

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, July 8, 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  
Finance Director Diana Lund  
Fire Chief Matt Kohner  
Police Chief Brad Bluml  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood  
City Attorney Fritz Knaak

**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: Discuss Paid Family Medical Leave, Administrative Options, and Cost Sharing**

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to paid family medical leave, administrative options, and cost sharing.

Councilmember Riley said he likes the idea of the cost-sharing option. He noted that if they went with the private paid family medical leave option, then they would be locked in for two years. He asked if the State were to change the laws on this over the next two years, how this would affect their private contract.

City Administrator Hagen stated he does not know how the change in State law would affect their contract with a private company.

Finance Director Lund asked what the private contract says about whether the State was to change the rates.

Administrative Services Director Lasher shared that she is attending a webinar tomorrow in regard to this RFP with MetLife. She said they have been told that they will be eligible for a two-year rate cap, and it is not being portrayed as a contract. She noted that Staff is looking for direction from the Council on whether they are supportive of Staff looking into the private option through MetLife.

Councilmember Peters asked if there are any other private vendors who offer these services.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said yes; however, MetLife is the superior product with lower prices.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to move forward with looking into MetLife for paid family medical leave services with a 50% cost share.

**2.02: Preliminary 2026 General Fund Budget/Levy Review - Please Note: at the meeting, the consensus was to move this case to 2.2.**

Finance Director Lund reviewed the Staff report concerning the 2026 general fund budget and levy.

Mayor Heineman asked if they are currently only paying interest on the Public Works building.

Finance Director Lund said yes and explained that once the City Hall building is paid off, they will begin paying on the Public Works building.

Mayor Heineman shared that when he came up with the pavement management plan in 2021 to increase by 5% every year, the idea was that they would be able to reduce this as they caught up on roads. He asked if they would ever catch up on the roads.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated road conditions are getting better, but he is not sure when or if they will catch up.

Councilmember Riley asked how much the health insurance will increase.

Finance Director Lund said it will increase by 6.1%.

Councilmember Specht asked what the current increase would be if they did not add anything new to the budget.

Finance Director Lund said it would be over a 4% increase. She reviewed the personnel requests for each department.

Police Chief Bluml shared his request for an increase in hours for the Records Technician. He noted that there has been an increase in demand for body camera footage, and this has kept the Record Technicians busy, and he would like one of the current part-time positions to become full-time. He added that they used to have an individual who was a part-time Records Technician and part-time crime data analyst, and this individual is now a full-time crime data analyst, so there is a need to fill these missing hours.

City Administrator Hagen shared the request for a part-time Communications Specialist to help with some of the Strategic Plan items around communication. He said they currently have one full-time communications person but would like to bring someone on in a part-time capacity to focus on social media.

Councilmember Specht said he would not be supportive of this position, as they are doing a good job with communication and using social media as it is.

Councilmember Buscher said she would support this position as part of the goal of the Council is to make sure that the residents know what is going on in the City and feel the City is being transparent.

Police Chief Bluml shared that he is asking for an additional Investigator for the Police Department.

Fire Chief Kohner shared the request for a new Firefighter/Fire Technician role in response to the recent increase in call volume. He said this position would help with fire response as well as administrative duties.

Community Development Director Hanson reviewed the request for a full-time Building Inspector/Plans Examiner. She shared that they currently contract with Rum River Consulting for inspection services. She noted this position would conduct all inspections, including plan reviews and septic inspections. She added that they already know that 2026 will be a busy year for commercial development. She explained that they already have the cost of the services from Rum River Consulting in their budget, so if this position is approved, then those fees would drop out of the budget.

Councilmember Peters asked if they would end up spending more money to hire a full-time position than they currently spend on the contracted services.

Community Development Director Hanson said it would be cheaper to hire their own person.

City Administrator Hagen noted that the contractor does not work for the City full-time, so a City position would give them more labor hours.

Mayor Heineman asked where the budget savings would come from if they chose to hire for this role.

City Administrator Hagen said there would be a reduction in the operating budget under professional services.

Finance Director Lund reviewed the request for a new City Engineer. She shared that the funding for this role would be taken from the pavement management and utility funds. She added that there is also a request for an Engineering Technician, and the funding for part of this role would also come from the utility fund. She explained that if they do not choose to move forward with the Engineering Technician role, then they would end up spending more out of the pavement management fund for hiring consultants.

