

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Ryan Heineman
Councilmember Kirsten Buscher (attended remotely)
Councilmember Michael Olson
Councilmember Eric Peters
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Dan Specht
Councilmember Shana Stewart

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson
City Attorney Fritz Knaak
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

2.01: Receive Recommendation from the Charter Commission to Amend Chapters 2, 3 and 12 of the Charter.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to recommendations from the Charter Commission on amendments to the Charter.

Councilmember Specht said he is not supportive of no longer requiring a roll call vote for ordinances, they are very important and he thinks everyone's vote should be said aloud individually.

Councilmember Stewart agreed she added that she was also supportive of requiring a Councilmember to live in their Ward, and if they move out of the Ward, they should give up their Council seat.

Councilmember Specht asked if this requirement would be immediate upon a Councilmember moving or if there would be a grace period.

City Attorney Knaak noted that when a Councilmember moves out of their Ward, they have committed a disqualifying act.

Councilmember Buscher added that if they were to create a vacancy due to a Councilmember moving, she would still want to ensure that the Ward was advocated for and rightfully represented. She asked how they would verify if people have moved from their Ward if they do not share this information.

City Administrator Hagen noted this would likely be an honors system to notify the City of any moves.

Mayor Heineman asked if there could be any legal action taken against a Councilmember for not disclosing that they had moved.

City Attorney Knaak stated that it is hard for him to imagine someone would move into another Ward and not tell the City.

Councilmember Peters asked if a Councilmember having to temporarily live in a rental or hotel due certain circumstances if this would also be considered a disqualifying act.

City Attorney Knaak noted that under certain circumstances there is a measure of intent and the City would be hard pressed to determine this a disqualifying act.

Mayor Heineman asked if they should add language to the Charter that clarifies temporary living situations or if it is already implied.

City Attorney Knaak said they could add this kind of language; however, he does not see the current language as causing any issues.

Councilmember Peters asked if they have redrawn the Ward lines recently.

City Administrator Hagen said yes and explained that every ten years they look at the Ward lines and make changes if needed.

Councilmember Peters asked if it was possible that the Ward lines changing could redistrict a Councilmember out of their Ward.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the Council sets the Ward boundaries, and he does not see this as an issue.

City Attorney Knaak said that if this were to happen it would still be considered a disqualifying act and the Councilmember would have to resign.

Councilmember Riley noted that this was a consideration for the Council the last time they reviewed Ward lines.

City Administrator Hagen continued reviewing the recommended Charter changes.

Councilmember Stewart shared concern with eliminating the 30 day time frame for an ordinance to be published before it is in effect. She stated that after speaking with City Administrator Hagen and understanding that most ordinances are in progress for two months or longer, she is okay with this change.

Councilmember Specht asked if residents would still have time to appeal an ordinance with this change.

City Administrator Hagen said yes and explained that even with the current 30-day requirement, a resident could likely not get an appeal organized fast enough anyway.

Councilmember Peters asked if the Council could put a start date on an ordinance if they did not want it effective immediately.

City Administrator Hagen said yes. He moved on to discuss the recommendation to decrease the number of City newsletters from six to four per year.

Councilmember Riley shared that he is constantly hearing that residents do not feel as though they get enough communication from the City and that the newsletter is the number one source of information. He said he would not support decreasing the number; however, the change is currently written to state that they must send at least four newsletter per year, so they could continue to send 6 under this change.

Councilmember Specht agreed and shared that the City's demographics seem to enjoy a newsletter. He added that he does not see a benefit to making this change.

Councilmember Stewart agreed.

Councilmember Peters agreed.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she had discussed this with City Administrator Hagen as she was also concerned with reducing the number of newsletters. She noted that they discussed other ways to fund the newsletter, including looking for more businesses to advertise in the newsletter.

Mayor Heineman asked if the cost to the City is \$60,000 a year for the six newsletters before or after the revenue they receive for advertisements.

City Administrator Hagen said the City's cost is less than \$60,000 after the advertisement revenue comes in. He added that they could also look into reducing the length of the newsletter to save money.

Mayor Heineman suggested adding a page to the newsletter to put advertisements on.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the Charter changes as proposed, with the exception of keeping roll call votes for ordinances and keeping the number of City newsletters

per year at six. The Council directed Staff to draft language that refers to temporary living situations outside of the elected Ward.

2.02: Traprock Park Mono-Pole Cell Tower Lease

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning the request for a mono-pole cell tower lease in Traprock Park.

