

**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 26, 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  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan  
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: Continued Review of Preliminary 2026 General Fund Budget/Levy**

City Administrator Hagen continued the review of the preliminary 2026 general fund budget and levy. He discussed the cash flows, budget transfers, and reimbursement opportunities that are included in the budget.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan explained that with the current TIF district, they are receiving the City, school district, and County portion of the taxes. He noted that if the TIF district did not exist, they would only be bringing in the City portion.

Councilmember Riley asked if the law had changed to allow for more reimbursement.

City Administrator Hagen explained that they clarified the statute that all of these are eligible expenses for reimbursement. He noted that this increased the minimum amount that they could reimburse themselves. He discussed the remaining positions that the Council had requested more information on.

Administrative Services Director Lasher discussed the part-time Communications Specialist role. She shared a handout that contained comments from different departments on how they would benefit from this role. She noted that there is also an opportunity for them to save over \$8,000 by doing their own advertising in the *Ramsey Resident* through a Communications Specialist. She explained that there is a lot that the Communications Coordinator does and added that they will be making ADA updates to the website, which will be a large undertaking. She shared that there are items that the Communications Coordinator has not had the time or capacity to get to that a part-time specialist could help with. She added that they feel that Parks and Recreation should have its own social media, and they would need someone to run this page. She noted that the current Communications Coordinator is an hourly employee and the only one in the department, so she is reluctant to take time off to not get behind. She added that this employee also checks Facebook and emails while on vacation. She noted this new role would help give the Communications Coordinator some peace of mind and the ability to disconnect from work when needed.

Fire Chief Kohner discussed the request for a full-time Firefighter/Fire Technician. He shared that the need for this position comes from the continued growth of the City, which is increasing calls for service and additional administrative duties. He noted that the benefit of this role is that it would be a dual position, assisting with both calls and the administrative functions of the department. He said that this role would be a customer-facing role for those residents who come in and need to make payments for alarm permits or other items. He added that this position will also be in charge of the record management system, reporting to the State, and payroll. He noted that these are very time-sensitive items. He shared that they have been struggling with daytime response for calls, as many of the paid on-call firefighters are not available during the day. He stated they currently have a paid on-call firefighter working around 29 hours a week, assisting with these additional duties, which is not sustainable for this individual. He added that in addition to this paid-on-call individual, other full-time positions are sharing the load of these duties, or they are going incomplete.

Councilmember Riley asked if they will still be short on responses when they are back to full Staff.

Fire Chief Kohner noted that this position is not related to the shortages that they are having on the operational side.

Administrative Services Director Lasher reminded the Council of the pay scale of different positions. She noted that this Firefighter/Fire Technician would be paid significantly less than the Assistant Fire Chief position. She said this position will be a better value for the role it will be filling.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood reviewed the request for the full-time Parks Maintenance Worker. He noted that three categories drive the need for maintenance works: population, aging infrastructure, and new impacts to the organization. He shared that there has

been a significant increase in the maintenance area just with the Ramsey Gateway project. He added that PACT Charter School is increasing the need for maintenance at Central Park. He shared that they are bringing in revenue from park rental fees, which could help offset this new personnel request. He noted that with the addition of The Waterfront and the pavilion rentals, their revenue will increase.

Mayor Heineman asked how this position would affect the seasonal maintenance workers.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that they have had a very difficult time getting enough seasonal workers for the past six to eight years. He noted that they have a gap from May to June with seasonal workers, as a majority of the individuals that they hire are college students. He said they currently do not have any seasonal workers left, as they have all gone back to school already.

City Administrator Hagen shared that Staff will continue to fine-tune this budget through the remainder of the budget season.

Mayor Heineman shared that he is comfortable with the currently proposed budget, including the three positions discussed, since it makes the overall increase 7.5%.

Councilmember Stewart asked why the cost of the items remaining in the budget had gone up since the last meeting.

City Administrator Hagen explained that this is from the addition of a new permit review system software, as the one they are currently using is not working as they had hoped. He shared that they will be able to pay the implementation fee for this new software out of the remaining funds from the Building Department this year.

Councilmember Specht asked what they are doing with this software to ensure that it is a more effective fit.

City Administrator Hagen shared that this software was the preferred software originally; however, knowing the financial impact, they attempted the more reasonably priced product. He noted that this project is also being implemented by a number of other cities in the area. He said they are very confident that this software will work well for their needs.

Councilmember Specht asked how much money they would have lost from implementing the current software.

City Administrator Hagen said it was around \$6,000 in implementation fees.

Finance Director Lund shared what other Anoka County cities are proposing for tax increases.

Councilmember Specht said he is still not supportive of the Communications Specialist role. He stated he would like to see the overall increase lower than it is; however, he is comfortable with where it is currently.

