

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Ryan Heineman
Councilmember Kirsten Buscher
Councilmember Michael Olson
Councilmember Eric Peters
Councilmember Chris Riley
Councilmember Dan Specht
Councilmember Shanna Stewart

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
Planning Manager Todd Larson
Senior Planner Chris Anderson
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan
City Attorney Fritz Knaak
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: Curbside Recycling Contract

Senior Planning Anderson reviewed the Staff report in regard to the curbside recycling contract with ACE Solid Waste. He shared the EPB's recommendation to stay with a single contracted service rather than an open hauling system.

Councilmember Buscher said she would not want to have an open hauler system, but she does not feel strongly whether they stay with ACE or get bids from other companies. She noted an RFP would be nice to see if their current contract is competitive. She added that she would like to implement a labor agreement with the next contractor.

Councilmember Specht asked how many residents utilize the recycling service.

Senior Planner Anderson shared that he gets a monthly report from ACE and about 90% of residents are using this service every month.

Councilmember Specht asked if there is an option for residents to opt out of using ACE.

Senior Planner Anderson said residents can opt not to recycle; however, they would still be responsible for paying the \$3.98 for the service.

Councilmember Specht asked if it would be feasible to offer an opt out option. He shared that he hears from residents who are frustrated that they have to pay for the service when they do not recycle.

Senior Planner Anderson said they could explore this; however, he thinks it would be very challenging to implement and would also make it difficult to negotiate a contract.

Councilmember Specht asked how much of the recycled materials are actually able to be recycled rather than what is contaminated and has to be disposed of.

Senior Planner Anderson explained that in 2017 and 2018, very strict contamination levels were implemented where almost all recyclers stopped exporting their materials. He noted that he gets a tonnage report from ACE and he is required to report this data to the County. He shared that he has reached out to ACE to ask if this tonnage report is from before or after the contaminated materials were disposed of. He said he has not gotten an answer on this yet.

Councilmember Riley shared that he agrees with the recommendation of the EPB and if the current system is working he does not see a need to change it. He said they do need to be confident that they are getting the best price for this service and if they feel they can do this through negotiations with ACE then he is supportive of that, or if it would be better to have an RFP, he would support that as well.

Councilmember Stewart asked when the City did an RFP last for this service.

Senior Planner Anderson shared that through his research he believes the last RFP was done before the initial contract for service was signed which was in the early 1990s. He noted that direction since he has been on Staff has always been to negotiate with ACE since everything had always worked well with them. He stated they normally will survey other cities around to see what prices they pay for recycling; however, it is a hard comparison to make as each city handles recycling and trash services differently.

Councilmember Stewart asked about the risk associated with doing an RFP.

Senior Planner Anderson noted that ACE would be allowed to submit a bid and he assumes that they would.

Councilmember Buscher added that there are only a few services in the area that offer recycling services so the bid process would likely not take a very long time.

Senior Planner Anderson shared that there are currently eight to ten licensed recycling haulers in the City; however, some only do commercial properties or apartment buildings. He added that services that are not currently licensed in the City can still submit a bid.

Councilmember Specht asked if they moved to an open hauling system if they would still require each hauler to report the tonnage of recycling that they collect so it can be reported to the County.

Senior Planner Anderson noted that the reporting would take more administrative time in an open hauler system to track this information down. He added that they would also have to update City Code to make it very clear that reporting is mandatory and failure to report could result in the revocation of their license to operate in the City. He explained that if they were with an open hauler system then the education on what can and cannot be recycled becomes more generalized as each hauler will have different standards for what they will and will not pick up.

City Administrator Hagen asked how organics recycling would come into play with this. He asked if this has to be available to residents through a County requirement.

Senior Planner Anderson said this is not yet a requirement; however, beginning in 2030, the seven-county metro will have to have an option for curbside organics recycling per a State mandate. He shared that they currently have an organics drop-off space at Public Works.

Mayor Heineman asked if the last time they extended this contract it was for another five years.

Senior Planner Anderson said yes.

Mayor Heineman said that he has experience with RFPs for work and he does not like them as they end up paying more in the end because the companies have to build into this contract what they estimate their costs will be in five years. He noted that the longer the term of the contract, the more waste there is built in to accommodate for inflation and other unknowns. He asked if they have ever done a year-by-year contract.

Senior Planner Anderson said they have done three-year contracts in the past with one-year extensions so it will be up to the Council to determine the duration of a contract they would be looking at.

Mayor Heineman asked if they had ever requested three bids rather than going out for an RFP.

Senior Planner Anderson said no.

Mayor Heineman noted that having three bidders seems to be an easier way to go about this rather than having to go through the entire RFP process. He asked Councilmember Buscher what she meant by wanting to add a labor agreement.

Councilmember Buscher explained this would require whoever is awarded the contract to remain neutral if the haulers decide to unionize.

Mayor Heineman disagreed with this and noted that he does not believe it is the City's business to have a say in this.

Councilmember Peters asked if they would be legally allowed to just request three bids rather than doing an RFP.

City Attorney Knaak noted that requesting bids and doing an RFP are very similar. He said they are always able to go out for bids rather than do an RFP.

