

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, May 13, 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
City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby
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: Northstar Commuter Rail Transition

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to the Northstar Commuter Rail transition. He introduced Craig Lamothe, Transition Director at Northstar.

Mr. Lamothe shared that they are still in the information-gathering stage of the transition process and they are preparing for the transition to bus service.

Councilmember Stewart asked why they would continue to have the overpass bridge built if they are getting rid of the commuter rail.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the overpass goes from the second floor of the parking ramp, over Veterans Drive, and over the railroad track. He said they would be extending this to also go over Highway 10.

Mayor Heineman noted that this overpass is less to service the rail or bus service and more about connecting Ramsey over Highway 10. He asked if they would have bus lanes for the bus service or if the buses would just be integrated into the regular lanes of traffic.

Mr. Lamothe shared that the buses would have access to the shoulder lanes on Highway 10.

Councilmember Stewart said she feels like they are going backward by going away from rail services and back to buses.

City Administrator Hagen shared that in recent years there has been pressure from the legislature to eliminate the Northstar Commuter Rail. He noted that this is a highly subsidized service.

Mr. Lamothe added that travel is different post-pandemic and Northstar was not even hitting its expectations before the pandemic. He said they are adapting their service based on what they are hearing from their customers and one of the things they are looking for is all-day service in both directions, which is not something they could provide on the commuter rail.

Councilmember Olson asked if they anticipate increased usage by switching back to a bus service.

Mr. Lamothe shared that they are hopeful that they will see more ridership with this service. He noted that there are likely a lot of people who do not ride the commuter rail due to their limited ride options who may start using the bus service because of its wide offerings.

Councilmember Riley asked if the Elk River service would come to Ramsey at all.

Mr. Lamothe explained that the Met Council has the authority to operate bus services within the metro area and Northstar has special legislation to operate the commuter rail. He said they do not have the ability to operate bus services without new legislation. He stated there is still a lot of work to be done.

Councilmember Peters asked how this will be communicated to residents.

Mr. Lamothe shared that they have heard loud and clear from citizens who use this service that discontinuing it will be a life change. He said they want to give everyone as much advance notice as possible. He noted they are looking at landing on a date that the services will transition and they plan to announce that date soon.

Councilmember Peters shared his concern that people could move to Ramsey because they see the existing public transportation service and them not being informed before they move to the area.

Mayor Heineman asked if they are planning to have any flexibility with the bus service for large events or sporting events that the bus service would take riders directly to the venue, like Target Field or the State Fair.

Mr. Lamothe said they are not currently proposing this; however, they have heard this voiced by citizens. He stated if the demand and the desire are present for these types of rides then it is definitely something they would explore.

City Administrator Hagen asked if he should submit a formal feedback letter containing all of the Council's opinions discussed this evening.

Mr. Lamothe stated the discussion is sufficient and noted they will continue to work with the City as they progress through this planning process.

City Administrator Hagen asked if the Met Council would be willing to reserve some funds to decommission the stop if the overpass does not move forward.

Mr. Lamothe said these conversations would need to take place after their discussion with BNSF. He said they will need to look at existing assets to see if there is a transit value to them or just a City value.

Mayor Heineman asked if the overpass is controlled by BNSF because it is in the railroad right-of-way.

City Administrator Hagen explained that there is a large portion of the Northstar stop that falls within the railroad right-of-way so they would want to make sure that long-term easements are secured.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that early in conversations this summer they will want to discuss asset management with Anoka County Parks as they are the implementing agency for Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission for trails and parks. He said the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission's vision is to connect regional trails to regional parks and they would have an interest in this.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to continue to work with Northstar on the transition planning.

2.02: Consider Request to Advance Replacement of 2009 Jetter-Vacuum Truck

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby reviewed the Staff report concerning the request for replacement of the 2009 Jetter-Vacuum Truck.

Councilmember Stewart asked if they would be able to sell the current vehicle after it is replaced to recoup any of their money.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared that they reached out to three vendors and one said they would give them \$10,000 for it. He said they should be able to get more than \$10,000 for it so they have been reaching out to other cities in the area to see if any of them are interested in purchasing it. He shared they would put the vehicle up for auction when they get the new vehicle delivered.

