

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Ryan Heineman (attended remotely)
Acting Mayor Chris Riley
Councilmember Kirsten Buscher
Councilmember Dan Specht
Councilmember Shanna Stewart

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood
Planning Manager Todd Larson
City Attorney Amanda Johnson

1. CALL TO ORDER

Acting Mayor Riley called the City Council Work Session to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: 2026 Strategic Planning Session

City Administrator Hagen reviewed updates to the strategic plan, noting most items remain consistent, including the City’s mission, vision, values, and high-level strategies, with no major changes proposed. He explained that the updates primarily reflect the removal of completed items, such as the Ramsey Gateway construction work, while ongoing and partially completed initiatives continue. He highlighted new or evolving items, including Ralf property sales as part of the next phase of Ramsey Gateway, adjustments to operational needs, such as staffing changes, and the addition of the Historic Town Hall project due to recent progress.

Councilmember Stewart asked where the recently purchased program referenced by Colleen would fit within the strategic plan and how it is being incorporated.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the program is still in the implementation phase and may not yet be reflected as a completed or “working well” item. He noted it is a multi-phase effort, with additional phases remaining before full implementation, and future successes will be recognized as it progresses.

Councilmember Buscher noted that the fire service model item likely captures the transition and leadership changes within the fire department, suggesting it reflects ongoing work rather than something fully “working well.”

City Administrator Hagen explained that items removed from the strategic plan were completed or no longer major concerns, such as process changes, reduced complaints about road conditions, and the planned elimination of gravel roads. He noted staff have also shifted workloads across departments as needed. He added that a new concern has been identified regarding long-term road funding, explaining that while current projections are stable, future needs may exceed available funding since the capital improvement plan is based on budget capacity rather than all identified project needs.

Acting Mayor Riley asked for confirmation that there are still about two years of bond funding available, noting that while short-term funding appears stable, he shares the concern about longer-term needs.

City Administrator Hagen noted that while funding is stable in the short term, there is a projected drop from higher annual investments to lower levels, which could result in needed road projects being deferred. He added that there are no major changes proposed overall, with some completed items removed, modest progress made on employee wellness efforts, and a new item added to consider a potential recycling and compost facility as interest in that area grows.

Councilmember Stewart asked whether the new technology the City has purchased should be reflected as something still needing implementation, noting it may represent an area where the City is not yet fully utilizing available tools and should continue researching and applying what makes sense.

City Administrator Hagen noted the City already uses a range of technology. However, there is still room to expand its use, highlighting GIS tools as an example where the City has the capability but has not yet fully utilized their potential.

Councilmember Stewart asked what the staff’s plan and goals are for fully utilizing existing technology tools, and what steps would be needed to move this item off the list once progress is made.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the expansion of the use of technology like GIS will be evaluated during the budget process by weighing costs and benefits. He noted that the City currently relies on LOGIS for system support with limited monthly hours, and while staff can make edits, they lack the capacity to develop it in-house fully. He said staff will assess whether increasing investment, either through LOGIS or internal staffing, would provide enough added value to justify the cost.

Councilmember Specht expressed openness to exploring a recycling and compost facility but noted he would like more information, including costs and details, before including it in the strategic plan.

City Administrator Hagen explained the concept would be a small-scale, local drop-off site for residents, not a full processing facility. He described it as a satellite location where residents could bring recycling or compost materials, rather than handling processing on-site.

Senior Planner Anderson described the idea as a resident-focused drop-off site for yard waste and compost, addressing frequent requests from residents who currently must travel long distances to county facilities. He noted it would function similarly to nearby city sites, offering a convenient local option for leaves and debris, with materials collected and then transported elsewhere for processing rather than processed on site.

Councilmember Specht stated that the idea has merit but feels it is premature to include it in the strategic plan, given that it is in the first discussion stage and lacks detailed information.

City Administrator Hagen explained that keeping the item on the strategic plan signals Council interest and gives staff direction to begin researching and developing more detailed information, rather than bringing it forward later without prior context.

Acting Mayor Riley noted that including the item as a strategy would signal the need to study it further, allowing the Council to gather information before deciding whether to move forward.

City Administrator Hagen proposed retitling the section to “areas for improvement,” focusing on where the City can build on existing efforts, such as team building and employee wellness, based on feedback from the employee survey. He noted updates to the opportunities section, including removing outdated items, advancing the Historic Town Hall project into the restoration phase, and recognizing upcoming opportunities, such as continued Highway 10 study efforts. He invited Council input on any additions or changes.