Councilmember Specht asked about the difference between an RFP and a bid.

Mayor Heineman explained that an RFP is when a municipality issues a formal request for proposals that gets posted online and anyone can submit a proposal and all of the results have to be published publicly which causes a lot more scrutiny. He said a bid is easier as they can choose trusted vendors and ask for their best price.

City Attorney Knaak noted that RFPs tend to be for services and bids tend to be for goods. He said the advantage of getting bids is that they have the responsibility of deciding who is the responsible bidder.

Councilmember Specht stated that if they decide to just stay with a single contracted hauler then he thinks they need to open it up for bids; however, he is supportive of an open hauler system.

Councilmember Stewart said she would like them to stay with a single hauler and would prefer to go the bid route rather than an RFP so the Council can maintain some control. She added that she also disagrees with the labor agreement suggested by Councilmember Buscher.

Councilmember Riley shared his support for requesting three bids.

Councilmember Olson agreed.

Councilmember Buscher said she does not have a preference for whether they go with an RFP or bids.

Mayor Heineman noted that this has been the system for a while and while he likes the freedom that an open hauler system would provide, he thinks the current system is working well and is not as hard on the roads. He said he would like to get three bids.

City Administrator Hagen asked how long they would like the contracts to be.

Councilmember Stewart suggested another five-year contract since there will be a new requirement come 2030 for organics recycling.

Senior Planner Anderson said they would need this contract to end in 2029 to give Council and Staff time to discuss what they will do in 2030 and beyond.

Councilmember Buscher stated she hopes the current Council will discuss how they would like to approach the organics recycling requirement and not just pass it off to whoever will be on the next Council.

Senior Planner Anderson asked if the discretion for who to request bids from will be left up to Staff.

Mayor Heineman said yes.

Councilmember Specht said it would be interesting to know during the bidding process what percentage of their materials they are able to recycle versus dispose of.

Mayor Heineman asked if they would like to ask the companies that they are requesting bids from to include a price analysis if users were to opt-out.

City Administrator Hagen said he is not sure what this would look like from a utility billing standpoint.

Senior Planner Anderson explained that ACE bills the City on a monthly basis based on the number of households and he gets an updated count of households on a quarterly basis.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she was opposed to the option to opt-out.

Councilmember Stewart agreed.

The consensus of the Council was to stay with a single hauler system and request three bids for service with a contract ending on December 31, 2029.

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

Planning Manager Larson reviewed the Staff report concerning the Rental Housing Licensing Inspection Policy.

Councilmember Specht asked if it is stated in the policy that pictures will only be taken of violations.

Planning Manager Larson said yes.

Councilmember Specht asked if most rental agreements include a stipulation around photography.

Planning Manager Larson explained that not every rental in the City has a lease.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she agrees with Staff's drafted policy and the only change she would like to see is to bring back the red line section in Section 1 to include protection against retaliation.

Planning Manager Larson explained that they do the rental housing inspections for many reasons and they do not want to have the view that every landlord is in the right and every tenant is the issue. He said there are neighbors that complain about things and they do not want residents to

have a different standing in the same neighborhood whether they own or rent in the neighborhood. He stated this policy advocates for both renters and landlords.

Mayor Heineman shared that they removed this section because there was a lot of bias in the section on retaliation. He noted that this can be subjective.

Councilmember Buscher noted that this discussion came as a result of tenant discomfort and she thinks it is fair to keep the retaliation section in the policy.

Councilmember Specht stated that this policy was presented as a way to help both the landlord and the tenant.

Planning Manager Larson explained that the basis for coming up with the policy was due to concerns with how the City's ordinance was written and how the inspections were being conducted.

Councilmember Riley added that this policy was also created from the City's perspective and that it is in the best interest of the City that all rental properties are well maintained by both the landlord and the tenant. He said he likes the draft put together by Staff as the policy is still doing what it needs to do without being more restrictive than it needs to be.

Councilmember Specht said he is still not comfortable with requiring background checks for property owners as only property managers are required to have a background check per State statute.

Planning Manager Larson explained that most property owners are also technically the manager which grants them the same access as a property manager. He stated this is included in the policy as it gives all renters equal protection from whoever would be able to access the home or unit. He added that this policy is modeled after Coon Rapids, and they also require background checks. He noted there has only been one background check conducted so far that someone did not pass.

Councilmember Specht stated he thinks a background check on a property owner is an undue burden.

Mayor Heineman agreed and noted that if someone hires a property manager to manage the rental property then they would be required to have a background check.

Councilmember Stewart added that this would put undue liability on the City.

Councilmember Buscher asked if the City does not conduct a background check how they would know if the property owner had a background check conducted on their property manager.

Councilmember Specht noted that if it is a requirement then he is fine with the City being the one to run the background check since it falls under State law.

Councilmember Olson agreed.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she would still like background checks conducted on all property owners who are also property managers.

Councilmember Stewart suggested lengthening the certificate cycle from three years to four years. She added that she wants to make sure the scoring system is fair that way regardless of who is conducting the inspection it will be consistent.

City Administrator Hagen asked if it is a code regulation for how long the licenses can be.

