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

The Ramsey City Council conducted a regular meeting on Tuesday, May 26, 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

Members Absent: None

Also Present: City Administrator Brian Hagen
City Engineer/Public Works Director Bruce Westby
Community Development Director Stephanie Hanson
Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Mark Riverblood
Fire Chief Andy Winkel
Police Chief Brad Bluml
Assistant City Engineer Joe Feriancek
Economic Development Manager Sean Sullivan
City Attorney Amanda Johnson

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Heineman called the regular meeting of the Ramsey City Council to order at 7:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mayor Heineman.

2. APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Councilmember Olson, seconded by Councilmember Specht, to approve the agenda as presented.

Councilmember Riley indicated that at the previous meeting, he moved to remove three items from the agenda, in hopes they would return during a work session, where they could be discussed and developed more thoroughly rather than debated from the dais. He explained he believed those discussions would have been more appropriate in a work session setting. Still, he added that the City is best served by moving forward, voting the items up or down, and allowing residents to see the Council's decision.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Buscher, Olson, Peters, Riley, Specht, and Stewart. Voting No: None.

3. PRESENTATIONS

3.01 Oath of Office – Fire Chief/Emergency Management Director

City Administrator Hagen thanked the Mayor, Council, and Ramsey residents and noted that at the previous Council meeting, the City recognized retiring Fire Chief Matt Kohner. He explained the City was now welcoming its next Fire Chief, Andy Winkel, who had started the prior Monday. He indicated Chief Winkel brings 18 years of experience in the fire service, including work as a paid-on-call firefighter with the Spring Lake Park, Blaine, Mounds View Fire Department, where he concluded his tenure as a battalion chief. He added that Chief Winkel also served in full-time roles with the City of Blaine as a fire inspector and, most recently, with the Anoka Champlin Fire Department as Assistant Fire Chief.

City Administrator Hagen also thanked Chief Winkel’s family for their support, noting the position requires continual availability and commitment. He expressed excitement about welcoming Chief Winkel to the City team before turning the meeting over to Mayor Heineman for the oath of office.

Mayor Heineman administered the Oath of Office to Fire Chief Winkel.

Fire Chief Winkel thanked the Mayor, Council, and Ramsey community for the opportunity to serve as the City’s next fire chief. He expressed appreciation for the warm welcome he has received and noted he looks forward to working with firefighters, staff, City leaders, and residents to continue providing high-quality service. Fire Chief Winkel also thanked his family and mentors for their support throughout his career.

3.02 Annual Public Works Department Update

City Engineer/Public Works Director Westby provided the Council with an annual Public Works update, highlighting the department’s mission, staffing, snow operations, street and utility maintenance responsibilities, and the successful completion of the new water treatment plant, which began operating earlier in the year. He noted Public Works maintains City buildings, streets, stormwater systems, utilities, and parks infrastructure while continuing to meet snowplowing targets and respond to increasing operational demands.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Director Riverblood summarized Parks and Recreation operations, noting extensive maintenance responsibilities for parks, trails, athletic fields, playgrounds, irrigation systems, and emerald ash borer-related tree removal. He also highlighted recreation programming, new amenities including a fishing pier and waterfront improvements, and construction progress on the City’s large regional splash pad project, which remains on schedule for a July opening.

4. CITIZEN INPUT

Mr. Matt Woestehoff, 16078 Uranium Street NW, explained he was not speaking about the three cases on the agenda because his views had not changed from the previous meeting. Instead, he focused on the importance of City staff, noting that Councils change over time while staff members remain responsible for operating and maintaining City services. He expressed concern over declining employee survey results regarding whether staff would recommend working for the City of Ramsey, citing a decrease from 96 percent in 2007 to 69 percent in 2026. He indicated he believed the decline reflected changes in governing style and concerns about how the Council interacts with staff, boards, and commissions, adding that recent Council actions demonstrated a top-down approach that he felt limited the independence and expertise of advisory bodies such as the Planning Commission.

Mr. Rodney Holland, a Ramsey resident on 142nd Avenue, thanked the Mayor and Council for their service and explained that he normally does not attend Council meetings but felt compelled to speak because he believes divisive issues are being raised. He indicated he does not believe those types of issues are appropriate matters for the Council to become involved in.

