

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT
October/November/December - 2002

JANICE RETTMAN
County Commissioner
District 3

220 City Hall / Courthouse
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102
Fax 266-8370, Phone 266-8360

Dear District 3 Resident:

I hope this letter provides you with information on some of the issues being discussed by the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners. The views expressed in this newsletter are mine and/or my staff's and are provided to citizens as a part of my responsibility to keep you informed on what I am doing as your County Commissioner. If I, or my staff, can be of assistance to you please call us at **266-8360** or send an e-mail to janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us.

Sincerely, **Janice**

>

In This Report	
1. Year End Update	2. County Board Adopts Budget
3. Board Expresses Concerns About Funding	4. Election Briefing
5. New Rules For County Contracts	6. More on Property Taxes!
7. Legislative News	8. Tired of Phone Solicitors?
Rettman's Home Page	Board of Commissioners

YEAR END UPDATE

It has been a unique year indeed. The weather tantalized us with an extremely mild winter only to be followed by one of the wettest summers on record. The "boatloads" of money that the state had to give back disappeared into a budget deficit so substantial that it will have a direct impact on our daily lives. The campaign ads started early and they made us blush with embarrassment at the negative tone. "The People's Voice", Paul Wellstone, died just days before the election and his memorial service seemed to only add to the turmoil

that followed. Conservatives swept the elections nationwide causing Liberals to ponder their future yet extra taxes for schools were adopted in many communities.

[Return to the report menu](#)

COUNTY BOARD ADOPTS BUDGET

As of this date there should be no significant changes in the way Ramsey County operates next year. On December 17th the Board adopted its 2003 budget and spending plan that provides continuation of most services depending on what the state legislature does to solve its problems.

Under the plan, the property tax levy will increase 5.89% over last year. In 2002 the total levy was \$175,503,810 and in 2003 it will be \$185,837,562. For a home valued at \$150,000 this would mean an increase of about \$70. However, because the county is only about 1/4 of your property tax bill, increases in your city and school district taxes could raise that amount.

Commissioner Janice Rettman voted against the proposed budget because she believes further cuts, based primarily on staff recommendations, could have reduced the levy without hurting services or meeting objectives.

The County Board also serves as the Regional Rail Authority. In that role they adopted a tax levy of \$4,423,934 which is an increase of \$1,863,434 over last year. This is significantly less than the \$56,133,564 that had originally been proposed. These funds were intended to be the beginning of a multi-year plan for the development of rail transportation, including light rail transit through the heart of Saint Paul.

Again, **Commissioner Rettman** voted against the levy stating that the increase was not justified and that an amount similar to last year would meet the Authority's needs until final decisions are made by all involved. "Transportation is a regional issue and the residents of this county should not have to bear the burden of solving the state's and region's problems. Before we begin to implement a plan we need to have all of the partners at the table with their checkbooks."

BOARD EXPRESSES CONCERNS ABOUT FUNDING

Local governments throughout the state, including Ramsey County, have begun expressing their concerns about the state's efforts to solve its budget problems. On at least three occasions in the past the state has made a commitment to counties and cities to provide financial support, primarily by returning a portion of the sales tax, to reduce dependence on property taxes. The most recent occurred in 1991 when the state legislature directed counties to adopt an additional ½ cent sales tax or lose local aid. The sales taxes collected were to be put in a *Local Government Trust Fund* for distribution to cities and counties

based on need. Just one year later, in 1992, the state legislature withdrew its commitment in order to help solve its own budget shortfall.

The Ramsey County Board is concerned that the state will again use local government aid to solve its estimated \$4,560,000,000 (**that's \$4.56 billion**) budget shortfall. This would force the county to raise property taxes in order to pay for services the state requires them to provide or eliminate programs. The portion of the budget that the county can control has limited impact on property taxes.

[Return to the report menu](#)

ELECTION BRIEFING

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners did not change with the election this fall. Commissioners Janice Rettman (District 3) and Jim McDonough (District 6) were re-elected without opposition while Rafael Ortega (District 5) and Sue Haigh (District 4) easily defeated their opponents. Considering the high voter turnout and pre-election turmoil, the election process ran smoothly with very few reported problems. Even where long lines were reported everyone who stayed was given the opportunity to vote.

[Return to the report menu](#)

NEW RULES FOR COUNTY CONTRACTS

Commissioner Janice Rettman announced the adoption and implementation of two of her initiatives to improve the way the County does business with contractors. Co-authored by Jim McDonough and Rafael Ortega, the new sets of rules impact how some successful bidders doing business with or for the County must operate. The first change requires that bidders submit information regarding their efforts to draw women and minority workers into their workforce and that the businesses participate in the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry Approved Apprenticeship Training Program or a similar program in another state. General contractors must make sure that subcontractors meet the same criteria.

The second initiative requires that future construction contracts needing Board approval indicate justification for or against the use of a project labor agreement and also requires notification be sent to the Saint Paul Building and Construction Trades and the Minority Business Council for their review and comment.