City Administrator Hagen said they would typically try to do something like this during the budget cycle; however, this truck would be paid for by user fees and would not come out of the general budget dollars.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby noted if Staff were authorized to purchase this replacement, they could have it by the end of the year.

Councilmember Riley said it sounds smart to purchase this replacement now as it is already in the CIP for 2026 and purchasing it this year would save them money.

Councilmember Stewart asked why it would take so long to get this vehicle. She asked if they would be taking out any debt for the purchase.

City Administrator Hagen said this would be paid for entirely by user fees which include sanitary sewer and stormwater fees. He stated they would not take out any debt for this purchase.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated there is always a lag time when purchasing these vehicles. He noted that when purchasing snowplows, the lag time is around a year so this timeline is much quicker than usual.

Mayor Heineman asked if they had looked into any alternatives to this vehicle.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby noted they tend to stay with the same brands when replacing vehicles as the mechanics would know how to fix them and they would already have parts for the vehicle. He said there is a case for official approval of the purchase of this vehicle on the Consent Agenda.

The consensus of the Council was to authorize Staff to purchase a new Jetter-Vacuum Truck.

2.03: 2025 Strategic Planning Session

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to the 2025 Strategic Plan.

Councilmember Riley asked for some clarification on the lack of funding for public safety that is listed under the section on things not working well. He noted that the way it is currently worded makes it seem like the Police and Fire Departments need more funding that the City is not giving them.

Councilmember Buscher noted they talked about the cost of fire trucks which may have been the idea behind this item.

City Administrator Hagen said they can reword this to say that increased capital equipment costs are not working well.

Councilmember Riley stated it may be implied, but he would like them to add language that they will also be recording and documenting the condition of all infrastructure during inspections.

City Administrator Hagen shared that later on in the plan, the asset management system is discussed.

Councilmember Riley noted that they are already prioritizing budget maintenance needs of the City through the CIP and does not know if it needs to be in the Strategic Plan as well.

City Administrator Hagen explained that this could be a little different as there could be projects they want to do that are not in the CIP and they do not have the budget for all of them. He suggested this item stay in the Strategic Plan.

Councilmember Riley suggested asking Staff for cost-saving ideas and making it a contest to see who can come up with the best cost savings.

Councilmember Buscher noted that there is not currently anything in place that stops Staff from sharing their cost-saving ideas with their department head so the only thing this would be adding would be the incentive. She added that this incentive could create a loss in itself.

Mayor Heineman said that the Staff on the ground level likely see a lot of inefficiencies and areas where they could save money and he thinks this is a great idea to ask them for their feedback.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby suggested that they limit Staff's suggestions to within their own departments.

Mayor Heineman stated department heads can field the suggestions from within their own department and only pass along the ones that they think would be helpful.

Councilmember Riley asked if there is any additional training or grant funding that they could offer to certain members of Staff.

City Administrator Hagen said there are grant writing courses available.

Mayor Heineman encouraged Staff to use AI to help write grants.

Councilmember Riley noted that he does not think that the objective for maintaining and improving existing park, street, and trail conditions City-wide is needed as this is something that is already being done constantly. He said this is of the utmost importance but does not think it needs to be included in the Strategic Plan.

Mayor Heineman asked if there is a benefit to still having this objective listed in the Strategic Plan.

City Administrator Hagen agreed with Councilmember Riley and said he could go back and look at his notes from the last meeting to see if there was discussion about keeping this on.

Councilmember Buscher shared that they had a discussion at the last meeting about items that stayed on the Strategic Plan because they are continuous work and wanted to show the residents that the City is continuing to invest in these important items. She noted that some of the items seem a little loose and do not have timeframes or percentages listed which will make it difficult to decide if they have met the objective.

Councilmember Specht asked if they would be tying in the trail policy to this objective.

City Administrator Hagen noted this trail policy is called out later on in the Strategic Plan.

Mayor Heineman asked if there was support to remove this objective as it is addressed in another area of the plan.

Councilmember Specht was supportive of this.

Councilmember Riley asked about the strategy relating to The Waterfront. He explained that they had decided to move forward only with the splash pad; however, this is not specifically addressed in this item. He added that this item also mentions sending this to a ballot question which the Council had recently decided against.

