

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, August 12, 2025, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

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

Members Absent: Councilmember Eric Peters

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen  
City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby  
Finance Director Diana Lund  
Police Chief Brad Bluml  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson  
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: Receive Recommendation from the Charter Commission to Amend Chapters 2, 3, and 7 of the Charter.**

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to recommended changes to the Charter from the Charter Commission.

Councilmember Specht asked who has the authority to call Special Meetings in the event of an emergency.

City Administrator Hagen said that the Mayor can declare emergencies, but the Council would need to support calling for additional Councilmembers to call a Special Meeting.

Councilmember Riley asked if changes to the Charter have to be unanimous between all present Councilmembers or if it has to be a unanimous vote from the entire Council.

City Administrator Hagen said it would have to be unanimous among all Councilmembers. He noted that they will need all Councilmembers present on September 23 when this item will be on the agenda for adoption.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to bring these Charter changes back for a Public Hearing prior to adoption.

## **2.02: Continued Review of Preliminary 2026 General Fund Budget/Levy**

Finance Director Lund continued the review of the preliminary 2026 general fund budget and levy. She shared that the Staff has reviewed their requests and only left in what they feel is a need for 2026.

City Administrator Hagen shared that Staff met and discussed how they could get to the 7.5% increase that the Council was requesting. He noted they removed the request for the Seasonal Building Maintenance worker, the Parks and Recreation Volunteer Assistant, and the Police Officer/Investigator role. He said they would like to bring on a part-time Evidence Tech role instead of an additional Police Officer or Investigator. He reviewed the other reductions that Staff were able to make from the proposed budget.

Finance Director Lund explained that they will be putting an interfund resolution coming forward since it was passed at the legislature to roll the HRA funds from TIF improvements into other areas.

Councilmember Buscher asked if the funds from where the original improvement costs came from are the funds that the TIF paybacks will go to.

Finance Director Lund said yes.

City Administrator Hagen added that the HRA fund is City money available for City expenditures due to other obligations in the COR district getting paid off.

Councilmember Olson asked if using MSA funds would take from other road projects.

City Administrator Hagen said no and explained that they have to designate MSA roads, and the State will send them money to do road maintenance projects on these roads. He continued his review of the reductions the Staff identified. He shared that one of their City Hall Receptionists has turned in their notice to retire, and while reevaluating the role, they are not sure if there is a need to replace this role.

Councilmember Specht asked if not replacing this role would have an impact on early voting.

City Administrator Hagen noted that the Receptionist roles help a lot with early voting; however, they could solve this by bringing in the Election Judges for a few additional days to help with this workload. He said that Staff feel strongly that they would be able to absorb all of the duties of the

Receptionist role, except for someone being physically present when residents walk into City Hall. He added that if they remove this Receptionist role, then it would also eliminate the need for the part-time Receptionist. He said if the Council is supportive of not replacing these positions, then they would implement it on a trial basis.

Mayor Heineman asked how this could affect the residents' perception when there is no one at the front desk to help them.

Administrative Services Director Lasher noted that a lot of residents who come to the front desk to ask questions are asking questions related to the DMV that Staff cannot answer anyway, so these residents leave frustrated since they were not able to get their questions answered.

Mayor Heineman stated this shift could be better for their image, as if someone was not at the front desk to be asked questions, the residents would not get frustrated with Staff for not being able to answer their DMV-related questions.

Councilmember Specht suggested they offer the front desk to the County for someone to sit there and answer DMV-related questions.

City Administrator Hagen said they could explore this.

Mayor Heineman noted that this workspace would also be able to be utilized as an additional workspace since it can be closed off.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said they would like to invest in some additional signage that would assist residents who are entering City Hall in knowing where they need to go.

City Administrator Hagen shared that the cheaper building permit software that they have implemented has not been up to the quality that they had expected, and they would like to add a plan markup tool, which would cost \$85,000 for the first year. He added that this additional cost has not been added to the preliminary budget, as they just received this feedback this week. He noted that when they come forward with changes to the fee schedule, they plan to increase permit fees to help offset this increase.

Mayor Heineman shared that he feels the 7.5% increase is reasonable given the capital and personnel expenses.

Councilmember Riley asked how they are getting down to the 7.5% increase.

Mayor Heineman said they are able to reduce this by interfund transfers through TIF and HRA funds.

Councilmember Riley asked if they are still proposing to add new Staff positions.

City Administrator Hagen said yes and noted they are still requesting to add five new full-time positions, two part-time positions, and one reclassification for an increase in hours.

Mayor Heineman stated he is supportive of these requested positions since Staff worked on the budget and made cuts to what they thought was not needed for 2026.

Councilmember Riley said that by keeping these Staff positions, they are pushing some of the equipment needs to next or future years. He added that when they add new Staff positions to this, it is also adding to the budget for future years, as they will need to continue to pay for this position.