5. CONSENT AGENDA

Motion by Councilmember Peters, seconded by Councilmember Olson, to approve the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- 5.01: Approve the Following Meeting Minutes:
 - 1) City Council Work Session dated May 12, 2026
 - 2) City Council Regular Session dated May 12, 2026
- 5.02: Approve Business License Applications
- 5.03: Authorization to Promote a Community Service Officer to Patrol Officer
- 5.04: Authorize the Application for Federal Funding for the Mississippi Skyway Pedestrian Bridge
- 5.05: Adopt Resolutions #26-116, 26-117, 26-118, 26-119, 26-120, 26-121, 26-122, and 26-123 Ordering Plans and Specifications for 2027 Pavement Management Program Projects
- 5.06: Adopt Resolution #26-125 Approving Final Plans and Specifications and Authorizing Advertisement for Bids for Riverside West Street Reconstruction, Improvement Project #26-06
- 5.07: Adopt Resolution #26-126 Approving Second Amendment to Lease; Mille Lacs Motor Sports II, Inc.
- 5.08: Adopt Resolution #26-128 Initiating Process for Approval of a Redevelopment Project Area and Calling a Public Hearing
- 5.09: Adopt Resolution #26-129 Initiating Request for Anoka County Housing and Redevelopment Authority Funding for Redevelopment Project
- 5.10: Adopt Resolution #26-130 Approving Partial Payment No. 3 to H+U Construction Improvement Project #25-58; The Waterfront Waterplay Park Improvement
- 5.11: Adopt Resolution #26-131 Calling for a Public Hearing by the City Council on the Proposed Adoption of a Modification to the Development Program for

Development District No. 1 and Establishment of Tax Increment Financing District No. 20 (Trident) Within Development District No. 1 and Approving the Tax Increment Financing Plan Therefor

- 5:12: Adopt Resolution #26-132 Approving First Amendment to Purchase Agreement for Sale of Lot 1, Block 7, Waterfront Village: Roers Ramsey Apartments I LLC
- 5:13: Adopt Resolution #26-133 Approving Cash Disbursements Made and Authorizing Payment of Accounts Payable Invoicing Received During the Period of May 7, 2026, through May 20, 2026
- 5:14: Adopt Resolution #26-134 Authorizing Solicitation of Requests for Proposals for a Well Sitting Study for Wells #9 and #10

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Buscher, Olson, Peters, Riley, Specht, and Stewart. Voting No: None.

6. PUBLIC HEARING

7. COUNCIL BUSINESS

7.01: Authorization to Hire a Part-Time Communications Specialist

City Administrator Hagen explained that the City Council is being asked to consider authorizing the hiring of a part-time Communications Specialist position included in the 2026 budget. He explained the position is needed to support the City's growing communications workload, provide backup for the Communications Coordinator, assist with elections, manage social media and website content, and improve continuity across communication platforms. Following a competitive recruitment process, staff recommended hiring Rachel Lahlum, noting that she had completed the required background checks and would be subject to the AFSCME contract and probationary requirements.

Motion by Councilmember Peters, seconded by Councilmember Buscher, to hire Ms. Rachel Lahlum as part-time Communications Specialist, effective on or near June 15, 2026, at \$30.803 per hour (step one of the 2026 wage scale).

Councilmember Riley explained he opposed creating the part-time Communications Specialist position, emphasizing his opposition was not directed at the individual recommended for hire. He noted he has consistently opposed expanding the City's communications staffing. He recalled that only a few years earlier, the communications role had been combined with event coordination duties before becoming a standalone communications position. He indicated he does not believe an additional communications position is necessary.

Councilmember Specht indicated he would not support the new Communications Specialist position, emphasizing his comments were not directed at the individual recommended for hire. He explained his concern centered on the City's budget and stated he does not believe the City can afford the additional position while trying to keep the budget in line.

Motion failed. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Buscher, and Peters. Voting No: Councilmembers Riley, Specht, Stewart, and Olson.

7.02: Adopt Ordinance #26-06, Approving a Zoning Map Amendment from I-1, Light Industrial, to I-2, General Industrial, for 14021 Azurite St NW, 14021 Basalt St NW, and 14050 Basalt St NW; Case of ACE Solid Waste

Community Development Director Hanson explained that the three properties under consideration are currently zoned I-1, and the proposed amendment would rezone them to I-2. She noted the Planning Commission recommended approval of the zoning map amendment on April 23, and the City Council later held a public hearing and introduced Ordinance #26-06 on May 12. She stated that the recommendation before the Council was to adopt Ordinance #26-06, approving the zoning map amendment.

Motion by Councilmember Riley, seconded by Councilmember Specht, to adopt Ordinance #26-06, Amending Section 106-120 “Official Zoning Map” of Chapter 106 of the City Code of Ramsey, Minnesota.

A roll call vote was performed:

Councilmember Buscher	aye
Councilmember Riley	aye
Councilmember Stewart	aye
Councilmember Olson	aye
Councilmember Specht	aye
Councilmember Peters	aye
Mayor Heineman	aye

Motion passed.

7.03: Adopt Ordinance #26-10 Authorizing the City of Ramsey to Sell/Convey Parcel of Real Property

Economic Development Manager Sullivan explained the Council was considering adoption of Ordinance #26-10 regarding surplus property within the City’s industrial park near Wildlife Research, Zoubak Investments, and Minnesota Water Jet. He noted the incorrect ordinance had been included in the meeting packet and clarified the correct ordinance and parcel information for the record. He stated the property is considered nominal and marginal land. He explained that the City must first declare the parcel surplus property before it can proceed with any transaction involving the land.