City Administrator Hagen said he wanted Council to discuss this again now that there are four new Councilmembers before they proceed with what was discussed by a previous Council. He noted the ballot question would be related to the larger Waterfront project as a whole rather than just the splash pad.

Councilmember Riley reiterated that they had already decided to move forward with the splash pad since they have funding available. He said this seems like a two-step process and they can discuss what else they want at The Waterfront at a different time.

Mayor Heineman agreed and said he would like to see the splash pad move forward as soon as possible.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that some of the action items listed within this objective are pretty important for moving this project forward as it would update the estimates for the cost of development and the project. He said he is meeting with the team tomorrow to advance the design for the splash pad. He added that there are other parts of this project that he would like to make sure are done with the splash pad such as a restroom and concession area. He stated they will also be looking at what a phasing scenario would look like for this.

Councilmember Specht said the previous Council had unanimously decided that they wanted to move forward with the splash pad and put the Community Center aspect to the side for now.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she ran for Council on wanting this space to move forward as she saw the need for it in the City. She stated she would rather see a splash pad be built sooner rather than later instead of continuing to wait to see if a Community Center would also move forward.

Councilmember Peters asked if they would be able to build the Community Center during the off-season for the splash pad so they would not need to shut the splash pad down for use during construction.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that there will be a significant motor control for pumping and electricity to the splash pad. He said if they are not doing a Community

Center at the same time as the splash pad then they will need to build a smaller building for the control center for the splash pad. He explained that he would like to make sure that when they build this structure, it is in a location that works for the splash pad and a future Community Center.

Mayor Heineman stated it seems like this objective needs to change to focus on building the splash pad as soon as possible. He noted that since the previous Council unanimously voted to move this forward, he thinks they need to honor that and move forward now.

Councilmember Olson thanked Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood for his perspective on this project in relation to future projects. He said he is supportive of moving the splash pad forward now as there had been previous consensus; however, he does not want this done wrong and wants to make sure the future of The Waterfront is being considered with this project.

Councilmember Stewart asked if the previous Council's unanimous vote included a restroom.

City Administrator Hagen explained that there was support to move just the splash pad forward and they had not gone into detail on what else this would include.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood suggested revising the language in the objective to say they are moving forward with the splash pad and leave the other action items in place so Staff can continue to work on numbers for the Community Center aspect of The Waterfront.

Mayor Heineman said he would just like the objective to be updated to direct Staff to get the splash pad built sooner rather than later.

City Administrator Hagen stated they can split this objective into two separate objectives, one to identify a construction start date for the splash pad and one for the overall plan for the rest of The Waterfront and its long-term vision.

Mayor Heineman said he would like there to be an announcement made this summer about when the splash pad will be built.

Councilmember Specht added that he would not want Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood to be investing too much time into the details of the Community Center before there has been discussion by the Council about what to move forward with.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood said he will need to do some work and research into this as he will need to know the numbers before presenting different ideas to the Council. He shared that they have already completed the grading for this park and built the trail last year for this project.

Councilmember Riley shared that Anoka is currently going through a study of what a Community Center would look like for them. He asked if they would want to work with Anoka on a combined Community Center.

Councilmember Buscher suggested finding an organization that may want to partner with both cities to help take on some of these costs.

Councilmember Riley said he would like to make sure that the City is always keeping its communications positive when putting things out to the residents.

Mayor Heineman asked if there needs to be more discussion on the Strategic Plan before it is up for final adoption on May 27.

Councilmember Riley said yes as he has more he would like to discuss before they approve the plan.

Councilmember Specht asked if they are doing any more work for the trail around the lake at The Waterfront this year.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood explained that they are looking to obtain more grants for this. He added that they just received a grant from the DNR for more landscape enhancements in this area.

Councilmember Specht asked if they would be putting any fish in this lake.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that he is in conversations with the DNR to formalize this site on what will be stocked in the pond. He added that they will also be looking to enact an ordinance on what activities are allowed at this lake.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with the discussed updates to the 2025 Strategic Plan and to direct Staff to bring this discussion back to the next Work Session before moving to final adoption.

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.