Councilmember Riley shared that he thought they had already replaced the Civil Engineer position with a Water Resource Technician.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that the former Civil Engineer spent half of his time on stormwater items and the other half of his time on other engineering items. He said the Water Resources Technician is taking on some of the stormwater items, but also other items that had not previously been done with the MS4 program and public education. He noted this Engineer position would take on all of the engineering items that were being handled by the previous Civil Engineer, including reviewing building permits, plan reviews for private development, and conducting reviews of City projects. He added that this position would also help with engineering inspections in the summer months.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared the request for a new Park Maintenance Worker. He said this position would be able to reduce contracted services for this maintenance. He noted that this request represents the ratio of residents to maintenance workers that the Council discussed back in 2022. He said they have an aging infrastructure that requires more maintenance. He added that the waterplay area at The Waterfront will also require additional maintenance.

Councilmember Specht said he remembers this discussion; however, he thought they would not need another maintenance worker for a few more years.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that their projections are calling for an increase of one maintenance worker per year. He explained that they also compared their Public Works operations to other cities in the metro area, and Ramsey runs a leaner and efficient operation than many other cities.

Councilmember Specht said he would like to see the cost difference between contracted services and hiring for this new position.

Councilmember Peters asked if this role would be able to take care of the maintenance of the pumps and electrical aspects of the waterplay area.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood said this would be taken care of by one of the Park Maintenance Workers, not necessarily the new one. He explained that they shift workers around based on their talents and expertise.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared the request for a seasonal Building Maintenance Worker to help keep the grounds of City Hall clean and help out with other building maintenance that is not currently being done from May to September.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood discussed his request for a seasonal Recreation and Volunteer Coordinator from May to September. He noted that Ramsey has a lot of recreational programming, and a lot of the programs require Staff time. He said that they need this role to take full advantage of those who want to volunteer with the City.

Councilmember Buscher thanked the Staff for their work in putting together these requests. She said she can tell that every one of these positions is needed. She stated that a lot of these positions will help them save money on contracted services by keeping the work in-house to do better work within the community.

Councilmember Riley asked if the City Engineer's benefits estimate assumes family rates.

Finance Director Lund said yes.

Councilmember Riley explained that if they make these personnel decisions for 2026, they are also making the decision for 2027 and beyond, as these wages will need to come from the budget.

Councilmember Specht said he would not be supportive of hiring a Recreation and Volunteer Coordinator. He stated they are already doing well with the Staff they have in recreation and programming. He said he would like to know more if there are certain events that they do not have enough volunteers for, or if there are certain events where they have plenty of volunteers.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that Recreation Coordinator Proulx has this information, and she can share it with the Council.

Councilmember Buscher added that she is on the Parks and Recreation Commission and has seen the amazing work that Recreation Coordinator Proulx has done to track volunteer attendance at recreation events.

Mayor Heineman shared that he understands how all of these requested positions are needed; however, the Council is here to represent the residents, and every dollar that they increase the budget is another dollar increased in taxes.

Finance Director Lund reviewed the capital equipment requests from each department. She shared the request to replace a core switch and for a virtual server refresh. She noted that both of these items would be funded through the QCTV, so it would not have a tax levy impact.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared the request to replace a 2012 Ford F-250 with a 2026 Ford F-250 with plow equipment. He reviewed the replacement guidelines, which include a replacement rating program. He noted that vehicles are not up for replacement just based on their

age. He added that they also keep track of what they are spending on repairs for each vehicle, and he can share this with the Council if needed.

Mayor Heineman explained that pushing off some of these capital requests, like vehicles, could cause the same item to cost much more in the future.

Councilmember Buscher added that when vehicles are replaced, the old vehicle is still being used, likely in another department.

Councilmember Olson asked if the Council could see an example of a rating sheet.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby said he can bring this back.

Police Chief Bluml reviewed the Police Department requests, including replacing a 2021 Dodge Charger with a 2026 Ford Explorer, replacing a 2016 Acadia with a 2026 Durango, a new unmanned aerial vehicle, and three new flock cameras. He added that there were also other requests that the department had, but they have been removed and will be requested in future years.

Councilmember Buscher asked if they would need to request more office space if the new Investigator position is approved.

Police Chief Bluml said they are currently out of offices, so they would need more office space or to convert the existing conference room into office space.

