

**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 27, 2026, 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  
Fire Chief Matt Kohner  
Police Chief Brad Bluml  
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: Quarterly Update from Fire and Police Departments**

Fire Chief Kohner presented the Fire Department's update, highlighting a 13.5% increase in call volume compared to the previous year, with no specific call type trend. Calls were most frequent between 6:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., with no significant increase in overnight calls. Staffing updates included the completion of phase one of the in-house FTO program for six new recruits and the approval of a new deputy chief. Training focuses on technical rescue, fire suppression tactics, and scenario-based drills, and includes community events such as first-aid classes and CPR training.

Mayor Heineman asked whether medical-related calls primarily drive the recent increase in calls for service and, if so, whether this trend is expected to continue as the city's elderly population grows.

Fire Chief Kohner noted that the city's changing demographics are a significant factor, confirming that medical-related calls account for a large share of calls for service and are contributing to the overall increase.

Mayor Heineman noted that baby boomers are the largest demographic group and will continue to age, indicating that the increase in service calls, particularly medical-related calls, is unlikely to reverse.

Fire Chief Kohner explained that call volume fluctuates throughout the year, with minor increases from incidents such as vehicle or dumpster fires, but noted that no single factor drives those fluctuations. He added that the more significant and consistent increases account for the larger portion of overall call growth.

Police Chief Bluml presented a high-level Quarter 4 police update, noting that a more detailed analysis will be included in the year-end report. The department responded to 4,094 dispatch calls, a 11% decrease from Quarter 3 and a 7% increase from Quarter 4 of last year. The seasonal decline from Quarter 3 to Quarter 4 was described as typical and attributed to factors including school in session, colder weather, and the holiday period.

Police Chief Bluml noted the most common non-criminal calls were medical checks, welfare checks, and property-damage accidents. The most frequent criminal calls were identity theft, theft by swindling, and harassment restraining order (HRO) violations. During the quarter, officers made 79 arrests, with the most common being DWI, domestic assault, and theft or property removal. The department handled 124 traffic crashes, a 68% increase from Quarter 3, which the chief stated is typical for this time of year and largely attributed to deer-related crashes and icy road conditions.

Police Chief Bluml clarified a prior reporting error, noting that the most common accident location is Bunker Lake Boulevard and St. Francis Boulevard, not Sunfish Lake Boulevard. The previously reported number of crashes (nine in Q3) was correct, but the location was misstated. In Q4, the intersection recorded four crashes, remaining the location with the most crashes for the year, with 21 total accidents. Additional analysis and contributing factors will be addressed in the year-end report.

Police Chief Bluml explained that the department conducted 772 traffic stops in Ramsey during the quarter. At the Chief's request, the crime data analyst reviewed activity near Highway 10/Alpine and at Jarvis Street, both of which were identified as challenging intersections. For 2025, there were five crashes on Highway 10/Alpine: three property damage, one personal injury, and one motorcycle fatality.

Police Chief Bluml also shared a high-level case highlight involving holiday package thefts at the COR Apartments. Using a GPS-tracked decoy package, Flock cameras, and coordinated efforts between officers and investigators, the suspect was apprehended before Christmas, resulting in additional case clearances and assistance to the Anoka County Sheriff's Office. The case remains in court. Finally, the Chief provided an update on malicious punishment of a child cases, noting one case in Q4, following three cases in Q3. While overall numbers remain low, the Q3 spike prompted closer monitoring.

Councilmember Buscher asked whether the cases involved three separate families.

Police Chief Bluml stated that, while he could not say with absolute certainty, he believed the cases involved three separate households and invited any additional questions from the Council.

Mayor Heineman referenced past major incidents on the west and southwest sides of the city and prior discussions about domestic violence and the city's role in addressing it. He sought clarification on whether domestic-related offenses were the most common arrest category and confirmed the ranking of the second most common category. He asked whether the increase observed in Quarter 3 compared to Quarter 4 represents a longer-term year-over-year trend or a temporary fluctuation.

