

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, February 25, 2025, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Ryan Heineman
Councilmember Kirsten Buscher
Councilmember Eric Peters
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Dan Specht

Members Absent: Councilmember Michael Olson
Councilmember Shanna Stewart

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
Fire Chief Matt Kohner
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood
City Attorney Fritz Knaak
Police Captain Tim Frankfurth
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson

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: Outdoor Wood-Burning Boiler Discussion

Community Development Director Hanson reviewed the Staff report in regard to the outdoor wood-burning boilers and their effects on the air quality.

Councilmember Riley asked if the property in question meets the City regulations for these boilers.

Community Development Director Hanson said yes.

Councilmember Specht asked if there is a lot size requirement for these boilers.

Community Development Director Hanson said no. She shared that these boilers have been a concern of the EPA and MPCA and they set strict regulations in 2020 about new furnaces in homes. She noted that these regulations only affected new furnaces and nothing can be done about old ones.

Mayor Heineman shared that he met with the resident who expressed concern with this and when he drove out to his property he noticed the strong smoke smell. He said that while he is not a fan of adding regulations, he would like to find a happy medium so both of these neighbors can be happy.

Councilmember Buscher agreed. She added that she would like them to look into what the cost difference would be between using these boilers and not. She shared that she reviewed the model ordinance from the MPCA as well as other ordinances from other cities and she noticed that a lot of cities require insulation of new outdoor burners. She added that some cities also regulate the chimney heights to ensure the smoke would be extending past the highest peak of the house and is out above the homes in the area. She asked if they had spoken to the homeowner who has the boiler that another resident shared concerns with.

City Administrator Hagen explained that they have not reached out and he does not see why they would since they are not violating any City codes.

Mayor Heineman asked if police and fire noticed any strong smoke smells when they visited the property.

City Administrator Hagen shared Fire Chief Kohner had been out to the property and they looked for signs of construction materials or other materials being burned and he was not able to find any. He said if they are caught burning unauthorized materials, they would have to put it out immediately.

Councilmember Peters shared that when he visited this property the moment he got out of his vehicle he was hit with what smelled like burning chemicals. He said he would like to find a way to put people into compliance.

Councilmember Specht asked if they could do some kind of grant for wood burning stoves.

City Administrator Hagen said they could look into this.

Councilmember Specht said he does not want to pass more regulations; however, this seems to be an issue that he would like to have taken care of.

Community Development Director Hanson noted that they did have a grant program in the past for people updating their wood-burning stoves.

Mayor Heineman shared that Minnesota residents can receive a discount on pellet stoves through the Stove Swap program.

Councilmember Specht said they would not be able to force residents to replace their stoves.

Mayor Heineman suggested they send a mailer to residents outlining this program as an option.

Councilmember Peters added that they can also reiterate what can and cannot be burned in these boilers.

Councilmember Specht asked how they would be able to prove if someone was burning an unauthorized material.

Police Captain Frankfurth shared that if they get a call for a strong smoke smell, they will search around and try to determine which property it is coming from and if they determine that it needs to be investigated then the Fire Department can investigate on the property.

Councilmember Riley stated he likes the idea of sending a reminder to the residents about the current wood-burning boiler ordinance and what materials they are and are not allowed to burn.

Mayor Heineman asked if they could just target this communication to specific areas where it is an issue or if it would have to be City-wide.

Community Development Director Hanson suggested putting this communication in the next *Ramsey Resident*.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that adding a flue section can help disperse the smoke that is produced, and this is a very cheap option.

Councilmember Buscher agreed and reiterated that she would like to see more regulations around new boilers that are installed. She noted that another city has these boilers subject to their nuisance regulations.

Councilmember Peters suggested having this reviewed by the EPB.

Mayor Heineman shared that he would be supportive of having this reviewed by the EPB. He reiterated that he is not in favor of more regulations; however, he would like to show this concerned resident who brought this forward that Council and Staff are listening to this concern and looking for ways to make it better.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to prepare a communication for residents reminding them of the boiler ordinance and to have this reviewed by the EPB.

2.02: Northstar Commuter Rail Legislation

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning the Northstar Commuter Rail legislation and its possible discontinuation.

Councilmember Riley stated that he does not think that it will matter what Ramsey's response is to this, especially when MnDOT and the Met Council are supporting the discontinuation of it. He asked if the City is in debt with the Northstar improvements they made.

City Administrator Hagen said they technically are in debt as it was funded through interfund loans that are paid back through TIF proceeds. He noted that if there is no public transportation in the City then they may be able to ask for some reimbursement of these funds.

