

**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 8, 2025, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

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

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
Planning Manager Todd Larson
City Attorney Fritz Knaak
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson
City Planner Adam Martin

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: Sign Code Update - Discussion

City Planner Martin reviewed the Staff report in regard to the proposed sign code updates.

Councilmember Specht noted that with ADA standards they are not supposed to use tables on their website. He asked if the recommendation to have a zoning code table would be affected by this.

City Administrator Hagen said no and noted they would make sure it meets the accessibility standards.

Councilmember Specht asked what defines a temporary sign.

City Planner Martin explained that a permanent sign is generally something that is anchored to a structure or has a foundation of its own, while a temporary sign is typically only out for a few days to a few weeks to draw attention to a specific event. He added that construction signs are temporary signs.

Councilmember Stewart asked if there is a size restriction on temporary signs.

City Planner Martin said they can be a maximum of 50 square feet.

Councilmember Specht asked if these will only apply to businesses.

City Planner Martin said it will apply to any signs regardless of content.

Mayor Heineman asked if all events, such as yard sales or graduation parties that will have signs up are required to have a permit.

City Planner Martin said yes; however, most people do not come get a permit for something like this. He added that signs cannot go in the right-of-ways or on power poles.

Councilmember Specht asked if the political signs that people put in their yards would currently require a permit.

City Planner Martin explained that political signs are regulated separately by State law.

City Administrator Hagen added that if the City receives a complaint about a political sign, they will review it, but if the sign is not in the right-of-way, then they do not worry about it.

Councilmember Buscher asked what enforcement currently looks like.

City Planner Martin explained that they are currently enforcing on a complaint basis.

Councilmember Buscher said she sees a ton of signs in her neighborhood, including signs for churches and new businesses.

City Planner Martin noted that if they do away with requiring permits for temporary signs then it can make enforcement much more difficult.

Councilmember Buscher stated she would like them to keep requiring permits as it will give the City the ability for enforcement if needed.

Councilmember Specht asked if they would have other mechanisms of enforcement if they did away with requiring permits.

City Attorney Knaak stated that they could regulate signs only based on size. He said if they wanted to get rid of these signs, they could prohibit temporary signs below a certain size.

Mayor Heineman noted that he does not want to do anything that could seem to take away free speech; however, he does see requiring permits as a way to help keep rights-of-way clean and clear of these temporary signs. He asked the Council if they would like to see proactive enforcement of this or if the current complaint-based system is enough.

Councilmember Buscher agreed that she would not want someone to feel that their free speech was taken away but she wants to ensure the City looks clean and is not covered in signs.

Mayor Heineman said this could be a slippery slope. He stated he does not think it is a wise idea to take away their ability to enforce.

Planning Manager Larson added that Public Works goes and picks up signs when they receive a complaint. He said it would be much more efficient if they could go out on dedicated runs to remove signs rather than just run when they receive a complaint.

Councilmember Stewart asked if they only pick up signs when there are complaints or if they have a dedicated day to pick up all signs that receive complaints in a certain period.

Planning Manager Larson said they pick up signs when they receive a complaint.

Councilmember Stewart suggested having Staff pick up every sign throughout the City every 45 days.

Mayor Heineman noted that signs like those for the Parade of Homes are up for about six weeks. He asked if the Parade of Homes ever requests sign permits from the City.

City Planner Martin said no.

Councilmember Buscher asked what kinds of temporary signs are currently permitted.

Mayor Heineman noted that every sign that is put up should have a permit under the current code.

City Planner Martin shared that sandwich signs are not allowed anywhere outside of the COR.

City Administrator Hagen added that no signs are currently allowed in rights-of-way.

Councilmember Riley stated that keeping the permit requirement gives the City the ability to enforce the code when needed. He noted that since they are not currently having issues with the current enforcement process, he thinks it can remain a complaint basis.

Councilmember Stewart explained that it does not make sense to her to require permits for temporary signs and to not allow sandwich signs outside of the COR. She asked how this is helping the City's businesses generate traffic if they are outside of the COR.

City Planner Martin said they want to address this concern with these updates.

Planning Manager Larson added that these updates are not proposing to make anything more restrictive than it already is. He said they have taken a very hands-off approach to the enforcement of temporary signs due to the Highway 10 construction.

Councilmember Stewart noted that if someone has a sign in their own yard, they would still be required to have a permit, and she would not want to permit someone's use of their own yard.

City Planner Martin explained that these permits help them with location and size of these signs to make sure they are not too large and are not in the right-of-way.

Mayor Heineman stated if they did not require permitting for signs in someone's yard, then someone could make signs with profane language and have them in their yard, and the City would not be able to step in and do anything.

Councilmember Stewart recommended having a maximum size that would require permits on residential properties and anything smaller would not need a permit.

Mayor Heineman asked what the process would be if they wanted to try out this process but want to change it again in the future.

City Planner Martin said if the Council adopted the ordinance with these updates, if they wanted to change it in the future, they would have to adopt another ordinance.

Councilmember Specht asked if residents would still be able to apply for variances from this code.

Community Development Director Hanson shared that they have an appeals process as the size of signs typically do not meet the hardship requirements for variances.

City Attorney Knaak shared that City Planner Martin has done a great job at preparing these updates and they do a great job at addressing any potential issues. He added that there is so much money involved in bigger, electrical signs that he is concerned could be an issue. He explained that a lot of other cities deal with issues of temporary signs by giving their Public Works a directive that if any signs are seen in rights-of-way, then they are allowed to pick up the sign and remove it. He said that they can regulate the time, place, and manner of signs without worrying about infringing on free speech, which could get them in legal trouble.