Police Chief Bluml confirmed that DWI arrests were the most common, followed by domestic assaults. He noted continued improvement in DWI enforcement through participation in the Toward Zero Deaths state-funded grant program, explaining that Ramsey is serving as the host agency this year, administering grant funds to other Anoka County agencies for overtime enforcement.

Police Chief Bluml explained that, regarding domestic assaults, the department participates in the Lethality Assessment Committee and coordinates its response with Alexandra House. Officers immediately connect victims with services while still on scene and complete a formal lethality assessment to identify high-risk cases. These assessments are shared through the court process to inform judicial and legal decision-making and to prevent repeat or escalating incidents.

Police Chief Bluml noted that, while domestic incidents remain a concern given the city's size and number of households, the department believes the program is effective and continues to make progress, with seasonal fluctuations—particularly around holidays—also influencing trends.

Mayor Heineman thanked staff for the updates.

## **2.02: Flock Drone as a First Responder (DFR) and Flock Automated License Plate Readers (ALPR) Program Concept Discussion**

Police Chief Bluml explained that the Anoka County Sheriff's Office approached all Anoka County police chiefs to gauge interest in a countywide Drone as a First Responder (DFR) program and an expanded Flock Safety automated license plate reader (ALPR) system.

Police Chief Bluml noted that Ramsey currently operates eight Flock ALPR cameras, two at the parking ramp and six along roadways, and stated that the system has been a valuable investigative tool. Based on its success, the department is interested in increasing the number of cameras.

Police Chief Bluml described the proposed Drone as a First Responder system as distinct from current patrol drones, explaining that these larger, automated drones would be stationed in secured "perches" at strategic locations throughout the county. When a 911 call is received, a drone would automatically deploy to the scene, with an average response time of 60–90 seconds, often arriving before traditional first responders. The drone would provide immediate situational awareness, helping determine the size, severity, and legitimacy of incidents such as crashes or fires, and enabling more efficient resource deployment.

Police Chief Bluml reviewed additional components of the proposal, including software-based traffic analytics, vehicle counts, and access to a crime analysis center, enabling Ramsey analysts to use the system for data analysis and research independently. Regarding funding, the Chief emphasized that discussions are preliminary. The Sheriff's Office is exploring a pilot or proof-of-concept program that could span up to ten years, with multiple funding options under review, including potential grants. He stated there is no confirmed funding source at this time.

Police Chief Bluml explained preliminary cost estimates suggest Ramsey's financial impact would be minimal, potentially only a small increase over current Flock subscription costs. Because the cameras are leased annually, there is potential for a refund of the current year's payment and little to no cost for the first two years under the pilot program, pending final details.

Police Chief Bluml stated that his purpose in presenting the item was to inform the Council, share that discussions are underway, and gather feedback and general support, noting that he was interested in learning more and believes the program could be a positive direction.

Fire Chief Kohner explained that while the benefits of the proposed Drone as a First Responder program may vary for fire services, a rapid aerial response would provide critical early situational awareness. From a fire response perspective, drones could quickly help determine whether an incident involves a structure fire or a grass fire, identify potential exposures, and support incident planning before crews arrive on scene.

Fire Chief Kohner noted that the program was recently presented at a Fire Protection Council meeting, where chiefs were asked only to provide feedback on whether the concept could be beneficial, not to make any commitments. The response from fire chiefs was unanimous in support of exploring the idea further, while emphasizing that funding considerations will be a significant factor in the future.

Mayor Heineman asked for clarification on the drone's operational capabilities, including its flight speed, operating altitude, and whether it is equipped with audio and video recording.

Police Chief Bluml stated he was uncertain whether the proposed drone system includes audio capability. He noted that some department-owned drones can communicate with people on scene, but he could not confirm whether this specific software or drone platform supports that feature. He explained that airspace restrictions, particularly near airports, constrain flight altitude. Under standard conditions, drones operate below a set ceiling, with the potential to fly up to 400 feet if additional radar or authorization is in place.

Regarding coverage, the Chief noted that the drone program would not serve the entire county. Deployment areas are based on call volume and operational range, meaning higher-demand areas such as Ramsey would be covered, while lower-call-volume regions would not. In response to questions about speed, the Chief said no specific flight speed had been provided during the presentations, though the estimated 60–90-second response time was shared at a high level. He added that some details were discussed informally with program staff and remain subject to further clarification.