Motion by Councilmember Peters, seconded by Councilmember Olson, to adopt Ordinance #26-10, authorizing the City of Ramsey to sell/convey a parcel of real property.

A roll call vote was performed:

Councilmember Buscher aye
Councilmember Riley aye
Councilmember Stewart aye
Councilmember Olson aye
Councilmember Specht aye
Councilmember Peters aye
Mayor Heineman aye

Motion passed.

7.04: Adopt Resolution #26-127 Approving Purchase Agreement, Right of Re-Entry Agreement, and Sale of City Property to LH Road, LLC

Economic Development Manager Sullivan presented a proposed development agreement involving the sale of surplus City land east of Wildlife Research to support expansion of the existing business. He explained the currently unbuildable property would require significant infrastructure and stormwater improvements, estimated at nearly \$650,000, before development could occur. The project includes a phased warehouse expansion for Wildlife Research, future expansion opportunities for neighboring properties, and is expected to generate approximately \$100,000 annually in new taxes once completed.

Motion by Councilmember Stewart, seconded by Councilmember Specht, to adopt Resolution #26-127, approving Purchase Agreement, Right of Re-Entry Agreement, and Sale of City Property to LH Road, LLC, (as presented), subject to City Attorney review.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Buscher, Olson, Peters, Riley, Specht, and Stewart. Voting No: None.

7.05: Adopt Resolution #26-114 Accepting Bids and Awarding Contract for 2026 Neighborhood Pavement Overlay Improvements, Improvement Project #26-08

Assistant City Engineer Feriancek presented the 2026 Neighborhood Overlay Improvement Project, which includes pavement improvements in four neighborhoods across the City totaling approximately 1.39 miles of streets. He explained that the project involves mill-and-overlay work, ADA ramp upgrades, and concrete replacement, with bids coming in below the engineer's estimate. He noted North Valley was the low bidder at approximately \$499,000, and staff recommended awarding the contract, with construction expected to begin in late June and conclude by late August.

Motion by Councilmember Olson, seconded by Councilmember Peters, to adopt Resolution #26-114 accepting bids and awarding contract for 2026 Neighborhood Pavement Overlay Improvements, Improvement Project #26-08 to North Valley, Inc. for the total bid of \$499,411.45.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Buscher, Olson, Peters, Riley, Specht, and Stewart. Voting No: None.

7.06: Adopt Resolution #26-102 Designating the Historic Minnesota State Flag as the Official Flag of the City of Ramsey to Ensure Local Control and Fiscal Responsibility

Mayor Heineman introduced Item 7.6, consideration of Resolution #26-102 to designate the historic Minnesota State flag as the official flag of the City of Ramsey to ensure local control and fiscal responsibility. He then opened the floor to public comment and invited residents wishing to comment on the item to come forward and state their name.

Ms. Amy Hodges, 7463 159th Avenue Northwest, Ramsey, explained that she attended the meeting primarily to show opposition to the resolution. She described Ramsey as a welcoming, growing community that she and her family chose for its positive environment, families, and amenities. She expressed concern that the three resolutions under consideration were divisive and inconsistent with the values she believes define the community. She indicated she wanted City resources focused on services and projects that benefit everyone. She respectfully urged the Council to vote against the resolutions so the community could move forward together.

Mr. Brian Walker, 17289 Variolite Street Northwest, agreed with concerns about potential state funding consequences tied to communities choosing to continue using the historic Minnesota flag, describing that approach as partisan politics. He noted previous Minnesota flags had never been selected through a statewide public vote and pointed out there had been opportunities for public input during the redesign process. He questioned why the discussion focused on the flag rather than the state seal and argued that there is no state requirement mandating the use of a specific flag. He stated that he believed the proposal was unnecessary and a poor use of City resources, and encouraged the Council to continue current practices without taking formal action.

Mr. Todd Embury, 9041 159th Lane Northwest, Ramsey, stated that he had previously addressed the same issue two weeks earlier and indicated that he had not seen significant public demand for the proposed action. He remarked that the state flag redesign process appeared to have followed the proper procedures and included opportunities for public input. He questioned whether the matter warranted additional Council time and resources, noting the limited public attendance compared to other local issues he considered more important to residents. He encouraged the Council to consider how the proposal reflects on the City and whether the time and effort involved are serving the broader community interest.

Mr. Michael Swanson, 5368 140th Court Northwest, expressed concern that the historic Minnesota flag contains the former state seal and argued that adopting it as an official City flag would endorse a symbol no longer recognized by the state. He stated that the redesign process had been widely publicized and included opportunities for public participation, noting that he followed it even while living outside Minnesota. He also questioned whether the proposal reflected the views of Ramsey residents as a whole and expressed concern that the action could create division within the community.