Mayor Heineman asked whether grant writing could be considered an area for improvement, seeking insight into how successful the City has been in securing outside funding and whether there are opportunities to pursue more state or other grant dollars.

City Administrator Hagen responded that the City is performing well in grant writing, highlighting recent successes including funding for Highway 10, the water treatment plant, Historic Town Hall, parks projects, and tree replacement efforts. He also noted that staff have attended grant-writing training to strengthen their efforts further.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted the City has been successful in securing grants, particularly for projects already planned, such as the boulevard tree replacement program. He explained that the focus has been on leveraging grant funding to support existing priorities rather than pursuing new projects that would require additional local matching funds.

Mayor Heineman expressed that he is satisfied with the City’s current approach to grant writing, noting it appears to be well managed and appropriately balanced with staff workload, and confirmed he feels comfortable with the current level of effort.

Councilmember Buscher expressed interest in strengthening grant efforts, suggesting a dedicated or part-time grant writer could reduce staff burden and help pursue additional funding opportunities. She recommended considering this as an area for improvement, while acknowledging the staff's current success.

City Administrator Hagen stated that while there may be additional opportunities, the City has been successful with the grants it pursues, given current staffing levels and capacity.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood announced the City was awarded a \$126,000 Community Development Block Grant for paddle boats at the waterfront, highlighting another recent grant success.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed impacts over the next one to five years, noting updates such as aligning staffing needs with anticipated management retirements and removing items like tariff uncertainty and water quality concerns as conditions have stabilized or projects have been completed. He added that ongoing considerations include the effects of daycare tax exemptions and increasing pressure on City facility space as departments approach capacity.

Acting Mayor Riley asked whether reaching a population of 30,000 would trigger any meaningful changes compared to the current population level, or if it is simply a milestone without significant operational impact.

City Administrator Hagen noted that 30,000 is often viewed as a key threshold for retail interest, making the City more attractive to certain businesses. However, it does not necessarily result in an immediate surge of new development applications.

Mayor Heineman discussed the potential Mississippi River crossing as a significant future impact, noting it could expand the City's market reach and increase retail attractiveness, similar to reaching a 30,000-population threshold. He acknowledged it may not fit neatly into one category but highlighted its potential influence if it moves forward.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed updates to strategies and action steps, noting most remain ongoing with adjusted timelines based on staffing capacity and workload. He highlighted refinements such as expanding the asset management program, advancing studies and facility planning, and continuing grant efforts and business outreach. He also noted new or updated initiatives, including the redevelopment of Highway 10 properties, neighborhood and corridor improvements, a home improvement incentive program, continued restoration of the Historic Town Hall, and the potential return of an Earth Day cleanup effort involving City staff.

Acting Mayor Riley asked whether the Earth Day cleanup concept would include coordinating or involving community volunteers in addition to City staff.

City Administrator Hagen noted the City regularly welcomes volunteers and coordinates park cleanups when groups express interest.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted upcoming and ongoing volunteer efforts, including a tree planting event at Alpine Park funded by a Metropolitan Council grant, as well as park cleanup days organized with volunteers.

City Administrator Hagen noted no changes to Strategy Five, as it remains an ongoing effort tied to street and pedestrian improvements. For Strategy Six, he highlighted updates on the Waterfront Park, with construction underway and a target opening date of July 1, 2026. He added that after a previous proposal for community outreach on phase two was not supported, staff is seeking Council direction on how to approach planning and timing for the next phase.

Mayor Heineman expressed opposition to including an indoor recreation or community center in Waterfront Park phase two, citing concerns about cost and return on investment. He suggested an alternative vision focused on outdoor amenities, such as food truck spaces, seating areas, and a small performance or gathering space, emphasizing uses that could activate the area and generate revenue more quickly.

Councilmember Specht suggested waiting several years to evaluate the success of the waterfront park before considering additional amenities, such as a community center, indicating it may be a future discussion rather than an immediate priority. He stated he would prefer to evaluate the success of the current waterfront investment before pursuing additional projects, noting future development could be considered later if the park proves successful or if other suitable opportunities arise for the site.

Councilmember Stewart agreed with a cautious approach, stating the City should not actively market the property at this time but remain open to proposals, such as a restaurant, that align with Council preferences, rather than pursuing an indoor recreation facility.

Councilmember Buscher expressed support for a community gathering space, noting that return on investment should include community value, not just financial impact. She stated she is not in favor of a simple indoor play area but would support a more comprehensive community center concept, potentially funded through grants, and emphasized the importance of providing spaces for residents to gather.