Councilmember Stewart said she is supportive of using this park for a mono-pole cell tower lease; however, she would like to see a better deal negotiated.

Councilmember Specht asked if a mono-pole is just a basic cell tower.

City Administrator Hagen shared that it is comparable to what is currently at Alpine Park. He noted that they would engineer the design to have a breaking point if the cell tower were to fall. He added that the west side of the Traprock property is farthest from any residential areas and would be the best place for the cell tower.

Councilmember Specht stated he is concerned if this would match the rural aesthetics of the area and he is not sure how the residents in this area would feel.

City Administrator Hagen explained that when they had a survey done of the property, stakes were put into the ground which generated a few phone calls from residents. He noted that they would look to have community meetings with the residents in the area if this were to move forward to gauge interest.

Councilmember Peters asked if they would include in their contract that if Verizon added other carriers to the tower the City would see an increase in the lease.

City Administrator Hagen said this had already been discussed and they were willing to add an additional \$200 a month per additional carrier.

Councilmember Riley shared that they have two studies completed on what the fair market value for this would be and if Verizon does not want to pay fair market value, then he would not support this.

Mayor Heineman added that this area is already covered with 5G cell coverage. He noted that he thinks this would be a big eye sore and he thinks people would object to this being so close to residential areas. He said he does not think this would be worth it based on the amount of revenue they would be getting.

Councilmember Specht asked what else they would be able to do with this land if they do not pursue a cell tower lease.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that they could use this land for any park related use. He shared that some residents were interested in an outdoor archery range in this

area. He explained that this park was platted in the 1980s at a time when the adjoining properties were platted. He said at this time they used the area for a horseback riding arena. He added that they currently use this area as a drop-off site during large weather events for debris and the mosquito control chopper uses this area as well.

Councilmember Stewart asked if this cell tower would inhibit any of the other potential uses for the property.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood said no.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she thinks they should explore some more creative ideas to try to get more money out of a lease; however, if they cannot get market value for the site, they would have to look into the impact of accepting something that is below market value. She asked if they do not move forward with this if there is a possibility that a cell tower could be constructed on private land outside of the City's oversight.

City Administrator Hagen explained that there would be an opportunity for a private property to move forward with this; however, it would require a land use application. He noted that this is not something the City could say no to; however, they could set reasonable restrictions.

Mayor Heineman said he is not in support as he does not see the benefits outweighing the drawbacks.

Councilmember Stweart asked if they were to move this forward if the residents in the area would be notified and would have the opportunity to come forward at a Council meeting and voice their opinions.

City Administrator Hagen explained that they would need to hold a targeted neighborhood meeting with the residents in the area for them to provide the City with feedback before they decide to move forward with agreeing to the lease.

Councilmember Buscher suggested they try to negotiate the rate with Verizon and at the same time, hold a neighborhood meeting to get the residents' feedback before they move forward or not.

Councilmember Olson shared that he is not supportive of this, especially at the proposed rate. He noted the community support for this will be very important to him if they decide to move forward with this.

Mayor Heineman said he does not see many residents being supportive of this.

Councilmember Buscher stated they have held neighborhood meetings for lesser items than this. She explained she would like to put the potential revenue for the City into perspective for the residents she may see them being supportive. She noted it is her goal to ensure that the residents are included in these kinds of conversations.

Mayor Heineman agreed; however, he thinks they need to be aware of unintended consequences.

Councilmember Stewart asked about the history of the cell tower at Alpine Park.

City Administrator Hagen shared that this cell tower has been there for over 20 years.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood added that the cell tower ended up in the center of this park and the residents understood that some of the revenue was going to the parks system.

City Administrator Hagen explained that they could put together maps for the residents at the neighborhood meeting to show them other potential areas in the City where the cell tower could go if not on this property.

Mayor Heineman asked if there is a price point that they would like to target to make this worth it before they begin negotiations.

Councilmember Stewart asked how much the lease is at Alpine Park.

Councilmember Riley said the two current leases are at \$26,400 and \$24,000 per year and he would like this to be their target for negotiations.

Mayor Heineman added that he would like them to start imagining what they would use the lease money for to help sell the idea to the residents.

City Administrator Hagen asked if Verizon is not willing to meet market value if they would not want to move forward with a neighborhood meeting.

Mayor Heineman said yes.