Mr. Rodney Allen, 5731 142nd Avenue Northwest, Ramsey, stated he believed Councilmembers serve the City with good intentions and encouraged the Council to focus on issues he believed were most important to residents. He expressed embarrassment that the historic Minnesota flag continues to be displayed, explaining he believes the flag represents a negative and divisive

history. He urged the Council to move forward from the issue and focus on matters that benefit the broader community.

Ms. Dara Grimmer, 15931 Xenon Street Northwest, Ramsey, asked about the rationale for the proposal to designate the historic Minnesota flag as the City's official flag and sought clarification on when that rationale would be discussed during the meeting process.

Mayor Heineman explained that citizen input is generally not conducted as a back-and-forth discussion and indicated the Council would discuss the matter after public comment concluded.

Ms. Grimmer stated she wanted to better understand the intent behind the proposal and how supporters viewed the symbolism of the historic flag before the Council proceeded with its discussion.

Wayne Grimmer, 15931 Xenon Street Northwest, Ramsey, referenced comments from the previous meeting regarding the Council's ability to address multiple issues at once and clarified that residents were not suggesting the Council was failing to perform its duties. Instead, he expressed concern about the amount of time and taxpayer resources being spent on the proposed flag discussion, including staff and legal review time. He encouraged the Council to focus its efforts on other City priorities.

Mayor Heineman explained that he would personally introduce the resolution because he had drafted it, rather than turning the presentation over to staff. He clarified his previous comments regarding the history of Minnesota flag approvals, noting prior versions of the state flag were approved directly by the state legislature in 1893, 1957, and 1983. He stated he believed the recent redesign process complied with the law but disagreed with its structure, explaining that the redesign committee consisted of 13 appointed members and had broad authority to select and modify the final design. He also noted there is no legal requirement for cities to fly the current state flag and referenced earlier legislative discussions about potential funding penalties for cities that did not adopt the new flag. However, those provisions were ultimately not enacted. He stated that the resolution was intended to address local control, then opened the matter for Council discussion and questions.

Councilmember Buscher questioned several statements contained in the proposed resolution designating the historic Minnesota State flag as the official flag of the City of Ramsey. She asked how the resolution would make City leaders more accountable to residents and challenged language suggesting that citizens were denied a voice in the state flag selection process. She also questioned how many residents had contacted Councilmembers in support of the proposal, expressed concern that the resolution was drafted by a Councilmember rather than City staff, and noted that it had not been discussed during a work session. She argued that the City already flies the historic flag, that adopting the resolution would have little practical impact, and that the proposal risked creating division within the community. She indicated she would oppose the resolution.

Mayor Heineman responded that elected officials are accountable to residents through the election process and are expected to exercise independent judgment on behalf of the community. He noted

that he had received feedback from residents on both sides of the issue and estimated that public opinion was relatively evenly divided. He defended the process for introducing the resolution, explaining that Councilmembers may bring forward resolutions with the support of another Councilmember. He emphasized that policy decisions belong to elected representatives rather than staff and argued that local governments should occasionally push back against decisions made by higher levels of government. He maintained that adopting the resolution would formalize the Council's previously expressed preference for flying the historic state flag.

City Administrator Hagen explained that the City initially complied with State requirements by obtaining and displaying the new Minnesota State flag after it became official. He noted that following previous Council discussions and work sessions, staff were directed to remove the new flags and resume flying the historic state flag. He stated that the City possesses both versions of the flag and that adopting the resolution would not have a significant fiscal impact, as no additional purchases would be necessary. He also confirmed that previous Council discussions regarding the flag had occurred during public work sessions.

City Attorney Johnson explained that her review of the resolution focused on ensuring it was appropriately structured as a policy resolution, rather than evaluating the policy arguments it contained. She stated that the decision regarding which flag to fly is a policy determination for the Council. She further advised that Minnesota law does not require municipalities to fly the State flag and explained that if the City chose not to display the State flag, that decision would be legally permissible. She cautioned the Council against opening City flagpoles to private organizations because doing so could create legal issues related to public speech.

Councilmember Stewart asked whether the City was legally required to fly either version of the State flag. After receiving clarification that no such requirement exists, she inquired whether other Councilmembers planned to explain their personal support for the historic flag. Her comments focused primarily on understanding the legal framework and the reasoning behind the proposal.

Councilmember Specht supported the resolution, citing consistency with his previous votes on the issue and feedback he had received from residents. He stated that many residents had expressed support for continuing to fly the historic state flag. He indicated that he believed the process used to adopt the new State flag at the State level did not adequately reflect public sentiment. He argued that his vote reflected both his prior position and the opinions he had heard from constituents.

