support this right now and it should be considered with other budget requests. He suggested documenting the need over time so it can be discussed during the budget discussions.

Community Development Director Hanson shared that they decided to bring this forward at this time as they need to hire someone now. She noted the fear is that they will hire someone at a part time capacity when this position needs to be full time and if they get approval to change it to full time then the person currently in the position working part time may not be able to work full time and they would have to start the hiring process over again.

Councilmember Riley shared that without administrative Staff they have the professionals doing the administrative work and having high paid people doing the wrong job. He said that by having

the right people in administrative roles this allows for the professionals to be able to do their job more effectively.

Councilmember Howell said she would like to see this reserved for a budget discussion. She suggested advertising the part time role with the possibility that it could become full time.

Councilmember Olson agreed that they should advertise that the role is currently for part time work but may become full time which could help minimize the risk of turnover if the position does become full time.

The consensus of the Council was to not approve the increase to full time hours for the Planning Administrative Assistant and to bring the discussion forward again during the 2025 budget discussion.

2.04: Communication Strategy to Share Development Interest with City Council

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to communication strategies with the Council when it comes to businesses and developers who are interested in Ramsey.

Councilmember Specht said that if a business or developer seems serious enough or has a big name brand he would like the Council to be kept in the loop or having certain things brought forward to the Council for discussion before telling the developer no.

Mayor Kuzma asked for opinions from the EDA representatives on this.

Councilmember Riley shared that Economic Development Manager Sullivan will sometimes bring forward discussions with very general information on the type of business that is interested in the City. He said it is a fine line of when something should come to the Council or when it should not. He noted this should be done on a case-by-case basis. He added that there are some projects that do not even come forward to the Council because they did not have any zoning requests, so the Council does not know about them.

Councilmember Howell said that Aldi is a good example of when Economic Development Manager Sullivan brought forward very general information about an interested party but not enough information to be disrespectful to the business seeking space in the City while still informing the Council. She asked what City Administrator Hagen would propose to be the solution for a situation like what happened with U-Haul.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the U-Haul situation was unique as Staff gave U-Haul feedback on what they would need to do to move forward for consideration with the Council and U-Haul skipped this step and went straight to the Council. He noted this could be due to the difference in developers. He said he is not sure if this situation could have been handled much differently. He shared that the City does a good job at discussing the developments that are close to fitting zoning and just have some gray areas. He added that the U-Haul situation is not a consistent issue that they face and that they are handling these situations relatively well.

Councilmember Howell reiterated that she likes how Economic Development Manager Sullivan brings very vague information forward and is open to questions if anyone may have them and he can disclose what information he is able to share. She noted this has seemed to work rather well.

Mayor Kuzma said that over his last 12 years on the Council he cannot think of any other issues they have had and the U-Haul situation is very unique.

Planning Manager Larson said he fields a lot of the interest calls every day and added that it is rarely a situation where they outright turn an interested party away. He said they often try to work with the interested party on location, utilities, or other considerations.

City Administrator Hagen shared that they communicate regularly about the kind of businesses that are interested and calling in. He added that Staff also has a good understanding of what the Council would and would not support and they share this with the interested parties to be upfront with them. He explained that moving forward they can give Council a heads up when big name brands are interested in the City.

Councilmember Howell said this would be helpful as the Council would first be hearing Staff's perspective.

Councilmember Olson agreed that a heads up would be helpful.

Councilmember Musgrove said she would be curious about the number of inquiries the City has been receiving and what kind of inquiries they are.

Community Development Director Hanson said they can let the Council know this moving forward. She said one of the more popular interested businesses are restaurants.

Planning Manager Larson said residential and industrial are also very popular interests.

Councilmember Specht asked if something is being heard consistently from developers and businesses that this feedback be passed along to the Council.

Planning Manager Larson shared they have an interested party who has called twice for a tiny home neighborhood.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to bring vague information forward concerning businesses and developers who are interested in the City on a case-by-case basis.

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 6:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
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