Councilmember Buscher noted that the Drone as a First Responder program was also presented to the Fire Protection Council the previous week, at which Deputy Jacobson provided additional details. She noted that the drone has an estimated 45-minute flight time, shorter than some existing drones, but it includes more advanced onboard technology.

Councilmember Buscher explained that the drone can provide real-time situational awareness, including smoke and flame detection, wind conditions, line-of-sight to fire scenes, roof integrity, and potential collapse zones, thereby enhancing firefighter safety and response planning. She referenced its use during the Nowthen fire, where the drone monitored conditions during a complex incident.

Councilmember Buscher added that, because the drone system is integrated with Flock technology, it includes facial recognition capabilities similar to those in existing Flock cameras. Alerts can be triggered not only by 911 calls but also by Flock camera detections, and she cited an example in which Flock technology helped link a suspect in Anoka to a homicide.

Addressing constitutional and privacy concerns, Councilmember Buscher stated that program officials are drafting policies to prevent misuse, emphasizing that the technology would not be used for generalized surveillance or “fishing expeditions.” Regarding cost, she shared that preliminary estimates for a 10-year contract place the first two years under \$200,000, with costs increasing significantly in later years, potentially totaling several million dollars, possibly to be levied across participating cities.

Councilmember Buscher expressed personal support for continuing to explore the program, citing unanimous support from fire chiefs, the technology's advanced capabilities, and the importance of carefully addressing privacy and constitutional considerations when communicating with residents.

Mayor Heineman asked whether there are specific weather-related thresholds, such as high winds or heavy rain, that would prevent the Drone as a First Responder system from being deployed or used safely.

Police Chief Bluml stated that increased winds reduce drone battery life. While there are operational limitations in certain weather conditions, drones can still be deployed more frequently than requesting a helicopter. He also clarified his comments on facial recognition, noting that Ramsey's current Flock cameras do not use it. Instead, they identify and track observable characteristics, such as clothing items (e.g., hats or backpacks), to track movement through an area. He emphasized that this capability differs from facial recognition technology and that the cameras currently in use do not perform facial identification.

The consensus of the Council was to continue researching the Flock camera program.

### **2.03: Cryptocurrency Ordinance**

Police Chief Bluml reminded the Council of a prior presentation by Derek Anderson regarding fraud concerns associated with cryptocurrency kiosks in Ramsey and noted that the Council

previously supported drafting an ordinance to prohibit them. Since that discussion, additional information has emerged, prompting a reconsideration of the approach.

Police Chief Bluml highlighted several developments, including public education efforts by Derek Anderson through QCTV and an extended presentation to the County Attorney's Office to raise awareness of crypto-related fraud. He explained that Derek Anderson has also been working closely with the City's new attorney, Amanda Johnson, who provided new legal insights. Recent lawsuits related to cryptocurrency kiosk bans in other jurisdictions were cited as a key factor influencing the discussion.

Police Chief Bluml stated that staff were seeking Council input and consensus on whether to continue pursuing a complete ban or pivot to an alternative regulatory approach and indicated that Attorney Johnson would outline her recommendations during the discussion.

City Attorney Johnson shared her legal analysis of cryptocurrency kiosks, drawing on prior work with the City of Forest Lake, where similar concerns were raised. Based on guidance from the Minnesota Department of Commerce and the League of Minnesota Cities, she stated that an outright ban on cryptocurrency kiosks is neither a strong nor a defensible legal position.

City Attorney Johnson outlined three policy options available to the City:

1. Do nothing,
2. Adopt a complete ban, or
3. Implement a registration ordinance.

City Attorney Johnson noted that both Stillwater and St. Paul have enacted bans and are currently facing litigation related to those actions, with the Stillwater case further along in the legal process. She explained that the registration ordinance mirrors the approach to other state-licensed but locally regulated activities, such as cannabis, in which kiosks would be registered with the city rather than banned outright. Under this model, registration would be tied to the property owner, typically gas stations, rather than the kiosk operator, reflecting the City's land-use authority.