Planning Manager Larson noted that this was a part of the crime prevention aspect of the licensing that has been removed.

City Administrator Hagen said they can discuss the length of the license at a different time as that is not in the policy that is being discussed.

Councilmember Stewart asked about the inspection and re-inspection timelines.

Planning Manager Larson explained that many insurance companies like these inspections as it helps minimize risks and can keep premiums low. He added that some insurance carriers may require yearly inspections. He said this would be done at the request of a landlord, as they might want that service.

Councilmember Stewart noted that she would like to clarify the landlord's responsibilities, and they should not be held responsible for crime activity. She stated the policy gravitates towards crime activity in a few places and she thinks this policy should focus only on the health and safety of the unit.

Mayor Heineman asked if the Plain Sight Doctrine essentially gives the inspector the duty to report criminal activity that they see during an inspection.

City Attorney Knaak said yes.

Councilmember Stewart added that she does not think that ripped carpeting should trigger an annual inspection unless it is a direct safety hazard.

Planning Manager Larson shared that the inspector is using her discretion on their inspections and if a concern is minor, like a small rip in the carpet from a child or a puppy, then they would discuss a correction schedule rather than causing the property to fail the inspection.

Councilmember Stewart asked the inspector to determine what is acceptable for a rip in carpeting as it can be subjective.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the policy needs to stay high level enough that there is a broad spectrum of what is acceptable. He added that the Council also needs to trust that Staff is hearing the concerns of the Council and implementing them accordingly. He noted that if the

inspector is writing up every single tenant who has a small rip in their carpet, then the Council would be hearing about it from the residents. He said focusing on these small details is not a good use of time and they need to be able to trust Staff that they are treating residents and landlords right.

Community Development Director Hanson shared that she works with the inspector daily and there are instances where she is inspecting a unit and the carpeting is completely ripped up and causes a tripping hazard which would be a concern that needs to be addressed; however, there are also instances where a rip is very small or just has normal wear and tear that does not need to be addressed. She noted that when it comes to safety and the concern could be a hazard then that is when it needs to be addressed.

Councilmember Buscher asked if they could put this item on a future Work Session agenda to fully iron out.

Mayor Heineman noted that the Council does trust Staff to do what is right; however, they still want to do their due diligence for the residents. He added that they have a complaint-based system so if something is not being addressed it can be reported to the City.

Councilmember Stewart asked if the inspector will still be looking in closets during inspections. She added that if a tenant does not want photos taken of their home, she thinks they have the right to say no to it.

Mayor Heineman suggested adding a section that if a tenant declines to have photos taken in their unit then this would admit fault to the issue.

Planning Manager Larson explained that the photo is to help identify the issue and work out the solutions with the property owner or manager. He said they are not taking broad pictures, just close-up pictures of the area of concern.

Councilmember Olson said he likes the option of allowing tenants to opt out of having photos taken of issues found in the inspection. He noted these photos are to speed up the process of getting the issue fixed and if they do not want photos taken then they should be able to say no to that; however, this will likely slow down the process of getting the issue resolved.

Mayor Heineman stated he would not want to waste Staff time by making them come back and look at the issue because they did not have a photo of it.

Planning Manager Larson added that it would not be the tenant admitting fault by saying they do not want issues to be photographed. He noted that property managers have every right to take pictures of whatever they need to.

Debra Musgrove noted that there was a question listed on the draft policy about property manager background checks and if those are conducted every year.

Community Development Director Hanson said the background check is done at the time of the application and is only done again if the property owner requests it.

Councilmember Buscher said she does not agree with the discussed changes to the policy and shared that she trusts that Staff has the knowledge and expertise on this topic.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the draft policy, removing the requirement for property owner background checks and not inspecting closets unless there is a reported issue or utility access is through the closet.

2.03: Old Town Hall Discussion - Renovation Quotes - EDA Recommendation - History - Next Steps

Economic Development Manager Sullivan reviewed the Staff report in regard to the old Town Hall and renovation quotes.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she thinks it is worthwhile to invest in this property as it is one of the only buildings in the City that ties Ramsey back to its history. She noted that it would not take a lot to make it something great. She said if they spent some time looking into this they could likely find grant opportunities or private donors who would be willing to invest in it.

Councilmember Specht shared the idea that the building could be something that they rent out. He agreed that it is worth investing in to preserve the history of it.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan shared that they have spent \$33,000 recently to secure the building so far. He noted that the breakeven point for renting this building would happen in about 14 years. He shared the concerns of the EDA that if they were to do all of these renovations and improvements then rent this location out to a tenant and they leave after a few years, this would cause a deficit. He said the tenant who expressed interest in the building back in 2021 is still interested in the building for her boutique. He explained that they have five parking spots for this building, as well as an agreement with the bank to use this parking lot when the bank is not open. He added that he has had preliminary discussions with the bank president and there may be parking spots that could be allocated every day within business hours.

Councilmember Stewart asked where they would find the money to renovate this building.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan said they do not have a funding source yet, but they could look into grant opportunities.

Council Specht recommended everyone go see the inside of this building, so they understand what they are working with.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward and continue discussions on the renovations for the old City Hall.

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 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.