

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, September 23, 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  
Planning Manager Todd Larson  
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood  
Senior Planner Chris Anderson  
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: Review Quotes for a New Curbside Recycling Contract Beginning in 2026**

Senior Planner Anderson reviewed the Staff report in regard to quotes for a new recycling contract to begin in 2026. He shared Staff's recommendation to negotiate with ACE Solid Waste.

Councilmember Peters asked what is included in the organics that are picked up with recycling.

Senior Planner Anderson said organics would be food waste or things like pizza boxes that have food grease on them that cannot be recycled.

Councilmember Riley asked how these prices compare to what they have been paying in their last contract.

Senior Planner Anderson shared that the current rate is \$3.98 per household per month. He noted that ACE is proposing to hold this rate steady for the first year of a new contract and increase a total of \$0.39 over the course of the contract.

Councilmember Busher asked if this increase is similar to what they saw in the last contract.

Senior Planner Anderson shared that ACE had originally proposed an increase for the last contract; however, after discussions, they did propose a flat fee.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to negotiate a contract for recycling services with ACE Solid Waste.

## **2.02: Variance Appeals**

Planning Manager Larson reviewed the Staff report concerning the process of variance appeals. He shared that there will be a variance appeal at the next two Council meetings.

City Attorney Knaak shared that the Planning Commission has been given decision-making authority over variances, which means that the Council no longer has to review the Planning Commission's recommendations for these variances and would only see a request if it goes through the appeals process.

Councilmember Riley suggested that they change the process to not give the Planning Commission final authority to approve variances, and their recommendations would be placed on the Consent Agenda or regular Agenda for the Council to vote on.

Councilmember Stewart asked if the Planning Commission has always had final authority over variances.

Senior Planner Anderson explained that the Planning Commission has always had the authority for variances.

Councilmember Specht shared that he had a resident who reached out to him with concerns that an unelected Commission was making these decisions. He noted that he respects the Planning Commission and understands that they play an important role; however, he likes the idea of them giving a recommendation to Council to make the final vote as the elected body.

Councilmember Peters agreed.

City Attorney Knaak noted that when these items would come forward to the Council for final approval, no supplemental information could be used in this consideration.

Councilmember Buscher asked what other cities in the area are doing to approve these variances.

Planning Manager Larson shared that Staff can research this and put together a City Code amendment to change this process.

Mayor Heineman noted that the practical difficulties outlined for a variance are all subjective. He said the Planning Commission could believe the practical difficulties to be not present, and the Council could believe them to be different. He asked if this would be allowed through the appeals process.

City Attorney Knaak said yes, as long as the Council's findings were based on the record.

Councilmember Buscher shared that she is comfortable with keeping this process as is, as the Council still has the process to make a change to a decision through the appeals process if necessary.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to put together an amendment to change the variance process to make the Planning Commission an advisory body and the Council the deciding body.

### **2.03: Consider Public Fund Expenditure to the Fire Relief Association**

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report in regard to considering a public fund expenditure to the Fire Relief Association.

Councilmember Buscher shared that this is something that she finds to be equitable and thinks that, since they gave to the Ramsey Police Association, they should also give to the Fire Relief Association. She noted that the Police Department pensions are already higher than the Fire Department's.

Councilmember Stewart asked if this \$400 amount would be in excess of what they already give to the Fire Department.

Councilmember Buscher said yes, but noted that they are giving the same extra amount to the Police Association.

City Administrator Hagen explained the difference between the Ramsey Police Association and the Fire Relief Association, which are both non-profits.

Councilmember Buscher noted that the Fire Relief Association serves the same purpose as the Ramsey Police Association, so she believes it would be equitable to give the same amount to both organizations.

Councilmember Specht said this is not about equity to him, as this could be a slippery slope; however, he is not against giving the Fire Relief Association the extra \$400.

Councilmember Olson stated he does not see a need to do this. He noted that there was a very specific request brought to the Council for an additional \$400 for the Ramsey Police Association, and he does not think that they need to match the donation to the Fire Relief Association. He shared that the Council is responsible for handling the taxpayers' dollars, and since the Fire Relief Association has not even asked for this additional donation, he does not think it is reasonable to give to them just to be equitable.

Councilmember Buscher shared that while the Fire Relief Association did not request these funds, she did reach out and ask if she could raise this request on their behalf, to which they were excited

at the possibility of getting some extra funding. She added that they put a lot of effort into raising money for the Fire Relief Association.

Mayor Heineman said that he thinks that they should wait for requests to approve additional donations; however, he would be supportive of approving the additional \$400 for the Fire Relief Association.

The consensus of the Council was to provide the Fire Relief Association with an additional \$400 donation.

#### **2.04: Veterans Park Discussion**

City Administrator Hagen reviewed the Staff report concerning the idea of creating a Veterans Park in Ramsey.

Mayor Heineman shared that, as a veteran himself, he does not see a need for a Veterans Park. He said if they wanted to incorporate a memorial at an existing park, then he would be supportive.

Councilmember Buscher asked if there is currently a park being planned somewhere in the City.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood shared that they have a number of proposed parks that have yet to be developed. He added that there is a resident who does an annual flag retirement event, which has grown over the years. He said they could consider collaborating with this event to honor the veterans in the City.

Mayor Heineman added that they could name one of the other proposed parks Veterans Park.

City Administrator Hagen noted that the next park is likely three years out from being built.

Councilmember Olson shared that he likes the idea of collaborating with the resident for the flag retirement event. He added that he would like them to work on some sort of succession planning for after this resident is no longer able to put on the event himself.

Councilmember Specht agreed.

Councilmember Buscher said she does not think this would need to be a full park; however, they could put some kind of memorial next to the old Town Hall.

Councilmember Stewart shared that she would also like the City to look into some succession planning for the flag retirement event currently being put on by a resident.

The consensus of the Council was to direct Staff to work with the resident who puts on the flag retirement event for City collaboration and succession planning, and also look into adding a Veterans memorial at a future park.

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

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

Noted.

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

### **4.01: Update on Outside Committees**

Councilmember Riley shared that the Lower Rum River Watershed Management Organization has new engineering staff, and he thinks this will be a good thing for Ramsey.

Councilmember Specht shared that QCTV has won several awards and has been nominated for the local Emmy Awards.

Councilmember Buscher noted that the Blaine Police Department has helped reconfigure the pure support team, and they are seeking members from the Fire and Police Departments to help work through different issues. She added that at the Fire Protection Council, they discussed coordination with mental health providers for arson-related behavior. She encouraged other Councilmembers to stop by these meetings to see how the surrounding cities are working together to protect all citizens.

Mayor Heineman added that the Joint Law Enforcement Council has new facilities that opened around the Anoka County Sheriff's Office, which are now available for tours for those interested. He noted that he attended the Twin Cities Gateway meeting, where they discussed where visitors to the area are spending money when travelling to the City. He shared that summer sports are a huge draw to the City for visitors. He added that the Twin Cities Gateway came out with their first magazine, and Ramsey has a two-page spread all about the City.

City Administrator Hagen shared that these projects through the Twin Cities Gateway are being funded through hotel taxes.

Councilmember Olson asked about the emergency fence consortium with the Joint Law Enforcement Council.

Councilmember Buscher noted that this is on hold for the time being due to not being given the legislative budget for this. She said they are hopeful to have this repropose in the future.

City Administrator Hagen shared that the North Metra Mayors Association typically takes a break over the summer months, so they have not met recently; however, they will be starting back up soon to discuss the budget and legislative priorities.

## **5. ADJOURNMENT**

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:44 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.*