Councilmember Buscher stated she does not want the City to offer comments on this as she does not want them to get entangled in something that they do not need to be in. She asked if there are citizens in Ramsey that will be unable to get to places if the rail goes away.

City Administrator Hagen explained that they do not know who is using the rail; however, it seems like this is already a done deal in legislation. He noted that a statement was released from MnDOT and the Met Council that stated they will be ensuring that another service is available for public transportation.

Councilmember Peters suggested putting some information about Northstar Commuter Rail being disconnected and give residents the information for what other services will be available in the *Ramsey Resident*.

Councilmember Specht agreed that he does not think the City should get involved with this.

Mayor Heineman asked if there has been any change in crime rates with the rail.

Police Captain Frankfurth said there is nothing measurable that they have seen as most people use it to get to the airport or to sporting events.

Mayor Heineman said that he does not want to get involved with this if it could turn into a fight; however, if they are going to say anything then he would like them to communicate that they invested money into the rail and would like to be compensated for this.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to not make an official statement on the possible discontinuation of the Northstar Commuter Rail but to advocate for a bus stop and possible compensation to make up for the improvements done by the City for the rail.

2.03: Remote Public Meeting Attendance Policy

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to the remote public meeting attendance policy.

Councilmember Specht shared that he was not a supporter of allowing unlimited members of Council or Commissions to attend meetings remotely; however, this policy has not been abused.

Mayor Heineman agreed and noted that since it is not currently being abused, then he does not have an issue with this policy.

City Administrator Hagen said they could address this if it ever does become an issue.

Councilmember Specht asked if the City has more regulations in place than open meeting laws through the State.

City Administrator Hagen said no.

City Attorney Knaak shared that when people attend meetings remotely, the address from which they are attending is supposed to be published which actually increased public participation.

Councilmember Specht shared that a Councilmember in the past had wanted to attend a meeting remotely from their car and were told they would not be able to attend.

City Attorney Knaak explained that the location which someone is attending remotely from must be open and accessible to the public.

The consensus of the Council was to keep the 2020 Remote Public Meeting Attendance Policy in place with updates.

3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar

Noted.

Councilmember Peters asked if they have standardized questions that they will ask in the Board and Commission interview process.

City Administrator Hagen shared that they ask broad questions and have the applicants rank their preferences for which Board or Commission they would like to serve on. He noted that they may ask more specific questions once they know what Board or Commission the applicant is most interested in.

Mayor Heineman asked if they do interviews for the Charter Commission.

City Administrator Hagen said that is a separate entity and is handled through the judge.

Councilmember Buscher asked if she should draft some information for the future topics that she would like to see on an agenda for other Councilmembers to consider supporting or if she should wait to draft some information until after it has enough support to be put on an agenda.

Mayor Heineman said she can use her best judgement on whether or not she needs to have information prepared to help convince a Councilmember to go in with her on a certain item.

4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT

City Administrator Hagen shared that the water treatment plant is nearing the end of construction and it is standard to put a plaque on the wall recognizing those who had a lot of involvement in the

project. He stated he would like to recognize the seven current Councilmembers, key Staff members who were involved, former Mayor Kuzma and Councilmembers Howell, Musgrove, and Woestehoff, former City Administrator Ulrich, and former Public Works Superintendent Grant.

Mayor Heineman shared that he thinks it is a great idea to list the former Councilmembers, Mayor, and Staff members that had a lot of involvement in this project. He noted he would like Mayor Kuzma to be listed first, then Councilmember Howell, the Councilmember Woestehoff, then Councilmember Musgrove.

Councilmember Riley asked how the new Police Chief and Captain have been.

Police Captain Frankfurth shared that things are going well and Police Chief Bluml is settling into his role and it has been great having a second Police Captain.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood encouraged everyone to sign up for the recreation program updates from Recreation Coordinator Proulx to stay up to date on all things parks and recreation. He added that the Ramsey Community Foundation has funded a community art plan that they would like to offer to the Council that will be coming forward in June for review.

Mayor Heineman asked about the use of the ice rink outside of the COR.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that it has been used but not as much as they had hoped.

Mayor Heineman asked if there is a liability with using the pond at The Draw for ice skating.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood said it would not be a liability as long as they are being smart with how they use it.

Councilmember Specht asked if they need to have an unsubscribe feature in the recreation emails.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood said he can talk to Recreation Coordinator Proulx about this. He noted that a few people have asked to be removed from the email list and she has removed them.

City Administrator Hagen shared that they are working on the City audit and it will be presented in June to the Council.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.