

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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a City Council Work Session on Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Mayor Ryan Heineman  
Councilmember Kirsten Buscher  
Councilmember Michael Olson (attended remotely)  
Councilmember Eric Peters  
Councilmember Chris Riley (attended remotely)  
Councilmember Dan Specht

Members Absent: Councilmember Shanna Stewart

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen  
City Clerk Katie Schmidt  
City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby  
Administrative Services Director Colleen Lasher  
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan  
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson  
City Attorney Amanda Johnson

**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 Council Organization**

City Clerk Schmidt explains the process of approving appointments, including designating the city's official newspaper and legal counsel.

Councilmembers discussed their rankings for various appointments.

The Council's consensus was to move forward with the remaining one-year appointments as proposed, including Councilmember Buscher for the Environmental Policy Board, with Councilmember Peters as alternate; Councilmember Peters for the Parks and Recreation Commission, with Councilmember Buscher as alternate; Councilmember Peters for the Planning Commission, with Councilmember Olson as alternate; Councilmembers Riley, Olson, and Specht for the Public Works Committee, with Councilmember Peters as alternate; and Mayor Heineman for the Twin Cities Gateway Board. There was also consensus to approve the contracts with TOSS,

the *Anoka County Union Herald*, and legal services. The two-year term appointments remained the same.

## **2.02: Consider Support for GAP Funding Assistance on an Anoka Ramsey Athletic Association Facility Project**

City Administrator Hagen introduces the topic of support for gap funding assistance for the Anoka Ramsey Athletic Association (ARAA) facility project.

Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan and Josh Shelling from ARAA present the project's history and current status. The project includes a 100,000-square-foot building for multi-use courts, with plans for a land swap with PSD.

Mr. Shelling outlined the project's financial needs and potential benefits, including increased space for sports programs and possible economic development around the facility.

The Council discussed the financial assistance options, including a \$2 million loan and potential fee waivers, with a consensus on a \$2 million loan and up to \$200,000 in fee assistance.

Councilmember Riley stated that he was more comfortable with offering a loan rather than forgiving fees, noting that the fees cover legitimate city costs and have historically been considered reasonable. He indicated a preference for more favorable loan terms instead.

Mayor Heineman proposed a financing package consisting of a \$2 million loan with a 120-month term and up to \$200,000 in fee or service assistance, with the understanding that no fee assistance would be provided for a future Phase Two and that full fees would apply at that time. He noted agreement with concerns about fee forgiveness. Still, he emphasized the City's negotiating position and the potential community benefits of the project, including economic activity, local business support, and increased use of city resources.

Economic Development Manager Sullivan clarified that the fees presented apply to the entire 10-acre development and that no additional costs would be assessed for Phase Two. He explained that the proposal would defer the Phase One fees until completion of Phase Two, emphasizing that this was a clarification of timing rather than a change in total costs.

Mayor Heineman acknowledged that the fees apply to a single parcel and phase and that there would be no opportunity to recoup costs in a later phase. He noted that the proposal would need to be adjusted in light of this clarification and indicated that the outlined terms would serve as a starting point for further discussion.

Councilmember Specht expressed support for the proposed \$2 million loan and stated a preference for meeting the applicant's request. He noted that additional assistance could be considered if available through existing funds without increasing taxes. He emphasized his long-standing support for the project and highlighted its potential return on investment, including attracting residents and businesses and strengthening the city's identity.

Councilmember Buscher expressed support for the project, agreeing with prior comments and describing it as a worthwhile investment in the community's future. She emphasized the benefits of investing in youth programs, noting positive impacts on public safety and overall community well-being. She highlighted that the project's value extends beyond direct financial returns by strengthening residents and community engagement, and expressed confidence in the organization's ability to deliver the proposed development, which she stated would enhance opportunities for families and youth in the city.

Mayor Heineman expressed strong support for the project, emphasizing the importance of locally driven youth programs and contrasting them with private, profit-focused models that can increase costs for families. He agreed with prior Council comments that the project would be a significant benefit to the community and highlighted the value of youth sports and recreation for local families. The Mayor indicated support for moving forward with a \$2 million loan and additional assistance as requested, and invited further Council input regarding the proposed terms.

Councilmember Olson expressed general support for the project and favored moving forward. He indicated that while the details would need to be finalized, he supported pursuing the proposal, consistent with Councilmember Riley's recommendation, and viewed it as an appropriate starting point.

The Council reached consensus to support a \$2 million loan for the project, along with assistance covering standard development fees in an amount consistent with the figures presented by staff.

