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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a special meeting on Tuesday, April 2, 2024, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Acting Mayor Chris Riley
 Councilmember Chelsee Howell
 Councilmember Debra Musgrove
 Councilmember Michael Olson
 Councilmember Dan Specht
 Councilmember Matt Woestehoff

Members Absent: Mayor Mark Kuzma

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
 City Attorney Fritz Knaak

1. CALL TO ORDER

Acting Mayor Riley called the regular meeting of the Ramsey City Council to order at 6:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Acting Mayor Riley.

None.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Councilmember Woestehoff, seconded by Councilmember Howell, to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Councilmembers Woestehoff, Howell, Musgrove, Olson, Riley, and Specht. Voting No: None.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

None.

5. COUNCIL BUSINESS

5.00: Consider City's Position on MN Housing Legislation

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to the Minnesota Housing Legislation. He shared that Councilmembers Howell, Musgrove, and Specht called for this Special Meeting in response to the bills being discussed at the legislature.

Councilmember Musgrove thanked Staff for getting this special meeting together. She noted that there are many things that the legislature is working on this year that will have major impacts to the cities, especially this one concerning housing. She explained that this legislation would change a lot of what the City would be able to do for housing. She shared that they need to do something to show the legislature that this would render the Council uninvolved in the zoning process in their own City. She added that it would not be acceptable for them to not say or do anything. She said they need to let the legislature and the governor know the City's position on this matter.

Councilmember Howell thanked resident Jim Bendtsen who came forward at the last Council Meeting and made the Council aware of this legislation. She shared that she spent time digging into this legislation and has some concerns. She noted that there are a number of other cities around the metro area that have already started lobbying against this. She said there are approximately 20 cities in the State that have started to take action on this. She said it would be great for the Council to send their own letter to the legislature as the legislators representing the City will also support the City's stance. She added that if they wanted to form a larger coalition then there are some groups that have multiple cities who have signed on to letters in opposition of this, and they could gather all cities who are in opposition and form a coalition together with Ramsey as its lead.

City Attorney Knaak shared that they already know what happens when Minneapolis tries to make decisions for the whole metro area. He shared that the legislature has not had the opportunity to impose their zoning controls on everyone yet. He noted that Minneapolis has gotten a lot of push back on their efforts to increase density in their 2040 plan. He explained that they are making an effort to change the law to get around this. He shared that they found an ally in this effort in contractors who want to lessen city power for obvious reasons. He said they have not seen a situation like this where there has been this kind of support from both sides of the aisle. He noted that this can be very dangerous. He explained that cities take many things into account, including city services and safety, when developments are looking to come into cities; however, this legislation would make these decisions exclusively based on profits and not planning. He said Ramsey should take pride in the fact that they are an example of how development should work, as the Council considers things such as traffic, safety, and City services before deciding if a development is right for the City. He noted that this is very different from the previous stance of the legislature years ago. He said there is nothing extreme about the way Minnesota regulates housing and zoning. He added that this issue resulted from a political problem in Minneapolis and is from a lot of people who are unfamiliar with what cities actually do. He discussed that this situation is similar to the recent THC legislation that did not give cities much control. He said they cannot word this letter strongly enough to show the legislature that they do not support this. He noted that it is very important that they voice their opinion on this. He said the thing that bothers him the most about this is the lack of reflection. He noted that the less friction the legislation gets

on this, the more they are likely to move forward with it. He said the angrier the City is about this, the more the legislature will listen. He added that the League of Minnesota Cities is currently fighting a tough battle as they are facing this, and many other, issues.

Councilmember Woestheoff asked which bill City Attorney Knaak finds most concerning.

City Attorney Knaak said HF4010 is the most concerning to him. He added that HF4009 seems to be stalled. He explained that they should not be deceived as revisions can always be made between Committees. He said nothing in these bills seem like a good idea.

Acting Mayor Riley asked if the Council was in agreement that they are not in support of these bills.

The Council was in unanimous agreement.

Councilmember Woestehoff said he would like to send a letter to the legislation as well as forming a coalition against this. He added that they can direct Staff to reach out to all of the State and Local Government Finance and Policy Committee members so they can be aware if these bills are getting hearings again. He agreed with City Attorney Knaak that these bills are not the solution to this problem that would result in putting cities at disadvantages that are not necessary.

Councilmember Musgrove agreed. She noted that since this is in Committee, they know they can get a letter out quickly. She shared that she has spoken with other cities who have been sending these letters to their legislators.

Acting mayor Riley asked if they would be able to build the coalition off of what the League of Minnesota Cities or the North Metro Mayors Association are already doing.

City Administrator Hagen stated that the League of Minnesota Cities is watching this and testifying on behalf of all cities as a part of their legislative platform that was adopted. He explained that when the League signs up to testify in various Committees they will often bring a member of their Board, which is made up of elected officials and staff members. He said the League is a great avenue to speak for cities. He added that letters from cities will also bring strength in numbers. He noted that anyone can sign up to testify on bills.