City Attorney Johnson explained key elements of the proposed registration ordinance include:

- Kiosks must be from a brand with no more than two verified fraud incidents within the city in the past 12 months, as determined by the Police Department—criteria that would likely exclude all current kiosks in Ramsey.
- A \$2,000 annual registration fee.
- Additional operational requirements designed to deter fraud and remove bad actors.

Attorney Johnson emphasized that data indicate that approximately 95–98% of cryptocurrency kiosk transactions involve fraud, underscoring a public safety concern. She noted that the registration approach offers a balanced solution, allowing legitimate operators to continue operating while providing the city with a legally sound mechanism to protect residents. She concluded by confirming that staff have drafted an updated registration ordinance. She reiterated that the final decision, whether to pursue a ban, adopt the registration model, or take no action, rests with the City Council.

Councilmember Buscher asked whether, under a registration ordinance, liability for fraud associated with a cryptocurrency ATM would transfer to the party registering the kiosk, such as the property owner.

City Attorney Johnson explained that assigning direct liability to the registrant for cryptocurrency kiosk fraud is legally complex. She noted that the proposed ordinance regulates kiosks through property owners because many lease agreements provide property owners with a percentage of kiosk proceeds, creating a financial incentive that can discourage oversight.

City Attorney Johnson stated that this financial benefit provides a legal justification for requiring property owners to register kiosks and comply with regulatory restrictions, ensuring they have “skin in the game.” However, she clarified that the ordinance is not intended to impose criminal liability on property owners and would not support criminal charges against them.

Attorney Johnson added that the registration ordinance model, originally drafted for Forest Lake, has since been adopted by multiple cities, reinforcing its legal defensibility as a regulatory, not punitive, approach.

Mayor Heineman stated that cryptocurrency kiosks are amoral tools and that fraud is typically committed by individuals using the machines rather than by kiosk owners. He emphasized that preventing fraud depends on having engaged and invested shopkeepers who are willing to question suspicious transactions, particularly when vulnerable residents appear to be transferring large sums.

Mayor Heineman noted that, under current conditions, property owners often lack an incentive to intervene and expressed support for a regulatory approach that places the onus on shopkeepers or property owners to monitor and vet the use of the machines.

Mayor Heineman indicated that doing nothing is not acceptable, while pursuing a full ban could expose the city to litigation risk. He characterized the proposed registration framework as regulatory “red tape” intended to deter harmful behavior and protect residents, rather than to punish legitimate businesses. He concluded by asking whether the City of Forest Lake currently has any cryptocurrency kiosks in operation, noting his understanding that they may have all been removed.

City Attorney Johnson confirmed that all cryptocurrency kiosks have been removed in Forest Lake. She explained that the city previously had four kiosks: three were associated with significant fraud, and one had none. Ultimately, all property owners chose to remove the machines, determining that the regulatory requirements were not worth the continued operation.

City Attorney Johnson added that both Washington County and Anoka County are discussing countywide bans, noting that fraudsters typically direct victims by phone to the nearest available kiosk. As kiosks are removed from one jurisdiction, fraud activity tends to shift to nearby cities.

City Attorney Johnson stated that for regulatory efforts to be truly effective in protecting the broader community, wider regional or statewide participation would be necessary. She noted that

while the Minnesota Department of Commerce has acknowledged that current state legislation is ineffective, there appears to be limited momentum at this time for stronger statewide regulatory reforms.

Mayor Heineman reasoned that requiring cryptocurrency kiosks to register with a \$2,000 annual fee, combined with strict compliance requirements and the possibility of removal within a short timeframe, would likely make operation financially impractical and therefore discourage installation altogether. He asked whether the City could legally require education or awareness measures for kiosk registrants, such as informing property owners or operators about fraud risks, and whether imposing such requirements would raise any legal concerns.