Councilmember Olson also supported the resolution. He stated that he had heard from more residents who favored the historic flag than the new flag and expressed concern about the process used to adopt the new state flag. He indicated that he personally preferred the historic flag and did not feel adequately represented by the State's decision-making process.

Councilmember Riley opposed the proposal, arguing that the issue was unnecessarily divisive and did not require Council action. He noted that public feedback appeared evenly split and questioned why the Council was spending time on a matter that had little effect on City operations or services.

Council discussion focused on the Council's role in making policy decisions, the history of Ramsey's flag practices, public input received on the issue, and whether the City should formally

designate the historic state flag as its official flag. Members debated the significance of the state flag issue, the process the State used to adopt the new flag, and whether Council action was necessary, given that the City was already flying the historic flag.

Motion by Mayor Heineman, seconded by Councilmember Olson, to adopt Resolution #26-102, Designating the Historic Minnesota State Flag as the Official Flag of the City of Ramsey to Ensure Local Control and Fiscal Responsibility.

Motion failed. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Olson and Specht. Voting No: Councilmembers Buscher, Peters, Riley and Stewart.

Following the failed vote on the historic flag resolution, Councilmember Riley proposed an alternative solution directing staff to prepare a resolution providing that Ramsey would not fly any State flag. He explained that this approach would avoid future disputes over which state flag should be displayed.

Motion by Councilmember Riley, seconded by Councilmember Stewart, to direct staff to create a resolution for consideration at the next meeting that no state flag shall be flown.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Buscher, Olson, Peters, Riley, Specht, and Stewart. Voting No: None.

7.07: Adopt Resolution #26-108 Expressing Formal Disapproval and Censure of Governor Tim Walz

Mayor Heineman introduced Resolution #26-108, expressing formal disapproval and censure of Governor Tim Walz, and opened the public hearing. He explained that he would provide additional context during Council discussion, but first invited public comment on the proposal.

Mr. Rodney Allen, 5731 142nd Avenue Northwest, Ramsey, questioned why the resolution had been brought forward and asked what purpose it would serve. He indicated that he did not understand the proposal's objective and requested clarification on the Council's intent.

Mr. Brian Walker, 17289 Variolite Street Northwest, criticized the proposal and questioned why the Council was pursuing it. He argued that if the Council wished to hold individuals accountable for the Feeding Our Future fraud scandal, it should also consider censuring the Minnesota Legislative Audit Commission and others who had oversight responsibilities before the matter reached the governor's office. He contended that many layers of government had opportunities to identify problems before the governor became involved and characterized the resolution as an attempt to target a political opponent rather than address the root causes of the issue.

Mr. Michael Swanson, 5368 140th Court Northwest, stated that he opposed both Agenda Items 7 and 8. He argued that if the Council intended to censure the governor formally, it should be based on evidence and a legally supported rationale rather than media reports or political disagreement. He suggested that the Council should first consider the subsequent agenda item before taking

action on the censure resolution and agreed with previous speakers that responsibility for the fraud issue extended beyond the governor alone.

Ms. Dara Grimmer, 15931 Xenon Street Northwest, Ramsey, again questioned what the proposed censure would accomplish. She stated that she wanted a clear explanation of the resolution's purpose and expected outcome, and expressed doubt that the Ramsey City Council was the appropriate body to address the issue.

Mr. Todd Embury, 9041 159th Lane Northwest, argued that the agenda items appeared politically motivated. He stated that if the Council was genuinely concerned about fraud and government misconduct, it should apply the same standards consistently across all levels of government. He referenced actions by President Donald Trump and argued that if the Council wished to condemn misconduct by elected officials, it should do so regardless of political affiliation. He suggested that focusing exclusively on Governor Walz created the appearance of partisanship and political point-scoring rather than principled oversight.

Mr. Matt Woestehoff, 16078 Uranium Street Northwest, reflected on his own experience as a former subject of a proposed censure action before the City. He acknowledged that he had made decisions in the past that he later viewed differently, but noted that he had acted within established rules. He argued that Governor Walz had acted within the authority of his office and stated that elections provide the proper mechanism for accountability. He questioned the value of the proposed censure and suggested that voters, rather than local governments, should determine whether the governor should remain in office.

Mayor Heineman then presented the resolution. He explained that local governments have the legal authority to express opinions on matters of public concern and cited Minnesota statutes that authorize City Councils to conduct municipal affairs. He argued that large-scale fraud involving state funds affects local governments because state resources support services and programs that benefit communities. He also referenced examples from across the country in which City Councils, school boards, and other local government bodies had censured elected officials or adopted resolutions expressing disapproval of actions taken by state or federal leaders. He maintained that the proposal was legally appropriate, historically supported, and within the Council's authority.

Councilmember Buscher asked City Attorney Johnson to explain the meaning of a censure.

City Attorney Johnson responded that a censure is a public declaration expressing disapproval of an individual's conduct and serves primarily as a symbolic action without legal consequences.