Councilmember Howell agreed that they should send an initial letter right away then spend some time looking at what other cities have done. She said coalitions have been averaging around six cities per coalition. She stated they could gather all of these cities and send out a larger letter with the support of their legislatures who can deliver the letter on the floor to the other legislatures. She added that she knows of some cities who would be interested in signing on to their coalition.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested talking to Coon Rapids and all of Anoka County to get all of them on board. He noted that one of the members of the State and Local Government Finance and Policy Committee is Jerry Newton who is a member of the DFL party from Coon Rapids.

Jim Bendtsen, 14131 Junkite Street, came forward and said he was surprised that the Council did not know about this before he brought it forward to them. He said this has been being discussed at the legislature since the end of February. He asked if the City had any membership or a liaison with the League of Minnesota Cities.

Acting Mayor Riley said he was aware of this and had already been discussing it with City Administrator Hagen before Mr. Bendtsen brought this forward.

City Attorney Knaak said there are a bunch of discussions that are floating around the legislature, so it is a lot to keep track of. He noted that zoning regulations are not typically the attention-grabbing issues.

Councilmember Musgrove said the League of Minnesota Cities and the North Metro Mayors Association were both watching this and asking for help from cities to provide more pushback on this. She noted they may have missed this; however, she is glad they are to the point where they can have a special meeting and create a plan going forward. She shared that this is awful legislation. She said they have made a few amendments to these bills; however, they are still awful. She noted this would essentially eliminate the Planning Commission. She said this would take so many things from the City's control. She shared that the League of Minnesota Cities wants their help.

Senator Cal Bahr came forward and reiterated that this would eliminate all zoning actions within cities as these bills are designed to centralize control. He explained that these bills would take the control from City Councils and move it to a centralized agency, the State. He said Ramsey is the most populous of the cities he represents. He explained that minimum lot sizes would be completely eliminated if these bills pass. He noted that the contractors that are in support of this think that cities make it impossible to build in their city due to regulations. He said there is some legitimacy to this argument; however, it is not enough to take away local control of who can build what and where they can build it. He said these bills will escalate into all zoning and building elements of cities. He noted that the more stern they can draft this letter the better. He added that any bills are still alive up until the session adjourns. He encouraged the City to remain vigilant.

Acting Mayor Riley asked if there are any recommended changes to the draft letter.

Councilmember Howell recommended having City Attorney Knaak scrutinize the letter and add more aggressive language where needed.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared he would trust Staff to write a strongly worded letter based on the Council's feedback this evening.

Councilmember Musgrove asked who they should reach out to other cities to join the coalition.

Acting Mayor Riley said they can reach out to other cities at the City level as well as individual Councilmembers.

Councilmember Howell said Councilmembers can reach out to other Councilmembers from other cities while City Administrator Hagen reaches out to other City Administrators.

City Administrator Hagen added that he is a part of a City Administrator list with several hundred Administrators. He said he can send an email to everyone on the list to reach many cities at once to see who would be interested in signing on to this coalition. He noted that he can also focus his attention on other cities in the County and surrounding area. He would suggest putting a few week timeline on this to give other cities time to discuss joining a coalition. He said he and City Attorney Knaak can put together the initial opposition letter to send to the legislature.

Councilmember Howell said if they feel like they can get a big enough coalition together then she would like to get all of the cities' Mayors together to have a meeting and report to any news outlet that will listen to put pressure on the legislature.

Councilmember Olson asked if there is any idea what the critical timing is for these bills.

Senator Bahr suggested having the initial draft letter done by the end of the week so they can send this out early next week and see if other cities would like to sign on. He said a 10 to 12 day window would be best to get this letter submitted before the bills go to the Conference Committee.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there is a specific date that the Conference Committees begin.

Senator Bahr said the final deadline for Finance Committee bills is April 19. He noted there is not a fixed date when Conference Committees meet.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if they should physically hand in their letters or send them by email.

Senator Bahr said he can bring copies of the letters to distribute to every Senator on the floor.

Motion by Councilmember Howell, seconded by Councilmember Musgrove, to direct staff to send a written statement to legislators opposing state legislation that restricts local zoning authority and draft a letter to circulate among any cities that would be in support of this.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Councilmembers Howell, Musgrove, Olson, Riley, Specht, and Woestehoff. Voting No: None.

City Administrator Hagen said they can also send out social media posts that will share the City's stance on the matter.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested sharing the final letter from the City on social media.

City Administrator Hagen said they can post the letter on their website and link it to Facebook as well as provide links to the League of Minnesota Cities webpage.

Councilmember Howell added that a lot of cities were also sending their letters to the local newspapers. She suggested sending their letter to the newspaper as well as having QCTV doing a highlight on this.

6. MAYOR, COUNCIL AND STAFF INPUT

Councilmember Musgrove suggested that they add a legislative update to every meeting's agenda to help them stay on top of legislative items. She added that she would also like a Work Session discussion on meeting agendas and taking a look at what other cities do to see if they could change their agenda.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Specht, seconded by Councilmember Howell, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried.

The regular meeting of the City Council adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.

A recording of this meeting is available for viewing online at www.qctv.org <<http://www.qctv.org>>. Recordings are available for 36 months after the date of the meeting.