Councilmember Stewart said she is not supportive of the Communications Specialist or the Parks Maintenance Worker roles, as she would like to see them not have year-over-year increases in these departments. She suggested waiting until the 2027 budget season to revisit these roles. She stated she is supportive of the Firefighter/Fire Technician role. She added that she is not completely comfortable with the 7.5% increase.

Councilmember Peters said he is supportive of the Parks Maintenance Worker and the Firefighter/Fire Technician role, as well as the overall increase. He noted that he thinks the Communications Specialist role could be pushed out another year.

Councilmember Olson shared that he sees the value in the Communications Specialist position and how it will help with future succession planning, so he is supportive of all three discussed roles. He said he is supportive of the overall levy increase as well.

Councilmember Riley noted that instead of finding areas to cut from the budget, they were able to find additional revenue. He said that if he had known that they could find this additional revenue, then he would not have suggested a 7.5% overall increase. He stated he is still not fully supportive of the proposed budget. He noted that he is not supportive of any of the three roles that were discussed.

Councilmember Buscher said she is comfortable with the 7.5% increase and all three proposed positions. She noted that holding off on any of these positions will not help anything, as the growth of the City is not holding off.

Mayor Heineman said he is comfortable with the increase as presented. He shared that he is also supportive of all three of the discussed positions. He noted that one piece of feedback they have gotten from residents is that they want better communication from the City, and the Communications Specialist can help with this. He said that they want to stay ahead of the growth of the City, which is why there is a need for the Firefighter/Fire Technician. He added that they want the parks to look good and be well-maintained, and want the Waterfront facility to be successful, which is why there is a need for the Parks Maintenance Worker.

Councilmember Riley noted that they still have a healthy HRA fund balance and asked if they should use any of it to buy down the 7.5% increase.

City Administrator Hagen said they could do this, as this is a flexible fund. He noted that the downside to using the fund balance is that they could possibly limit themselves in the future for other needs.

Mayor Heineman asked how much they would need to buy down the levy to get to a 6.5% overall increase.

Finance Director Lund said it would be over \$200,000.

Councilmember Specht added that they could also look at using the HRA fund balance to fund some of the capital items that they had previously moved to the 2027 budget, so save money now rather than have this same discussion again next year.

Finance Director Lund added that this fund does not include every parcel of land and every piece of land that will be sold over the next few years. She said this does not include the site by Casey's.

City Administrator Hagen thanked Finance Director Lund for all of her work on the budget throughout this budget season, which started back in April.

The consensus of the Council was to move forward with all three discussed positions and direct Staff to look into using more of the HRA fund balance for eligible expenses to buy down the levy to 6.5%.

## **2.02: Movie in the Park Discussion**

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning the upcoming Movie in the Park and resident concerns with playing a PG-13 movie, Beetlejuice Beetlejuice.

Councilmember Specht shared that he does not think it is appropriate for the City to be promoting a PG-13 horror movie.

Councilmember Stewart noted that she does not think that this is a responsible action by the City, as it says that the City thinks this is an appropriate movie for children to see. She said she does not like the messaging of the movie and what it says to young children.

Mayor Heineman agreed, as some of the reviews for the movie suggested the content of the movie may not be a good representation of the City.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she trusts the Staff to decide on what is best to show for the residents. She said people can choose not to come to the movie if it is not something they are comfortable with.

Councilmember Riley noted that Staff has received requests from residents in the past to show these types of movies. He said he is fine with this movie being shown. He added that they have already purchased the rights to show the movie, and if they make the decision to show a different movie, then there would be a cost to the City.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that they have already purchased the rights to the movie for \$510. He added that there are a number of other cities in the area that also show PG-13 movies. He noted that they have residents rent out parks to show movies privately. He asked if they should be pre-approving these movies with these requests.

Councilmember Stewart said that as long as the City is not being represented, then she does not care what movie they play.

The consensus of the Council was not to show Beetlejuice Beetlejuice and to only show PG or G-rated movies at City events.

### **2.03: Discuss Employee Wellness Room**

Administrative Services Director Lasher reviewed the Staff report in regard to using the Rum River room as an employee wellness room.

Councilmember Buscher said she would be supportive of adding a treadmill or other equipment to the room.

Councilmember Specht noted that there is a potential for future added costs with this and wonders how much it will be used.

Councilmember Stewart asked who would be at fault if an employee brought in their own weights and got injured using this room.

Administrative Services Director Lasher said they would have employees sign a waiver before being able to use the room.

The consensus of the Council was supportive of moving forward with turning the Rum River room into an employee wellness room.

## **3. TOPICS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION**

### **3.01: Review Future Topics/ Calendar**

Noted.

## **4. MAYOR / COUNCIL / STAFF INPUT**

City Administrator Hagen shared that they will be beginning interviews for the City Engineer. He asked the Council if they would like to be involved in the first or second round of the interviews.

The consensus of the Council was to be involved in the second round of interviews.

## **5. ADJOURNMENT**

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:57 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.*