Councilmember Buscher then asked whether the resolution would provide any direct benefit to Ramsey residents, recover any lost funds, or affect City operations, services, or funding.

City Attorney Johnson explained that a censure does not create legal obligations, require corrective action by the subject of the censure, or result in financial recovery. She characterized the action as a symbolic expression of the Council's position.

Councilmember Buscher asked City Administrator Hagen whether he had received requests from residents asking the City to pursue a censure of Governor Walz.

City Administrator Hagen replied that he had not.

Councilmember Buscher then questioned references to Local Government Aid and asked when Ramsey last received LGA funding.

City Administrator Hagen responded that the City last received LGA around 2013 and explained that eligibility is determined by a state formula that generally directs aid toward communities with greater financial need. He noted that Ramsey has not relied on LGA in recent years because it has not qualified for the program.

Councilmember Buscher concluded that the resolution would not improve City services, recover funds, or produce a meaningful outcome for residents. She argued that the proposal would increase political division, create feelings of exclusion among some residents, and move the City into broader political debates that are more appropriately addressed at the state or federal level.

Motion by Mayor Heineman, seconded by Councilmember Olson, to adopt Resolution #26-108, expressing formal disapproval and censure of Governor Tim Walz regarding the mismanagement of State resources and oversight failure.

Councilmember Riley opposed the resolution, arguing that the Council was spending time on an issue unrelated to the City's core responsibilities. He observed that the proposal had not been discussed in a work session and characterized the resolution as symbolic rather than substantive. He emphasized his view that the resolution lacked meaningful consequences and was more performative than practical.

Mayor Heineman defended the resolution. He argued that numerous reports had documented concerns about oversight failures in the Feeding Our Future fraud investigation and maintained that state leadership should be held accountable when problems occur. He stated that public officials at every level of government should be subject to scrutiny and argued that censure sends an important message regarding expectations for accountability. He also rejected criticism that the proposal amounted to virtue signaling, asserting that public discussion of important issues helps residents understand where their elected officials stand. He argued that transparency and accountability justified the Council's consideration of the resolution.

Councilmember Olson supported the resolution and stated that accountability requires public officials to speak out when significant wrongdoing occurs. Referencing a quotation often attributed to Edmund Burke, he argued that inaction enables misconduct to continue unchecked. He acknowledged that a censure would not directly change policy. Still, he stated that it would communicate the Council's disapproval of how the fraud issue had been handled and reinforce the principle that elected leaders are responsible for outcomes occurring under their administration.

Councilmember Specht also supported the resolution. He stated that many residents had contacted him expressing concern about the fraud scandal and encouraging the Council to take a public

position. He indicated that he believed Governor Walz had not handled the situation appropriately and argued that supporting the resolution reflected both his personal assessment of the issue and the feedback he had received from constituents.

Motion failed. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Olson and Specht. Voting No: Councilmembers Buscher, Peters, Riley and Stewart.

7.08: Adopting Resolution #26-111 Authorizing Staff to Explore City's Ability to File Claim Against Governor Walz and Other State Leaders

Mayor Heineman introduced Resolution #26-111, authorizing staff to explore the City's ability to file a claim against Governor Tim Walz and other State leaders for alleged state oversight failures related to the Feeding Our Future fraud case. He opened the public hearing and invited residents to comment before the Council considered the proposal.

Mr. Steve Little, 14529 Willemite Street Northwest, Ramsey, attended his first City Council meeting and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to hear different viewpoints. He stated that accountability begins at home and extends through the local, state, and federal governments. He argued that someone should be held accountable for the billions of dollars lost to fraud in Minnesota and indicated that he supported efforts to hold State leadership accountable. He suggested that if the City could encourage the Governor to address residents directly regarding the issue, that would be beneficial.

Mr. Brian Walker questioned the factual basis for portions of the resolution, noting that millions of dollars and assets had already been recovered through criminal investigations and enforcement actions. He stated that no one in the room supported fraud and agreed that anyone involved in wrongdoing should be held accountable, regardless of political affiliation. However, he challenged the fiscal logic of spending taxpayer dollars to pursue litigation against the State, arguing that any financial recovery would ultimately come from taxpayers themselves. He expressed frustration that the Council had devoted significant time to issues unrelated to local government responsibilities and encouraged the City to focus instead on roads, economic development, and municipal services. He commended the Council's recent efforts to attract new businesses to Ramsey.

Mr. Todd Embury argued that if elected officials believe wrongdoing should be condemned, they should apply the same standard consistently across all levels of government. Referencing previous comments made during the meeting, he questioned why some actions by public officials receive attention while others do not. He encouraged the Council to proceed with the proposal if it believed it was a worthwhile use of staff time and public resources, suggesting that the effort would not produce the results supporters expected.