Acting Mayor Riley expressed concern about the affordability of a community center, noting that while it may be desirable, funding it would be challenging and unlikely to generate a financial return. He indicated it could be considered in the future, but it is not a priority at this time. He thought this should be removed from the strategic plan.

Mayor Heineman suggested exploring a zero-entry beach concept at the waterfront, noting that it could add another recreational option for residents. He referenced examples from other communities where similar amenities generate some revenue while enhancing resident experience, emphasizing a balance between community value and financial sustainability.

Acting Mayor Riley asked whether the Council intends to keep any of these waterfront phase two ideas included in the strategic plan.

Mayor Heineman stated he is not proposing to formally include the beach concept in the strategic plan at this time, suggesting instead that the City wait to see how the current phase performs before advancing additional ideas.

Acting Mayor Riley questioned whether a specific timeline should be set for future consideration, such as three, five, or seven years, but noted it may not be appropriate to dictate decisions for a future Council.

Councilmember Stewart recommended staff revisit the idea in several years if it has not come back forward, ensuring it is not forgotten while allowing flexibility for future Councils.

Mayor Heineman supported keeping the item in the strategic plan with a general timeline of three to five years, emphasizing the importance of long-term planning even if future Councils ultimately make the decision. He noted this could be removed from the strategic plan at that time.

Councilmember Specht stated he would prefer to see it come off. City Administrator Hagen confirmed it would be removed for now.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the remaining strategies, noting plans to reapply for a Ramsey zip code in 2026, continue branding efforts, and improve communication, including expanded social media support. He stated that a citizen survey was conducted in 2018 but not in 2024, as anticipated feedback would focus on road conditions, and asked whether Council would like to consider conducting the next survey in 2027.

Acting Mayor Riley asked whether there are alternative vendors for conducting the survey, noting that if the current company is the only or best option, he does not see a need for further discussion.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the current vendor is the most commonly used. However, other options are available, and the cost is roughly \$30,000, which is likely similar across providers.

Councilmember Stewart expressed that conducting another survey in 2027 may be too soon, suggesting a longer interval of five to eight years would yield more meaningful demographic and feedback changes, rather than surveying too frequently.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Strategy Nine updates, noting that completed items were removed and that new ideas were added based on employee survey feedback. He highlighted potential efforts to improve staff engagement, including more structured Q&A opportunities with management and exploring appreciation events, such as sponsoring a food truck lunch to encourage interaction between staff and leadership. He added that staff already does smaller engagement efforts, such as pop-up events during lunch or holidays, and plans to expand those low-cost, easy-to-implement activities. He concluded by noting updates to the 2025 accomplishments list to highlight key achievements and asked for any final Council feedback.

Councilmember Stewart felt staff did a great job.

Councilmember Buscher expressed overall support for the strategic plan and suggested adding more structure, such as prioritizing items by timeline or importance and including measurable outcomes to track progress better. She also recommended considering how the City will monitor changing demographics in the absence of frequent surveys, with an emphasis on equitable access to services. Additionally, she highlighted interest in strengthening environmental stewardship efforts and continuing to build partnerships with other governmental entities to leverage shared resources and funding opportunities.

City Administrator Hagen asked for clarification on how Councilmember Buscher would like those ideas reflected in the plan, specifically whether they should be included in the “working well” section or incorporated into the objectives.

Councilmember Buscher clarified that she is not prescribing a specific placement but wants to ensure the plan reflects ongoing efforts to build and maintain partnerships with other governmental entities. She emphasized the goal is to show continued collaboration and leveraging of external resources without overcomplicating the plan, and deferred to staff on how best to incorporate it, if appropriate.

Councilmember Buscher suggested revisiting joint meetings with neighboring cities, such as Anoka or Elk River, noting that such meetings were held in the past to discuss shared challenges and strategies. She expressed interest in bringing that back if there is value and alignment, and indicated she would support exploring it further.

Councilmember Stewart stated she would support a joint meeting only if there is a clear purpose and potential outcomes, rather than a general discussion without direction. She suggested there may be an opportunity in the near future, such as coordination around the Mississippi River crossing.

Mayor Heineman agreed that joint meetings should occur only if there is a clear, shared purpose, such as coordinating on the river crossing or providing a legislative update with common representatives. He expressed concern that without a focused objective, meetings could become unproductive.

