

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, September 10, 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
Finance Director Diana Lund
Planning Manager Todd Larson
City Attorney Fritz Knaak
City Clerk Katie Schmidt
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson
Assistant City Engineer Joe Feriancek
Police Captain Tim Frankfurth (attended remotely)

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: Final 2025 Budget/Levy Review Before Preliminary Adoption on 9-24-24

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to the 2025 budget and levy with changes since the Council's last discussion. He shared that the preliminary levy is at 8.24%.

Councilmember Riley said he would support adding back two items that they had discussed removing, the Council Work Session meals and the Employee Appreciation event, which adds up to \$7,500. He added that this would increase the budget by 0.034%.

Councilmember Musgrove disagreed as they will be potentially increasing the budget for the roads. She asked if there are any TIF dollars that will become available in 2025 that they could use to offset road funding.

Finance Director Lund shared that they used a lot of the TIF funds to fund road improvements in the COR area that are currently being constructed.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if they are under budget for roads in the CIP for 2025.

Councilmember Musgrove said they are not under budget for next year, but she believes they are for 2027.

Finance Director Lund explained that if they were to bring the road fund contribution from 5% to 7.5%, it would be another \$46,000. She noted that she is not completely sure what the balance for the road fund is currently.

Assistant City Engineer Feriancek shared that they are about \$90,000 short in 2027 for roads. He said they have the funding for 2025 and 2026 but they will need to address this before 2027.

Mayor Kuzma shared that he is not in favor of raising the contribution to the road fund as he would like to keep the levy down. He said he would support adding the Council Work Session meals and the Employee Appreciation event back to the budget. He noted that with a new Council coming on he does not think it is fair that they make this decision for them.

Councilmember Musgrove stated the employee engagement event that they removed from the budget was the least attended event that is offered for employee appreciation and engagement. She noted that it seems as though this event is the one that Staff is okay with removing.

Councilmember Howell agreed. She stated that a future Council could add Work Session meals back to the budget if they would like.

Councilmember Woestehoff noted that the Employee Appreciation event is the only event that Board and Commission members are invited to and because of that he would support adding it back to the budget.

Councilmember Musgrove said she is in agreement with not supporting non-profits as a City and asked if the lawful gambling funds can be used towards playground maintenance.

Finance Director Lund explained that the lawful gambling funds cannot be used for playground maintenance, but it is currently used for equipment.

Councilmember Musgrove asked about the landfill funds that were used for playgrounds.

Finance Director Lund shared that the landfill funds were closed out.

Councilmember Howell stated that she also does not support the City contributing to non-profits. She said she would like to see the funds that were previously going to non-profits to be better invested into the City.

Councilmember Riley shared that in the past, the non-profits that they have supported had come forward and shared the benefit that they are able to add to the City. He asked if this information is still available.

Finance Director Lund noted that the Police Department does get this information from the Alexandra House.

Police Captain Frankfurth explained that the Alexandra House is a program that the Police Department uses for domestic assault cases throughout the County. He shared that this program helps victims navigate the court system and make sure they have protections in place.

Finance Director Lund asked if there is a list of how many participants of this program were Ramsey residents.

Police Captain Frankfurth said he can try to find this information.

City Administrator Hagen asked if other entities are contributing to the Alexandra House.

Police Captain Frankfurth shared that he believes other agencies are contributing to this and noted that there is also grant funding that contributes.

Mayor Kuzma asked Councilmember Woestehoff, the Council liaison to Youth First, about the importance of Youth First to the community.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that it is an organization throughout Anoka County that provides safe spaces for children which are education adjacent. He noted that it is funded by Ramsey, Andover, Coon Rapids, Anoka County, the Anoka-Hennepin School Districts, and various grants.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the JPA between the City is directly with Youth First or another organization.

Councilmember Woestehoff noted that it is with another organization. He added that he advised the Chair of the Youth First Board that the City would likely not be able to fund them in the future.

Councilmember Musgrove asked how they would go about making this decision if it is a joint powers agreement.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated the JPA has nothing to do with funding. He added that the Youth First Board is meeting later this week to discuss the new Executive Director and her vision of what the organization will be.