City Attorney Johnson stated that the Police Department has already conducted significant outreach and education at locations that host cryptocurrency kiosks, including posting warning signage to alert users to potential fraud. She questioned whether lack of knowledge is truly the issue, noting that property owners are likely aware of the risks given the scale of fraud experienced. She cited that Ramsey has seen hundreds of thousands of dollars in cryptocurrency-related fraud, comparable to other cities, including Woodbury, which has reported over \$8 million in fraud between 2020 and 2024.

City Attorney Johnson explained that, because awareness alone has not proven sufficient, the proposed registration ordinance includes additional regulatory requirements, such as mandatory closed-circuit video surveillance of the kiosk and a requirement that the Police Department be provided with footage upon request within 24 hours. She noted that these measures would apply in the rare case where a property owner registers a kiosk, pays the \$2,000 fee, and works with an operator with no verified fraud incidents and who can meet all ordinance requirements.

Mayor Heineman clarified that while the City has already engaged in proactive education regarding cryptocurrency kiosk fraud, he supports a more direct, practical approach that makes property owners aware of the financial realities of kiosk operations, specifically that, due to regulatory requirements and fees, kiosks are unlikely to remain in operation long enough to generate a return on investment. He emphasized the importance of communicating this reality without explicitly discouraging business in a way that could expose the City to legal risk. Based on the discussion, he expressed support for moving forward with Option Three, implementing a registration ordinance rather than pursuing a full ban. He thanked the staff for their work on the issue.

#### **2.04: Discussion 2026 Strategic Planning Session Structure**

City Administrator Hagen noted that the city is approaching its annual strategic planning period and that upcoming work session discussion topics are currently limited, creating an opportunity to integrate strategic planning into future work sessions. He noted that, over recent years, the City's strategic planning exercises, such as identifying what is working well, what is not, and upcoming opportunities and impacts, have remained largely consistent year to year. Given the limited change, he asked for Council's input on whether staff could complete much of the preliminary analysis in advance and present a draft framework for Council review.

City Administrator Hagen explained that under this approach, staff would prepare proposed strategies, goals, and updates to incomplete initiatives, allowing Council to focus on discussion, refinement, and final direction rather than conducting the full exercise themselves. He stated that this process could produce an equally strong final strategic plan while reducing the time commitment required of Councilmembers, particularly avoiding the need for an additional evening meeting.

Councilmember Stewart expressed support for the proposed approach, stating that if strategic planning themes have not changed significantly year after year, it makes sense for staff to complete much of the preliminary work. She noted that this would still allow Council sufficient opportunity for discussion and refinement while reducing the overall workload.

Mayor Heineman expressed support for the proposed strategic planning approach, emphasizing that staff preparation would not limit the Council's ability to raise additional topics or concerns. He noted that the approach would reduce redundancy, as the city often identifies the same core priorities each year. He encouraged Councilmembers to share any niche topics, passion projects, or emerging issues with staff in advance so they could receive appropriate consideration.

Mayor Heineman observed that past strategic planning discussions can sometimes move quickly on some topics while others, such as community surveys, require more in-depth discussion. He concluded by confirming the general Council agreement with the approach and directed staff to proceed accordingly.

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

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

Noted.

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

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

Councilmember Buscher provided updates from the Anoka County Fire Protection Association, including the approval of radios for the jail and the fire intervention program.

Mayor Heineman shared updates from the Twin Cities Gateway Board, highlighting the success of the sports soccer program and the importance of promoting local hotels.

Councilmember Specht discussed the Quad Cities Cable Communications Committee's efforts to stay relevant through podcasts and rebranding.

Police Chief Bluml provided an update on the Federal Law Enforcement presence in the area, emphasizing the department's focus on protecting and serving the community. He discussed the challenges of managing the situation, including the need for additional patrols and the potential

for clashes between pro- and anti-ICE groups. He reassured the council and community that the department was prepared to handle any incidents and maintain peace.

The council expressed its support for the Police Department and emphasized the importance of maintaining community trust and communication.

Police Chief Bluml acknowledged the challenges of balancing transparency with operational security and was open to further discussions on how to address community concerns.

The council agreed to continue monitoring the situation and providing support as needed.

#### **4.02: Updates on Items of Interest**

### **5. ADJOURNMENT**

The Work Session of the City Council was adjourned at 6:48 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.*