### **2.03: Discuss the City Engineer Recruitment**

Administrative Services Director Lasher reported ongoing challenges in recruiting a City Engineer, a position intended to be a separate department head role following the planned division of the Public Works Director and City Engineer responsibilities. She noted that multiple recruitment efforts have yielded only a limited number of qualified applicants despite extensive advertising through professional associations, government job boards, and other outlets. Given the need to move forward, Administrative Services Director Lasher presented three potential options for Council consideration: conducting another recruitment with possible adjustments to minimum qualifications or compensation; outsourcing engineering services to a professional firm; or engaging a specialized recruiting firm at an estimated cost of \$39,000, with staged payments and a replacement guarantee if the selected candidate does not remain in the position.

City Administrator Hagen noted that recruiting department heads has become increasingly complex across municipalities. He indicated that current challenges likely reflect broader market conditions rather than deficiencies in the City's process. He reviewed considerations for each option presented, stating that while another recruitment and wage review could be pursued, salary adjustments may create internal ripple effects and would not provide a permanent solution. He expressed concern that outsourcing engineering services would not achieve the long-term goal of having a City Engineer on staff. He noted the value of having city employees directly engage with residents. Regarding the use of a recruiting firm, he acknowledged the potential benefits but cited the high cost and uncertainty of outcomes. He concluded by stating that staff have successfully

conducted in-house recruitments in the past and invited Council's input, noting that there was no clear preferred option at this time.

Councilmember Specht asked whether there was an option for Mr. Linton to return on a temporary contract basis to fill the role for a few months while a permanent City Engineer is recruited.

City Administrator Hagen explained that Mr. Linton, a recently retired employee, would not be able to serve as the City Engineer. He noted that the current City Engineer is capable but that the City's long-term plan is for that individual to focus on Public Works to implement newly adopted policies and better integrate maintenance and engineering functions. He added that while the strategy remains sound, staffing challenges have delayed implementation of the plan developed several years ago.

Councilmember Riley acknowledged the City's past success with in-house recruitments but stated that, given the lack of success in recent efforts, it may be appropriate to consider using a professional search firm. He noted that changing market conditions may require a different approach and suggested modestly increasing the salary above average if necessary to attract candidates. He also asked staff whether recruiting for a Public Works Superintendent position might be easier than recruiting for a City Engineer.

City Administrator Hagen stated that staff have discussed alternative staffing options but are not recommending changes at this time. He reiterated that the existing plan for Bruce's transition into Public Works remains appropriate and noted that additional options could be reconsidered if future recruitment efforts are unsuccessful.

Councilmember Olson expressed concern about the cost of hiring a recruiting firm but acknowledged the need to take action. He stated a preference for continuing recruitment efforts in-house while remaining open to other options if necessary, noting a reluctance to incur significant additional expense.

Mayor Heineman asked for clarification on the terms of using a recruiting firm, including the timeframe for identifying qualified candidates, the payment structure if a suitable candidate is not found, and the City's financial obligation if the recruitment process does not produce results or is discontinued early.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that, based on her understanding, the City would only be responsible for the initial one-third payment to the recruiting firm if qualified candidates were not presented for interview, and the process would not advance beyond that payment.

Mayor Heineman asked when the second one-third payment to the recruiting firm would be due.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that the second one-third payment would be due upon presentation of qualified candidates who meet the minimum requirements.

Mayor Heineman sought clarification on whether the second one-third payment would be triggered upon receipt of qualified applications or upon the interview stage.

Administrative Services Director Lasher stated that she believed the second one-third payment would be due at the interview stage, but noted that she would need to confirm that detail. She said that the second one-third payment would logically be owed at the interview stage and indicated that, if this understanding proved incorrect, the timing could be addressed through negotiation.

Mayor Heineman acknowledged the cost of professional recruiting services but emphasized their potential value and effectiveness. He stated a preference for pursuing a recruiting firm as the primary option, followed by reposting the position. He expressed that outsourcing the role to a third party would be the least desirable option due to higher long-term costs.

Administrative Services Director Lasher asked if the city council would agree to let her try again for another three weeks to get candidates in for interviews.

Councilmember Specht stated that options appear limited and expressed openness to pursuing any approach staff are comfortable recommending, noting that alternative strategies could be considered if the initial approach does not prove successful.

Administrative Services Director Lasher proposed making modest adjustments to the minimum qualifications for the City Engineer position, such as allowing equivalent education and reducing experience and supervisory requirements, to broaden the applicant pool without lowering hiring standards. She recommended reposting the position for an additional three to four weeks with these changes to determine whether qualified candidates could be identified.

Mayor Heineman directed staff to repost the position for approximately one month and indicated that, if the effort is unsuccessful, the City should then engage a recruiting firm.

Councilmember Specht asked City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby whether he was comfortable continuing to cover the responsibilities for a few more weeks and invited him to share his perspective candidly.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby stated that while operations continue, he cannot give sufficient attention to either role while covering both positions. He expressed concern about his inability to support his teams fully despite their strong performance. He indicated that he could continue in the dual role for another month or longer, if necessary, but emphasized that doing so is not ideal.