Mr. Michael Swanson, 5368 140th Court Northwest, challenged figures cited in previous discussions regarding the extent of fraud in Feeding Our Future. He stated that while estimates have varied, the amount of proven and convicted fraud is significantly lower than the larger figures often discussed publicly. He urged the Council to use precise numbers when debating the issue.

Mr. Adam Martin, Sunwood Drive, emphasized that he was speaking only as a resident and not on behalf of his employer. He noted that the primary individual responsible for the Feeding Our Future fraud scheme had already been prosecuted and sentenced to prison. He also highlighted recent legislative action creating a State Office of the Inspector General to strengthen oversight and prevent future fraud. He argued that accountability measures were already being implemented through the criminal justice system and the State Government. He questioned the value of using City resources to pursue litigation against the state and noted that Governor Walz is not seeking reelection.

Mr. Rodney Allen, 142nd Avenue Northwest, stated that he viewed the proposal as a significant waste of time. He urged the Council to focus on issues directly affecting Ramsey residents and expressed concern that the discussion was diverting attention away from local priorities.

Ms. Dara Grimmer, 15931 Xenon Street Northwest, addressed Mayor Heineman directly and explained that she had previously supported him because she believed he would focus on issues affecting Ramsey residents. She stated that she felt disappointed and misled by the recent resolutions because they had not been emphasized as topics during the election. She expressed concern that the discussions were creating division within the community and making some residents feel excluded. While acknowledging her appreciation for the Mayor's willingness to listen to residents with differing viewpoints, she urged the Council to focus on issues that directly impact the City and to carefully consider the concerns raised by those who opposed spending public resources on the proposal.

Mayor Heineman then presented the resolution and explained the rationale for asking staff to explore potential legal options. He reviewed findings from state and federal investigations, legislative audits, and public reports related to Feeding Our Future. He argued that state agencies received multiple warnings and red flags regarding potential fraud but failed to act quickly or effectively. He cited findings from the Office of the Legislative Auditor that identified deficiencies in oversight and preparedness. He further connected the issue to state budget decisions, unfunded mandates, and rising costs imposed on local governments. He argued that fraud and financial mismanagement at the state level ultimately affect local taxpayers and municipal operations.

Mayor Heineman proposed that if the City pursued the matter further, staff could explore forming a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) with other Minnesota cities. Under his concept, participating cities would contribute a small amount based on population and pool resources to investigate potential legal action against the State. He suggested that this approach would spread costs across multiple municipalities while potentially creating leverage to seek financial recovery or accountability. He asked City Attorney Johnson whether Minnesota law would permit such a Joint Powers Agreement and whether cities have the authority to cooperate in that manner.

City Attorney Johnson responded that Minnesota cities do possess statutory authority to enter into Joint Powers Agreements for collaborative efforts. She acknowledged that using such an agreement to pursue litigation against the State would be unusual, but stated that the legal authority to form a JPA exists. However, she cautioned that litigation is outside her area of practice and noted that specialized outside counsel would likely be required to determine whether a viable legal

claim exists. She explained that significant questions remained regarding the legal theory, damages, standing, and causation necessary to support a lawsuit. She emphasized that the proposed resolution would authorize only further exploration of those issues, rather than direct the City to file suit.

Councilmember Buscher began her comments by recognizing newly appointed Fire Chief Andy Winkel and humorously suggesting that public donations might be better directed toward purchasing additional turnout gear for firefighters than toward exploring litigation. She then questioned whether any residents had specifically requested that the City pursue legal action against the governor. After learning that staff had not received such requests, she asked City Administrator Hagen and City Attorney Johnson how much staff time had already been spent researching the proposal. Both estimated that they had devoted several hours to the issue.

Councilmember Buscher expressed concern that the proposal appeared underdeveloped and questioned whether the Council should authorize further legal exploration before receiving more information regarding potential claims, damages, costs, and legal standing. She asked City Attorney Johnson whether she had consulted other attorneys and what conclusions had been reached.

City Attorney Johnson explained that preliminary conversations had not identified a clear legal claim and reiterated that specialized litigation counsel would be necessary to evaluate the issue fully.

Councilmember Buscher argued that the proposal appeared speculative and questioned why it had not been discussed first in a work session. She repeatedly emphasized that no residents had requested such litigation and stated that she did not understand why the Council was pursuing the matter.

City Administrator Hagen explained that staff had intentionally limited the amount of time spent on the proposal until receiving direction from the full Council. He noted that Ramsey's established practice is for staff to conduct a preliminary review when at least two Councilmembers express interest in an item and then bring the matter to the Council for discussion. He stated that further research, outreach to other cities, and consultation with outside legal experts would occur only if the Council authorized additional exploration. He also reiterated his general preference that significant policy discussions first occur during work sessions whenever possible.

Councilmember Riley questioned why the matter had not been brought to a work session before appearing on a regular Council agenda.