Councilmember Specht thanked Staff for their hard work to make these cuts from the proposed budget. He asked what the additional Parks Maintenance Worker would be responsible for.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood noted that this role would work at the waterplay area, on new park and trail projects, and to help maintain the increased use of park spaces. He added that the use of the athletic field is also increasing and requires additional maintenance. He explained that with an increase in residents, there was a natural increase in maintenance needs that they needed to keep up with. He noted that when they fall below the proper ratio of Maintenance Workers to residents, one Maintenance Worker for every 1,445 residents, they see a reduction in the quality of maintenance, and the residents notice and express concern.

Councilmember Buscher stated that Staff did exactly what was asked to get the budget to where Council was comfortable, and she is in support of the proposed budget. She noted that if they do not add new Staff positions this year, they would also just be pushing this expense off to later years. She added that she is not supportive of removing the part-time Receptionist position and not having someone at the front desk for residents.

Finance Director Lund noted that the estimated remaining balance in the HRA fund at the end of 2026 would be \$2,200,000. She noted that if they use this fund to pay the balance of the fire truck and the additional \$440,000 to reduce the budget increase, they would then be looking at a balance of \$1,500,000 to be applied towards the 2027 capital equipment requests. She added that they will continue to get TIF reimbursements back.

Councilmember Stewart asked if they would be able to get the fund TIF balances that they will have written out, so they can see how much money they can anticipate being available for use.

Mayor Heineman shared that when he first joined the Council, he was confused about a lot of the different funds as well, and he encouraged Councilmember Stewart to set up some time with Finance Director Lund so she could give an explanation of each of these funds and how they work.

Councilmember Specht said he is not a fan of the part-time Communication Specialist role; however, if they do move forward with this role, anticipating the Communications Director to retire in the coming years, and this role would backfill that one, he would not be supportive of also backfilling the part-time role.

Councilmember Riley asked if they would have decided that 7.5% would be a comfortable increase if they had known that they would be able to utilize funds from HRA funds.

City Administrator Hagen noted that he does not think that Staff would be able to make more cuts to the budget in good faith. He said if the Council needed them to make more cuts, then they could find areas to cut; however, from a perspective of what is needed to move the City forward to match its current growth, the current proposed budget is what is needed.

Mayor Heineman stated they may get to a point where they say they no longer want to add any new positions; however, he does not think they could get to this point until the City stops growing.

Councilmember Stewart asked if any new Staff positions could be cut.

Mayor Heineman noted that the Staff has already cut a few of their requested positions at the Council's request.

City Administrator Hagen reviewed each of the remaining new positions and why each is needed.

Councilmember Buscher shared that Anoka just hired a full-time firefighter, and their wages were much higher than those of the City. City Administrator Hagen noted that Staff is doing their best to make sure these salaries are reasonable requests.

Mayor Heineman asked about the levy increase over the last several years.

City Administrator Hagen said they have had increases between 8% and 18% over the last several years.

Finance Director Lund added that if they wanted to decrease the levy even further, then they could use more available funds from the HRA fund.

City Administrator Hagen noted that the cash flow in this fund does not reflect the vacant land in the COR that does not have a project proposed.

Councilmember Riley asked that Staff look at the new positions and remove a few more.

City Administrator Hagen asked if there are certain positions they would like to see removed or to get more information on why the position is still being requested.

Councilmember Riley said he thinks the part-time Communications Specialist and the additional Parks Maintenance Worker could be cut. He stated he has not heard enough about the need for an additional Firefighter.

Councilmember Stewart agreed with not being supportive of the Communications Specialist and the additional Parks Maintenance Worker. She said she is supportive of the additional Firefighter.

Councilmember Specht said he struggles to see the need for the Communications Specialist.

Administrative Services Director shared that she has notes that she can formalize and bring forward at the next meeting concerning the need for the Communications Specialist. She assured the Council that there is a need for this role.

Mayor Heineman asked if they brought on any additional firefighters for 2025.

City Administrator Hagen added that they brought on a Fire Inspector.

Mayor Heineman noted that there has been an increase in calls for service of 25% each year for the last two years.

Administrative Services Director Lasher explained that they used to have a Fire Technician who handled only clerical duties, and these duties are now being handled by those in higher-paying positions, so it would be a beneficial shift in resources to add this new position, which would handle these clerical duties and respond to calls for service.

Councilmember Specht suggested Staff look into utilizing ChatGPT to help with website updates.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to continue to work on the 2026 budget development based on Council discussion around reviewing the remaining new personnel requests.

### **2.03: Water Play Development at The Waterfront - Progress Report**

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood reviewed the Staff report concerning the water play area at The Waterfront. He reviewed the plans for the project. He said they hope to have the project finished by next summer.

Councilmember Riley asked if these plans would keep them close to the budget for the project that they had discussed previously.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood said yes and noted that their current estimates are slightly higher than what had been discussed previously due to the addition of the restroom facilities. He shared that they will be coming back with regular reports as they continue to work on this project.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with getting quotes for the project and installing sewer, water, and a bathroom facility on site.

## **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 6:59 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.*