Councilmember Howell shared that she does not like the idea of the City funding non-profits, regardless of the organization's contribution to the City. She added that Andover currently has an employment opportunity for a Youth Mental Health and Wellness Services Coordinator for Youth First. She noted that DEI is implemented throughout the role, and she has issues with the City supporting an organization that will prioritize certain children over others.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated that he would still like to look into the Alexandra House more as he sees it as a valuable resource to the City. He said he would like more information before they decide to pull funding.

Councilmember Specht asked how much they are contributing to each organization.

Councilmember Riley said they are giving \$5,000 to Alexandra House and \$15,000 to Youth First.

Finance Director Lund shared that they have already given \$7,500 to Youth First for 2024 and they have not given anything to the Alexandra House at this point.

Councilmember Specht noted that he definitely sees the value in supporting non-profits which is why he struggles with whether or not the City should be supporting them; however, he is in support of not funding non-profits at this time.

Councilmember Howell added that she would support the Youth First paying for their own snow removal.

Mayor Kuzma suggested November 26 as the Truth and Taxation Meeting date.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the changes made to the preliminary budget, including keeping the Work Session meals and Employee Appreciation event out of the budget and direct Staff to bring it forward for preliminary approval at the September 24 meeting. There was also consensus to pull funding from Youth First for 2025 and requested more information on the Alexandra House.

2.02: Discuss Polling Locations

City Clerk Schmidt reviewed the Staff report concerning polling locations for future elections.

Mayor Kuzma asked about the percentage of voters who voted early for the 2020 Presidential election.

City Clerk Schmidt said it was over 50%.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked if they looked at using PACT Charter School as a polling location in the future.

City Clerk Schmidt said she had not heard back from PACT. She added that St. Katherine Drexel Catholic Church stated that they are interested in being a polling location.

Councilmember Woestehoff asked how far in advance they have to send out notice of new polling locations.

City Clerk Schmidt said they send notices 60 days before an election.

City Administrator Hagen explained that they will need to pass a resolution if they are changing a polling location by December 31.

Councilmember Musgrove noted that she did want to look at Ward 3, P1 and P2. She asked if they could look at these two precincts and redo the lines so that they are more evenly distributed.

City Clerk Schmidt said they could make this change; however, they cannot change any of the Ward lines as these are done every ten years.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that between Ward 1, Ward 2, and Ward 4, she would like there to be consideration for an additional precinct to balance the numbers. She noted that adding additional precincts will require more work and time; however, she thinks it will help ensure the votes of the residents.

Councilmember Howell suggested talking to other large cities that have smaller polling locations on how they make this process work and mimic some of those processes.

City Clerk Schmidt shared that Ramsey is the third largest city in the County. She explained that she likes to focus on how many people actually vote on election day. She noted that if 20% of voters are voting early, then this takes out 20% of the voter base from election day. She stated that if the election judges have enough Staff and their location is not overwhelmed, then she would not want to add more locations if it was not necessary. She added that when they make changes to polling locations it is always confusing for voters for the first few election cycles. She noted that they would not have room in the current storage rooms for any more voting machines.

Mayor Kuzma asked when they would need to have this discussion if they did want to make changes to polling locations.

City Administrator Hagen reiterated that they cannot change anything for the 2024 election. He explained that this election year will be very telling for what the new normal is for the percentage of voters who vote early or absentee versus in person. He shared that any changes to the following year have to be made by December 31; however, there are no elections that will be happening in 2025. He stated they will have time to look at this and review for 2026. He suggested seeing how things go this year and reevaluating if necessary.

Councilmember Howell asked if they could make changes to equipment or poll pads that will be used in the 2024 election.

City Administrator Hagen noted that everything is already in place for the 2024 election, and he is not sure if changes can be made.

Councilmember Howell stated that the JPA with the County does not cover poll pads at all and noted that they could nullify this agreement with seven days' notice. She explained that this JPA is not good for the City and the County would not take any responsibility if anything goes wrong with the poll pads, yet the City would have to bear all of the costs. She noted that it would be worth

looking at the JPA and the election equipment agreement as she believes they could make changes to this for the 2024 election.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that he was not prepared to discuss anything other than polling locations this evening as that was the topic of the case. He said he would fully support moving the polling location from Central Park to St. Katherine Drexel. He added that he would also like a lot of feedback from the County if they are looking at changing anything for this year's election.