Councilmember Specht asked if they would be able to utilize any of the open office space on the other side of the building.

Police Chief Bluml said they could look into this. He noted that he does not think they would be able to have computers on that side of the building.

Fire Chief Kohner shared the Fire Department requests, including replacing a 2017 Ford Explorer with a 2026 Ford Explorer, replacing a 2013 Chevy Tahoe with a 2026 Chevy Tahoe, replacing three thermal image cameras, replacing a 2008 Rosenbauer Fire Engineer with a 2026 model to be received in 2027, and replacing the 2011 self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) bottles. He explained that the SCBAs are what firefighters wear to protect themselves from fires, toxic atmospheres, or a lack of oxygen when responding to a fire. He also shared the request to replace two of the 17 emergency sirens throughout the City in 2026.

Councilmember Buscher noted that it is the Council's job to balance the requests for Staff and the tax impact on the residents. She added that a lot of Staff are also residents who do not want their taxes to increase greatly.

### **Recess and Reconvene**

The meeting recessed at 6:55 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:40 p.m.

## **2.02: Preliminary 2026 General Fund Budget/Levy Review (cont.)**

Finance Director Lund continued her review of the capital equipment requests for 2026. She passed out the scoring sheet they use for vehicles.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared the Public Works request of replacing a 2013 Ford F-350 with a 2026 Ford F-350 with a dump and plow, reconfigure the previously mentioned 2013 Ford F-350 into a hook truck, and replacing a 2009 Sterling single-axle dump and plow with a 2026 Western Star Single Axle with dump and plow.

Mayor Heineman explained that on the rating sheet, the 2013 F-350 has 12 points for being 12 years old, and six points due to having 67,000 miles on it. He said this feels like they are double-counting on this. He stated the vehicle is in generally good condition and has low mileage, so the age should not count against it.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared that they have been using this rating system for a long time. He said they got this rating system at a seminar and have used it ever since. He noted that if the Council is questioning its validity, Staff can look into using another rating system.

Mayor Heineman stated he is not questioning the validity of the vehicle request, but the rating system. He said he would like to see more substantial reasons for replacement outside of the rating system.

Councilmember Riley asked if the \$114,000 for the hook track line item is just for that system or a whole new truck.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby explained that the \$114,000 is for the chassis truck with the hook track system on it.

Councilmember Specht asked if they would be able to keep the 2009 Sterling truck around until it dies, even if they get a new one.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby said they have a set number of plow routes and drivers. He noted that there are situations when trucks go down; however, they typically do not keep spare trucks around.

City Administrator Hagen asked how many plow trucks they have.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby said they have nine or ten.

Mayor Heineman asked if they have an extra plow truck currently.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated they have one more truck than they do plow routes currently.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood reviewed the Parks and Recreation Department request, including replacing a 2007 Chevy half-ton pickup with a Ford F-250 with topper and plow equipment, replacing a 2008 International Water Truck, and replacing a 2013 Ford one-ton dump and plow with a F-550 4x4 with plow equipment.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby shared the request for a mulcher to help clean out storm ponds. He explained that they have implemented their stormwater maintenance program, which will target cleaning out a few stormwater ponds a year. He said they plan on hiring surveyors to survey these stormwater ponds to see how much capacity is lost. He added that this would be paid for with stormwater funds.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the increase to the operating budget.

Councilmember Stewart asked if the HR software is what Administrative Services Director Lasher had requested at a previous Work Session.

City Administrator Hagen said yes.

Councilmember Stewart asked if Administrative Services Director Lasher was supposed to come back to the Council with more information on that.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the direction from the Council was to approve this, which was on this evening's Consent Agenda.

Councilmember Riley asked if Staff would prefer the Council say which items they want removed from the budget to decrease it, or to give Staff a target number that they do not want to be above.

City Administrator Hagen said they would prefer to have the Council tell them a target increase number, and Staff can work within that.

Councilmember Olson agreed with this strategy and noted that Staff knows which needs are more intense than others, and they can have shaped the budget around the target increase the Council desires.

Mayor Heineman explained that making these budget decisions is one of the hard decisions they will make as a Council.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to continue to work on the 2026 budget development.

### **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 9:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Brian S. Hagen  
City Administrator

ATTEST:

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Katie M. Schmidt  
City Clerk

Drafted by Ava Major  
*TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*