Councilmember Riley stated that the current staffing challenges were anticipated when the decision was made several years ago to combine the positions, which he had opposed at the time. He cautioned against treating the situation as an emergency, noting that it stemmed from a Council policy decision.

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby clarified that his earlier comments reflected his high standards rather than a current operational emergency. He stated that there are no major failures at this time and agreed that the situation is not critical. He emphasized the importance of advancing

long-term goals, including a facilities space needs study, noting that while the issue is not urgent now, it will become more pressing as he approaches retirement.

Mayor Heineman acknowledged concerns previously raised about the combined roles and noted that the arrangement had resulted in cost savings and benefited from institutional knowledge. He emphasized the importance of planning for future retirements to allow for a smooth transfer of knowledge, stating that the City should avoid delaying action until a transition becomes urgent and instead pursue a proactive approach.

Councilmember Buscher thanked City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby for his openness and emphasized the Council's appreciation and confidence in his leadership. She expressed support for reposting the position with broader qualifications, noting the City's strong team and commitment to developing leaders internally. She stated that a candidate who may not meet every criterion initially could be successful with support and experience.

Councilmember Buscher also indicated openness to considering a higher salary range if needed, recognizing current labor market challenges and the potential need to adjust compensation to attract qualified candidates.

Mayor Heineman suggested that staff proceed with another month of recruitment and then return to the Council with a brief update, at which time the Council would determine whether to engage a recruiting firm.

#### **2.04: 2026 Legislative Priorities**

City Administrator Hagen presented an overview of the City's legislative priorities and a summary of progress made in the previous year. He highlighted key local priorities, including continued coordination on the Northwest Metro Mississippi River Crossing initiative, with the next step focused on seeking state funding for a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement and scoping work, noting the project would be long-term in nature. He also discussed efforts to expand the Metro Mobility service area, supported by recent sales tax funding and initial outreach to Metropolitan Council representatives. Additionally, he outlined the closed landfill legislation initiative, driven by potential opportunities for solar development and future economic development, which may require legislative action. City Administrator Hagen noted that other listed items are broader statewide policy issues that may advance if momentum develops at the Capitol. He added that group home housing is expected to be a regional focus this year through the North Metro Mayors Association. He invited Council feedback on the proposed priorities and any suggested changes.

The Council discusses the importance of these priorities and the potential impact on the city and region.

Mayor Heineman and Councilmembers express support for the priorities and additional topics that could be included, such as rain gardens.

The Council reached consensus to move forward with the current legislative priorities and to monitor additional issues as they arise.

## **2.05: Consider the Ramsey Christmas Market**

Mayor Heineman proposed a conceptual idea for a Ramsey Christmas Market as a potential winter community event. He described it as a seasonal, family-friendly event featuring themed vendor chalets, local food and retail stalls, entertainment, holiday decorations, and activities like visits with Santa and ice skating, weather permitting. Possible locations discussed included near the amphitheater or the upcoming waterfront area. The mayor highlighted opportunities for local business participation, sponsorships, reusable branded cups, and making the event financially neutral through vendor fees and sponsorships. He also addressed logistical factors, including stall storage, power requirements, event duration, and operational planning. Mayor Heineman suggested that, if the Council agrees, the idea could be handed over to Parks and Recreation staff for further assessment and planning for a future year.

Councilmember Peters expressed general support for the concept but cautioned that planning should not interfere with ongoing priorities, including the water park project.

Councilmember Olson expressed strong enthusiasm for the proposed Christmas market, citing positive experiences with similar events elsewhere and noting that hosting it near the water park would enhance the area's appeal, particularly with the planned amenities. He encouraged the City to pursue the concept.

Councilmember Riley stated that while the concept is interesting, consideration should be given to staff capacity, noting existing demands related to Happy Days and other events. He suggested evaluating the proposal's feasibility and requested staff input on next steps before proceeding.

Councilmember Buscher expressed support for the Christmas market concept, provided it can be implemented without placing undue strain on staff. She noted similarities to existing events such as the art fair and farmers market, suggesting the model could be replicated. She described the idea as positive for the community and thanked the mayor for the presentation.

Mayor Heineman directed staff to share the presentation with Parks and Recreation and to conduct a feasibility review of the proposed Christmas market concept. He emphasized the need to be mindful of staff capacity and existing priorities and indicated that an initial assessment should be manageable before bringing recommendations back to the Council.

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

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

Noted.

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

**4.01: Updates on Items of Interest**

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:53 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 Sue Osbeck  
*TimeSaver Off-Site Secretarial, Inc.*