Councilmember Howell said if the Council is not prepared to have this discussion this evening in regard to the JPA and the equipment agreement then she would like to see this discussed at the next Work Session meeting.

Councilmember Riley asked if State law requires them to use the electronic poll pads.

City Attorney Knaak shared that he believes they do have to use the electronic poll pads.

City Administrator Hagen added that using only paper poll pads is allowed for municipal elections only.

Councilmember Howell asked if the JPA with the County does not cover these and they nullify the agreement, if the City would then have to purchase their own equipment or go back to using paper poll books.

City Attorney Knaak explained that the County can impose the kind of materials that are being used and in turn, they are answerable to the Secretary of State in terms of the system they choose to use.

Derek Lind, Anoka County Election Integrity Team, shared that his understanding is that the State mandate is for the machine tabulators, which was passed in May of 2023 but did not include poll pads.

City Attorney Knaak said he would have to look into this.

City Clerk Schmidt added that it is her understanding that they cannot make a change to the equipment that is used to administer the 2024 election.

Councilmember Musgrove noted that there are some cities that do not use electronic poll pads. She agreed with Councilmember Howell that the JPA is not beneficial to the City. She said the accountability seems to be off with this agreement where the City takes on all of the liability and the County holds all of the data. She noted that they should be protecting the data of this City; however, the electronic poll pads give anyone real time access to the data.

City Attorney Knaak explained that it is the counties that run the elections and the cities are answerable to the counties. He stated that electronic poll pads were introduced as a way to reduce potential voter fraud as it would be able to tell in real time if someone had already voted somewhere else or submitted another ballot at an earlier date.

Councilmember Howell read a portion of the equipment agreement with the County and shared that no responsibility for the function of the equipment will fall on the County. She said she is looking for where they are legally required to use the electronic poll pads. She stated she would like clarification from the County on this.

Councilmember Riley asked if the City Clerk would be authorized to bind the City to an agreement like this.

City Attorney Knaak said yes, as long as the City Clerk has been authorized to do so.

City Clerk Schmidt shared that State Statute 201.225 Subdivision 1 gives Head Election Officials the authority to designate that some or all precincts use electronic rosters. She added that the decision was made in 2018 to start using electronic rosters for any County and above election until the Board decides otherwise. She said the City has no say in changing this for the 2024 election as they are required by the State to use whatever the County decides.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she is open to having a future polling location at either St. Katherine Drexel or PACT Charter School. She added that she would like to have a better agreement with the County for the use of the equipment. She noted that the agreement does not seem to have been done in the best interest of Ramsey.

Councilmember Howell said she would like to see if there is any wiggle room in Subdivision 1 of State Statute 201.225.

City Attorney Knaak explained that they could try to make a case that Ramsey get an exception to this, but it would have to be decided by the Head Election Official at the County.

Councilmember Riley noted that since they cannot change anything for the upcoming election if they should just revisit this topic after the upcoming election.

Councilmember Howell said she would like to continue to discuss this before the election as the agreements are not beneficial to the City and would like to see the agreement nullified.

Councilmember Riley stated that if they nullify this agreement and they cannot negotiate with the County then the City does not have any election equipment and would have to figure out a new alternative so close to the election.

City Clerk Schmidt explained that she works with the County on a daily basis leading up to the election and they offer support to the City and the equipment.

City Administrator Hagen shared that Staff could continue to look into this and bring back more information to the Council.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to gather data and insights from the November election and bring it back for discussion for future elections and to make St. Katherine Drexel Church a polling location.

2.03: Driveway Discussion

Planning Manager Larson shared the Staff report in regard to two recent variances that were requested concerning extensions of existing driveways on the sides of the garages closer than the required five feet.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she believes five feet is a lot and would like the requirement to be smaller.

Councilmember Howell thanked Planning Manager Larson for his presentation with lots of visuals to aid in understanding the discussion. She said she would not be opposed to reducing the requirement to zero feet from the property line like Coon Rapids does.

Councilmember Woestehoff shared that he had a neighbor whose driveway was right up to the property line, and he stated this was not the best experience. He added that this contradicts the idea that they want to keep the City feeling more rural. He noted that structures bother him more than a driveway. He asked how often things like easements would get in the way of these types of scenarios.