Councilmember Specht asked if signs attached to someone's fence is considered a temporary sign.

City Attorney Knaak said yes.

Councilmember Specht said he is still in favor of not requiring permits for any sizes on personal property.

Councilmember Stewart stated she would like to see the maximum size without a permit be four feet by eight feet.

Councilmember Specht asked what decides if a permit is approved since they cannot regulate the content.

City Planner Martin said they would apply the same rules as they do for permanent signs by looking at where the sign will be, how big it will be, and how long it will be out.

Mayor Heineman asked if they want to have a separate permit for signs in rights-of-way.

City Administrator Hagen asked if they could allow special event signage in the rights-of-way, but not other advertising signs.

City Attorney Knaak said no and explained that this has gotten other cities in legal trouble in the past.

Councilmember Stewart reiterated that she still likes the idea of collecting signs and throwing them out every once and a while.

Councilmember Buscher asked if there would be a way they can allow any events that are in collaboration with the City to not need a permit.

City Attorney Knaak said that whatever they do needs to be consistently enforced.

Councilmember Riley asked if the signs that Public Works picks up are brought back to Public Works or are thrown out right away.

City Administrator Hagen said they are not being thrown out right away.

Mayor Heineman suggested putting a timeframe on permits of 60 days.

City Planner Martin suggested a shorter timeframe to ensure these signs are being kept in good repair.

Councilmember Olson asked if they could set a timeframe for a certain number of days before an event and beyond the event that these signs are allowed to be kept up.

City Attorney Knaak said that setting a timeframe around these events gets into defining what the sign is for, which has to do with looking at the content.

City Planner Martin shared that they could begin to educate residents and business owners about the requirements of a 45-day duration of these temporary signs so they can make preparations of when to put up signs and take them down surrounding an event.

Community Development Director Hanson noted that if they are looking at a duration of 45 days, they also need to consider how many times per year someone can apply for these permits. She explained that in other cities she has worked in she has seen people apply for another permit as soon as their other one expires. She asked if the 45 days needed to be consecutive.

Mayor Heineman suggested they make the 45 days consecutive and allow up to two permits per year.

City Administrator Hagen noted that church service signs are often in rights-of-way, which are typically only out for a few days at a time. He asked if this would be different if the signs are only up for a day or two rather than 45 days straight.

Planning Manager Larson stated if a church is putting up a sign on a Sunday morning and taking it down later that day, Public Works will likely never know about it.

City Attorney Knaak asked if they should incorporate a size restriction on right-of-way signs.

Planning Manager Larson added that they can only regulate the City rights-of-way, not the County rights-of-way, as nothing is allowed in those.

Councilmember Buscher asked about this permit fee.

City Administrator Hagen said it is \$25 per sign. He added that from a Staff perspective, it would be more efficient to not allow signs in rights-of-way, as Staff often has to maintain these areas and it will slow them down if they have to remove these signs and put them back up.

Councilmember Specht shared that he would still like to allow signs in the rights-of-way.

Councilmember Peters asked what proactive enforcement would look like.

Mayor Heineman said if Staff saw a sign somewhere it was not supposed to be, then they would remove it.

Councilmember Peters suggested putting some education on signs and permits in a newsletter.

Councilmember Specht stated he would like to continue to see enforcement be complaint-based.

City Planner Martin asked if there are any other questions or concerns with other parts of this code that the Council would like to discuss.

Councilmember Stewart asked if the A-frame signs are allowed to be everywhere, not just in the COR.

City Planner Martin said that as long as the sign is under 32 square feet then it would be allowed on private property without a permit.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the proposed sign code updates with not allowing temporary signs in City rights-of-way, allowing any sign smaller than four feet by eight feet to be on residential properties without a permit, but anything larger would require one, and continuing with reactive enforcement.

2.02: Newsletter Articles - Councilmember Corner

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning Councilmember articles in the newsletters.

Councilmember Buscher noted that if a Councilmember did not want to write their own article for the newsletter, then the Council could agree on a topic that they all want to talk about and write an article collectively in place of the single Councilmember.

Councilmember Stewart asked how far in advance they would know it is their turn in the rotation to write the upcoming article.

City Administrator Hagen asked if they care what order they put everyone in the rotation.

Mayor Heineman suggested a random assignment and will let Councilmembers know ahead of time so they can prepare their article.

Councilmember Peters asked if they need to discuss with the other Councilmembers what topic they want to discuss in their article so that everyone is not talking about the same issue.

Mayor Heineman said everyone can talk about whatever topic they would like as long as it falls within the parameters.

The consensus of the Council was to allow each Councilmember to write an article once a year for the newsletter.

2.03: Coffee with a Councilmember

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to Coffee with a Councilmember events.

Councilmember Specht asked if they still do Coffee with a Cop events.

City Administrator Hagen said yes.

Mayor Heineman added that having these events does not mean that a Councilmember cannot still do this themselves on their own time.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she and Councilmember Riley had discussed allowing two Councilmembers at a time at these events with one Staff member.

City Administrator Hagen asked if these events would be held at City Hall.

Councilmember Riley noted if they do it somewhere in the community, then there would be a cost associated with it.

Mayor Heineman suggested holding these events on a quarterly basis and allowing Councilmembers to sign up to attend.

Councilmember Specht recommended they hold these events at different parks throughout the City.

City Administrator Hagen asked if they would want to have a morning and an evening session each quarter or if they would alternate them.

Mayor Heineman said he would not want to do two different sessions each quarter. He said if they do this, he wants to make sure that Councilmembers will actually sign up.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to start planning these Coffee with a Councilmember events.

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 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.