In her comments Commissioner Rettman stated that "These amendments work well together toward our goals of creating apprenticeship opportunities and the development of lifetime work skills. They will ensure that contractors are using established apprenticeship programs, are paying Davis-Bacon wages and are a force in making certain that work is being done on-time, on budget and with no disruptions due to labor or market issues. They also help assure us that county taxpayers get the best job for the best price. Perhaps even

more importantly, though, it is my hope that these new rules expand opportunities in some of the other skill areas that the state has included in its apprenticeship program."

[Return to the report menu](#)

MORE ON PROPERTY TAXES!

In our last report we explained how property taxes are calculated and gave explanations for some of the many terms that are used by government staff. This time we will try to explain how the budget and tax levy are set.

The **budget** establishes exactly how your tax dollars will be spent. For Ramsey County, this includes those expenditures that are mandated by the state legislature, necessary services that are prioritized by the county board and then some discretionary spending for services people need or desire.

Major budget areas include the following:

- Administration
- Community Corrections
- Human Services
- County Attorney
- District Court
- Extension Services
- Information Services
- Landmark Center
- Libraries
- Parks and Recreation
- Property Records and Revenue
- Public Health
- Public Works
- County Sheriff
- Soil and Water Conservation District
- Veteran's Services
- Workforce Development

The County receives funds from a number of sources in order to pay the expenses listed above. The **property tax levy** is the amount of money the county needs to meet its obligations after all other sources of income are considered. For Ramsey County the levy covers only about 1/3 of the total bill.

Sources of funding for the county are as follows:

Revenue from other levels of government:

Federal	16.7%
State	17.4%
State local aid	1.5%

Other	0.3%
<hr/> TOTAL	<hr/> 35.9%

Revenue from other sources:

Service charges and fines	15.1%
Miscellaneous fees and taxes	6.0%
Investment proceeds & land sales	4.4%
Fund balance (carryover or committed for a future use)	2.6%
<hr/> Total other sources	<hr/> 28.1%

Property taxes	36.0%
<hr/> TOTAL (all sources)	<hr/> 100.0%

Legislative mandates are expenditures that the state of Minnesota has adopted as priorities and requires local units of government (cities and counties) to provide. Many are funded, either whole or in part, by the state while others are required but funds have not been provided. Whether or not funds are provided, mandates are required expenditures and are beyond the control of local elected officials. Examples include veterans' services, solid waste management, some human services, some criminal prosecutions and the Sheriff's Department.

Unfunded mandates are priorities that are adopted by the state legislature but whose costs are passed on to the local property tax payer. These mandates are also required and beyond the control of the County Board. Examples include solid waste management, Sheriff's Department and the prosecutions of some crimes.

Discretionary expenses include those that are "optional" but necessary such as the operation and maintenance of county roads and public works facilities, as well as those that enhance the quality of life for Ramsey County residents and/or bring visitors to the area. These include such things as parks, ice arenas, libraries and golf courses.

Should you want a budget snapshot, including income and expenditures, the *2003 Budget in Brief* could give you such a picture. Please call my office (266-8360) or the Ramsey County Budget Office (266-8048) and ask for the *2003 Budget In Brief* brochure.

[Return to the report menu](#)

LEGISLATIVE NEWS

While lobbying state legislators and the governor's office has been somewhat controversial on occasion, it is important to make certain that state legislators understand the impacts of their decisions, to see that Ramsey County residents receive their "fair share " of state tax dollars and to make sure that good public policies continue. On December 17 the Ramsey County Board set its agenda for the next legislative session. The requests include:

Opposition to efforts to transfer funding responsibility for human service programs from the state to the county;

Financial support for the maintenance of county parks used by visitors from the entire metro region;

Funding to upgrade certain interchanges where state highways and county roads meet;

Continued funding of proven social service programs such as in-home visits for teen parents and care consultations to keep seniors in their homes;

And, at **Commissioner Rettman's** request, extension of *This Old House* allowing homeowners to defer some of the taxes that would be applied when older homes are repaired and updated.

[Return to the report menu](#)

TIRED OF PHONE SOLICITORS?

It happens to all of us. Just when you are ready to sit down to dinner the telephone rings. Usually it is not a friend, a family member or an emergency. The conversation often begins with "Need new windows?" "Is your siding in need of replacement?" Or "We'd like to help refinance your home!" Beginning January 1, 2003 you can put an end to most of these annoying phone calls with one simple connection.

New rules adopted by the state legislature last year create a statewide DO NOT CALL LIST for residents who do not want to be bothered by sales pitches. Under the law, telemarketing firms will have to buy the list and the periodic updates and are not permitted to call anyone whose phone number is on it or they face fines up to \$1,000 per violation.

To get on the Do Not Call list you can call the state toll-free at 1-800-921-4110 or contact the Commerce Department on the internet at www.commerce.state.mn.us. Up to 3 residential lines can be put on the list but keep in mind that it will not end all of these calls. The new rules allow nonprofit fundraising, political party contacts and surveys, companies you already do business with and those who want to schedule a face-to-face presentation. Similar rules have been adopted in 28 other states.

[Return to the report menu](#)

E-Mail: janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us

[Ramsey County Home Page](#)

Author: Commissioner Rettman's Office