City Administrator Hagen responded that while he generally prefers work session discussions, the Council has the authority to place items directly on an agenda when requested by at least two Councilmembers.

Councilmember Riley then questioned City Attorney Johnson about the language in the resolution and asked whether she was comfortable with statements asserting that Governor Walz had lied to residents.

City Attorney Johnson explained that portions of the resolution were based on findings and language contained in publicly available oversight reports and were included as part of the staff's effort to draft a resolution responsive to the request.

Mayor Heineman defended the proposal and argued that governments frequently face novel issues that have not been litigated before. He maintained that the purpose of the resolution was not to authorize a lawsuit but to determine whether a viable legal path exists. He rejected criticism that the proposal was a waste of resources, noting that Councilmembers routinely bring forward issues that require staff research. He argued that large-scale fraud, unfunded mandates, and state oversight failures have real consequences for local governments and residents. He stated that exploring potential avenues for financial recovery or accountability is an appropriate responsibility of elected officials. He emphasized that the proposal merely seeks information before any future decisions are made. He reiterated his belief that a Joint Powers Agreement could spread costs among participating cities and potentially allow municipalities to pursue remedies that would otherwise be unavailable individually.

Motion by Mayor Heineman, seconded by Councilmember Olson, to adopt Resolution #26-111, authorizing City staff to explore the City's ability to file a legal claim against Governor Tim Walz and other State leaders for a failure to faithfully execute Minnesota State Law and nonfeasance related to the management of taxpayer money.

Motion failed. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Olson and Specht. Voting No: Councilmembers Buscher, Peters, Riley and Stewart.

Councilmember Buscher proposed directing staff to prepare a "Stay in Your Lane" resolution that would limit the City of Ramsey from advocating for positions or policies that lack a direct and explicit connection to City programs, services, policies, or budgets. She described the proposal as a way to discourage politically motivated or purely symbolic actions by the City Council. She referenced similar policies adopted by organizations such as the Association of Minnesota Counties and other local governments.

Mayor Heineman sought clarification on the proposal's intent and scope, questioning whether it would prohibit the Council from adopting symbolic resolutions and raising concerns about potential unintended consequences.

Councilmember Buscher explained that staff would use existing models from local government organizations to draft language that would appropriately define the policy and avoid unintended restrictions.

Motion by Councilmember Buscher, seconded by Councilmember Riley, to create a resolution to stay in our lane.

Councilmember Specht asked whether the proposed resolution should be reviewed first in a work session or brought directly to a regular Council meeting.

After discussion, Councilmember Buscher indicated she would support a work session review to ensure the policy was carefully considered.

Mayor Heineman acknowledged the proposal but expressed concern about limiting elected officials' ability to speak on issues they believe affect the community. Overall, the discussion focused on whether the City Council should formally establish guidelines restricting its involvement in political or symbolic matters that are not directly related to municipal government responsibilities.

Motion failed. Voting Yes: Councilmembers Buscher, Peters and Riley. Voting No: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Olson, Specht and Stewart.

8. MAYOR, COUNCIL, AND STAFF INPUT

8.01 Legislative Update

City Administrator Hagen provided a brief legislative update and highlighted a major accomplishment related to one of the City's long-standing legislative priorities: establishing an additional river crossing in the northwest metro area. He explained that Ramsey partnered with Champlin, Dayton, and Maple Grove to advocate for \$2.9 million in state funding to begin studying a future river crossing and associated transportation network improvements that would connect the Armstrong Interchange on Highway 10 to Interstate 94 and potentially Highway 610. The funding was approved, and he further reported that the project was also included on the federal funding request lists of Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith for an additional \$2 million. If secured, the combined \$4.9 million would fund environmental review, traffic analysis, corridor planning, and right-of-way preservation efforts needed before seeking future construction funding.

Councilmember Peters promoted the upcoming Dash & Dine 5K.

Councilmember Buscher welcomed the City's new Fire Chief and expressed enthusiasm about working together on future initiatives, including obtaining a second set of turnout gear for firefighters. She also highlighted a recent work session discussion regarding wage theft, labor trafficking, and labor practices in the construction industry, noting that productive collaboration had emerged from those conversations.

Mayor Heineman echoed the welcome to the new Fire Chief. He reflected on the evening's discussions, emphasizing that while Council debates can be challenging, members remain committed to working together for residents. He encouraged the community to continue enjoying recent park improvements, including the splash pad and fishing pier. He praised City staff for their ongoing work to provide high-quality services and amenities.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Riley, seconded by Councilmember Stewart, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Mayor Heineman, Councilmembers Buscher, Olson, Peters, Riley, Specht, and Stewart. Voting No: None.

The regular meeting of the City Council adjourned at 10:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian S. Hagen
City Administrator

ATTEST:

Katie M. Schmidt
City Clerk

Drafted by Sue Osbeck
TimeSaver Off-Site Secretarial, Inc.