Planning Manager Larson explained that with the Zoning Code update they put in language about easements and what can and cannot encroach into them.

Assistant City Engineer Feriancek explained that in the past they have allowed fences up to the lot line; however, fences can be easily moved to work on utilities, and this would be more complicated with something like a driveway.

Councilmember Olson said he would be supportive of reducing the requirement down to anything lower than five feet, including zero feet. He noted that he thinks it will still be quite rare that they will see a driveway going all the way to a lot line.

Councilmember Specht stated that he would support lessening the requirement or allowing driveways up to the lot line.

Councilmember Riley suggested lowering the requirement but not going down to allow driveways to the lot line as neighbors can often fight about where lot lines are.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed that this could cause further confusion on where property lines are.

Councilmember Howell stated that they should enforce the code when needed but put it on the property owners to determine their lot lines before installing a driveway extension.

The consensus of the Council was to reduce the driveway setback requirement.

Recess and Reconvene

The meeting recessed at 6:54 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 7:36 p.m.

2.04: Mayor & City Council Candidate Forum

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report on a Mayor and Council Candidate Forum. He shared that this was requested by Councilmembers Howell and Musgrove.

Councilmember Howell shared that the League of Women Voters has a forum that is great; however, she is concerned with access to the public being cut off and not allowing live access to the experience. She added that questions had to be submitted online by a deadline. She explained that the editing of the forum is only authorized for official media reporting and excerpts cannot be used for political purposes, which violates the Fair Use Laws. She noted that as an organization that supports democracy, they are making this very inaccessible for people and not honoring Fair Use Laws. She shared Oak Grove has managed to pull off their own candidate forums and she believes Ramsey could do the same.

Councilmember Woestehoff stated he likes the spirit of this; however, he noted that if it is done in conjunction with QCTV and they have their copyright restrictions in place.

Councilmember Howell shared that she believes that Fair Use Laws would still apply.

City Attorney Knaak explained that if information from a public meeting is trying to be restricted in any way is very problematic. He stated that this suggestion is something that they can do as long as it does not appear that they are favoring any side in any way. He noted that he would need to have a conversation with QCTV in regard to their restrictions.

Councilmember Howell stated that she has problems with the restrictions that have not been addressed in the past. She noted that the new restriction that restricts the content feels like having too much control. She explained that she just wants all residents to have access to these forums and she is disappointed in the League of Women Voters for their restrictive efforts.

Mayor Kuzma asked if Councilmember Howell is suggesting this for the 2024 election or elections moving forward.

Councilmember Howell said she is suggesting it for this election and future elections unless something changes with the League of Women Voters.

Mayor Kuzma stated that he does not know if they would be able to accomplish this for the 2024 election as early voting starts as early as next Friday. He said he would support this if early voting was not starting so soon but he does not think they have time to get this done.

Councilmember Woestehoff added that they should speak to the Executive Director of QCTV as they recently put a policy in place that states that QCTV will not have programming that features candidates during the election season.

Councilmember Howell said this would not be featuring a candidate, it would be hosting a forum which is not the same thing.

Councilmember Woestehoff noted that he would still like to discuss this with QCTV to make sure their understanding is in line with this.

Councilmember Howell stated that if a small city like Oak Grove can pull this off then Ramsey definitely can.

Mayor Kuzma said he would not support this as there is just not enough time before early voting starts.

Councilmember Specht shared that he agrees that these forums should be open to the public and the footage should be able to be used. He suggested they have a conversation with the League of Women Voters about changing some of their restrictions before deciding to do their own forum.

Councilmember Riley added that he does not like the idea of the City doing a forum like this. He suggested the Chamber of Commerce or another entity organize this.

Councilmember Howell said she would like the forums to be open again and less restrictive.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she was not even aware that the League of Women Voters forum even happened. She noted that she thinks residents have missed out on this, especially since they cannot attend in person. She said that as a candidate who had participated in open forums, it made her a stronger candidate as she had to be prepared to answer any questions that may come her way. She stated that she would like to let the League of Women Voters know their disappointment with how they are running the forums.

Mayor Kuzma asked what the cost of something like this would be.