2.02: Discuss Council Member Compensation

City Administrator Hagen opened a discussion on elected official compensation, noting that as of the last review in February 2022, Ramsey’s mayor’s salary was \$8,000, compared to an average of about \$10,338 in surrounding cities, and councilmembers’ pay was \$6,000, compared to an average closer to \$8,000. He noted the topic was brought forward at the request of Councilmembers Buscher and Riley.

Acting Mayor Riley stated he is now open to discussing elected official compensation, noting his previous opposition but recognizing that pay has not changed since 2005 despite rising costs. He acknowledged the percentage gap compared to other cities and supported having the discussion, emphasizing that any changes would take effect after an election. He suggested increasing compensation to be more in line with area averages, noting that while the role is not meant to be a

primary source of income, it also should not create a financial barrier to serving. He shared an example of a qualified individual who chose not to run because of the financial burden of missed work, emphasizing the importance of making service more accessible.

Councilmember Specht expressed that he does not see a strong need to increase compensation, noting there has generally not been a shortage of candidates or interest in serving. He suggested recruitment does not appear to be an issue and did not support making a change at this time.

Mayor Heineman expressed mixed feelings about increasing compensation, noting he did not run for the money, but acknowledged that Ramsey is paid less than comparable cities. He raised concerns about elected officials setting their own pay and suggested the discussion should include the full Council so all members can weigh in before any direction is given.

City Administrator Hagen asked if Council would like staff to update the compensation comparison data to reflect current averages before continuing the discussion.

Acting Mayor Riley supported updating the compensation data and suggested revisiting the discussion when the full Council is present.

Councilmember Buscher requested that the updated comparison include neighboring cities' compensation details, including salary, health insurance benefits or payouts, and other compensation packages, with a focus on cities similar in size and development to Ramsey.

City Administrator Hagen noted that prior comparisons did include benefit information, recalling that some cities offered modest stipends or health insurance options. He confirmed that paid health insurance was identified in at least one case. He noted he will bring the information back for further discussion at a future meeting.

2.03: Required Audio Recordings of Public Meetings

City Administrator Hagen explained that an audio recording of meetings is not required by state statute, City code, or the charter, but has been done as a practice. He suggested that if the City wants to differentiate which meetings are recorded or offer online attendance, a formal policy should be established to provide clarity and consistency when responding to public requests.

Acting Mayor Riley asked for clarification on the differences between state law, City ordinance, and current practice regarding meeting recordings.

City Administrator Hagen clarified that state law does not require meetings to be recorded. Still, if a meeting is recorded, the City must retain the recording at least until the minutes are approved. He noted that Ramsey keeps recordings longer and makes many of them publicly available. However, some, like interviews, are not posted online due to sensitive content but can still be released upon request as public data.

City Administrator Hagen noted that any meeting with a quorum must be open to the public and properly noticed, including interviews. He explained that while the public can attend these

meetings, they may not be recorded to allow for more open discussion, since no formal decisions are made during those sessions and final decisions are made at regular Council meetings.

Acting Mayor Riley asked for confirmation that those types of meetings, such as interviews, are not required to be recorded.

Mayor Heineman asked for clarification on whether meetings that are open to the public but not recorded would still be streamed or aired.

City Administrator Hagen noted that QC TV typically only covers regular Council meetings and boards and commissions meetings.

Mayor Heineman supported allowing discretion on recording certain meetings, emphasizing the need to balance transparency with sensitivity, particularly during interviews. He noted concerns about publicly sharing candidate performance, suggesting it may be more appropriate not to record those sessions while still allowing public attendance and clearly communicating the reasoning.

Councilmember Stewart clarified she is not referring to regular or work session meetings, but specifically interview sessions and post-interview discussions. She expressed concern that recording those conversations could expose candid evaluations of candidates and stated she would like to see recordings of interviews discontinued moving forward.

City Attorney Johnson advised against recording interview sessions, explaining that doing so creates sensitive data with unclear classification, whether public or private, and avoiding recording eliminates potential legal and data handling concerns. She recommended not recording interviews or post-interview discussions, noting that doing so creates legal vulnerabilities. She stated that while other recording practices are a policy decision for the Council, avoiding recordings in these situations is the safest legal approach.

City Administrator Hagen and City Attorney Johnson agreed that, based on legal advice, interviews should not be recorded and that this can serve as an informal policy without the need for a formal written policy. They noted that the reasoning is grounded in legal risk and candidate expectations, and that the approach can be documented in a legal opinion if needed.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

Noted.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

4.01: Update on Outside Committees

Received.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Sue Osbeck
TimeSaver Off-Site Secretarial, Inc.