The consensus of the Council was to renegotiate the terms with Verizon and direct Staff to schedule a neighborhood meeting to get feedback from the residents.

2.03: Continued review of the draft Rental Housing Licensing Inspections Policy

Community Development Director Hanson reviewed the Staff report in regard to the rental housing licensing inspection policy.

Councilmember Riley said he likes the idea of this becoming a policy, so they do not have to continue to change the ordinance. He added that he supports the changes made and feels that this is an important policy.

Councilmember Stewart shared that she is against any inspections for tenants as she feels as though it is a violation of tenant rights.

Councilmember Specht stated he likes the idea of the policy as they have found some rental units that have been in rough shape and they have already found things that could have resulted in big

issues if not addressed. He said he is open to hearing more ways that they can make the policy more tenant friendly.

Councilmember Olson shared that he has been very vocal about his opposition of this program since the beginning. He said the ideal situation would be to offer these inspections as a benefit rather than something that is imposed. He stated he likes the content of the policy for the most part.

Councilmember Peters noted he has been a renter for more than half his life and he has never had the benefit of one of these inspections. He said he thinks the policy is great to have in place for the City to take an invested interest in ensuring that the rental communities do not become dilapidated.

Councilmember Buscher said she thinks this is something the City should do. She noted the intent of the policy is to protect the safety of the tenants. She shared that she understands people's concerns about having an inspector in their private spaces; however, renters should understand that inspections can take place for their benefit. She added that she would not want this to be something that people could opt out of.

Mayor Heineman asked if the policy is written in a way that it protects the property owner or the tenant.

Community Development Director Hanson shared that their goal with this policy was that it was for the tenant, the property owner, and the City. She said they want to have a clear policy and process for rental housing.

Councilmember Stewart said she would not want inspectors looking in someone's closets or in a personal area as the inspector could touch their belongings. She suggested pulling back on where the inspector will be going in these homes to make it safe for the tenants while still maintaining the unit.

Mayor Heineman agreed that they should only be going into areas with specific reasons while not inspecting areas that are not of concern.

Community Development Director Hanson explained that when the inspector goes into someone's closet, the only thing they are looking at is the ceiling to see if there is any water damage. She said Staff does not touch anyone's personal belongings.

Mayor Heineman asked if it is pertinent that they check the ceiling in every closet.

Councilmember Riley suggested that they no longer require inspections of closet ceilings.

Councilmember Olson added that it would be very rare that there was a leak just limited to the area within the closet so he does not see a need for the closets to be inspected.

Councilmember Buscher shared that this plan was modelled after similar policies and programs in other cities. She said she would not want to create policies based off of potential bad personnel.

She noted that there are also other avenues that they can advocate for tenants' rights as well as property owners' rights by having an open dialogue to allow tenants to talk to their landlords about concerns. She added that they can come up with other ways to protect the tenants without lessening what they are doing with this policy.

Mayor Heineman noted the spirit of this policy to ensure there is a safe environment and that tenants and landlords are not taking advantage of each other. He said he would like to still allow the tenants to have security and privacy while the City is ensuring their living conditions are safe.

Councilmember Specht said he is not concerned with this being a trust issue with Staff. He stated he is struggling with finding the balance with this policy where they are ensuring that tenants and landlords have a safe environment while not infringing upon anyone's right. He suggested scaling down the inspection checklist.

Mayor Heineman shared that even when the Police Department is issued a warrant to search someone's residence, there are limitations to what they are able to search through. He noted that the inspectors are only entering these units to inspect certain things and anything that is outside of these set items would be off limits.

Councilmember Buscher asked how many complaints they have received from tenants in the City about this being an overly restrictive policy.

Community Development Director Hanson said they have only received one complaint.

City Administrator Hagen shared that last year they had an apartment tenant who completely disagreed with letting the inspector in and they were able to address this situation right away with the concerned resident and they worked out an agreement that they would just inspect the unit after the tenant moved out. He explained that when they brought on a new Code Enforcement Officer a few years ago the code enforcement process began to move forward. He shared that during this time they were receiving calls from renters who were concerned with the state of their units. He said they have gotten support from the residents on this policy so far.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to scale back the inspection requirements and continue this discussion at the next Work Session.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

Noted.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

Councilmember Peters shared that he had residents contact him about the new State flag.

Councilmember Stewart shared that she was also contacted by a resident in regard to the State flag.

City Administrator Hagen said they can discuss the State flag at a future Work Session.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.