City Administrator Hagen said he is not sure.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that between the Chamber of Commerce and the North Metro Chamber of Commerce they may have more availability for moderators to host this forum.

Mayor Kuzma said he is not against the idea of an open forum for candidates; however, he does not think they would be able to pull it off before early voting begins.

Councilmember Woestehoff agreed with Councilmember Riley that he does not think the City should be involved in a forum like this and would like to see another organization lead the charge on this. He added that he does have a concern with the timeline to get this done for the 2024 election.

City Administrator Hagen asked if the Council would be opposed to the League of Women Voters hosting another open forum on the City's terms.

Councilmember Howell stated that she would support this if the League of Women Voters changed their policies and dropped their statement. She said she does not care who hosts the forum, she just wanted it to be open and accessible to residents.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested talking to the League of Women Voters and asking them to adjust their policies around candidate forums.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that she does not think they would need to have this done by the first day of early voting as a lot of people do not vote early on the first day available. She said she would be okay with them hosting this forum after early voting had opened.

Mayor Kuzma said it would not be fair to host a forum after people could have already voted.

Councilmember Woestehoff suggested that City Attorney Knaak speak to the League of Women Voters to see if they would be willing to adjust their policies on this.

Councilmember Howell reiterated her main issues with the way the first forum was done was that the public and their engagement was cut out entirely.

City Administrator Hagen asked how well attended these forums have been in the past.

Councilmember Specht said they have been rather full.

Councilmember Musgrove added that they have been so full in the past that they had to have people wait in the lobby for their race.

Councilmember Howell said she does not see an issue with hosting a forum after early voting has opened as candidates will continue to campaign up to election day.

Councilmember Musgrove shared that candidates will likely want the opportunity to speak to their constituents in these types of scenarios.

Councilmember Woestehoff noted that there is nothing stopping anyone from the public from holding a forum on their own. He reiterated that he does not feel comfortable with the City being involved in this.

Councilmember Howell said they can invite an outside organization to host the forum and use City facilities so the City is not the host of the event.

Councilmember Musgrove disagreed with Councilmember Woestehoff and noted that they are trying to find out more about the candidates that are running for Council, and they want more opportunities for people to see the candidates.

City Administrator Hagen asked if they would like to move forward with this if it can be done at no cost to the City.

Councilmember Howell suggested that they find an organization to moderate this forum utilizing the City facilities and QCTV and invite all candidates and the residents to the forum. She said she would feel comfortable paying the moderators if necessary.

Councilmember Woestehoff added that this could come at an additional cost from QCTV if this was not one of the meetings that they had already budgeted for. He said if QCTV and the League of Women Voters are not on board with these changes then he would like to talk through the other options past that.

Councilmember Howell stated that she thinks the League of Women Voters will say no as they have not wanted to work with the City on this in the past. She said she would like to reach out to other organizations to see if they would have interest in moderating this before they eliminate this idea for the 2024 election and can begin working on a plan for future years.

Councilmember Riley noted that he likes the idea of having a non-resident moderate the forum.

Councilmember Woestehoff said they should give the candidates at least a week's notice.

The consensus of the Council was to direct City Attorney Knaak to approach the League of Women Voters about their policies on their candidate forums and if they are not willing to host another forum on the City's terms, then look into other organizations that could moderate the forum for the City. There was also consensus to pay no more than \$500 to moderators.

2.05: Attorney-Client Privileged Discussion of Potential Litigation - Closed to the Public

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning potential litigation. He asked for the meeting to be moved to Closed Session.

Motion by Councilmember Riley, seconded by Councilmember Olson, to recess the meeting to Closed Session at 8:13 p.m.

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

The meeting reconvened to Open Session at 8:23 p.m.

City Administrator Hagen shared that Staff has received direction from the Council on this matter.

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 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a Closed Session on Tuesday, September 10, 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 Attorney Fritz Knaak

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Kuzma called the Closed Session of the City Council to order at 8:13 p.m.

2. COUNCIL BUSINESS

2.01: Attorney-Client Privileged Discussion of Potential Litigation - Closed to the Public

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning potential litigation.

Staff received direction from the Council

3. ADJOURNMENT

The Closed Session was adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.