

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT
October/November - 2003

JANICE RETTMAN
County Commissioner
District 3

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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 www.janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us.

Sincerely, **Janice**

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COUNTY CEO RETIRES

On May 13th Ramsey County Manager Paul Kirkwold announced his retirement after serving 5 years as the chief officer. However, while Paul only served in that position for a short period of time, he has worked for the citizens of the county for over 30 years. Paul started out as a County crew worker but decided that being the "boss" had its advantages so he went back to school and earned an engineering degree. Paul's career was redirected for a time when he was called to serve in Vietnam but he returned to the county following his

tour of duty. He worked his way up the ladder to Public Works Director in 1990 where he served until his appointment as County Manager in 1999.

To a person county staff have found Paul to be a caring individual who was firm yet fair, and thoughtful yet sensitive, perhaps more so in these tough financial times. One of his notable worthy accomplishments is the new Public Works facility under construction in Arden Hills. This facility will bring all of the department's services and programs

under one roof, as well as provide space to service the myriad of vehicles, including monster trucks, that are necessary to do the job. (You can check out progress on the webcam at www.co.ramsey.mn.us.) What made this project special is the fact that over 80% of the materials from the old, vacant buildings that were torn down were reused or recycled, including the wooden floors. Paul also provided leadership for the construction of the new jail that will be opened later this year and help wade through the budget cuts adopted by the state legislature earlier this year.

Paul Kirkwold is certain to be missed, especially by the County Board who appreciated his honest, quiet demeanor and his ability to respond positively even with difficult problems. If Paul was asked, he would want his lasting legacy to be one of treating people with respect.

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DAVID TWA COMES ON BOARD

The retirement of Manager Paul Kirkwold opened the door for new leadership for Ramsey County. Following Mr. Kirkwold's announcement the County Board developed a process to find the best possible person to fulfill the role of its chief executive.

The firm of Springsted, Inc. was selected to advertise, recruit and recommend qualified candidates for the position. Numerous meetings with the County Board and senior staff aided in defining the minimum qualifications that the Board would require. Ads were placed in national and local publications, trade journals and professional organizations. A number of candidates from around the country applied for the position with 5 recommended for interviews with the Board. The salary, which is restricted to 90% of the Governor's salary by law, was thought to be an issue for many, however, a good pool of candidates still applied.

Following the interview process the Board voted unanimously to hire Minnesotan David Twa. Mr. Twa comes to Ramsey County from Saint Louis County in northern Minnesota, which includes the city of Duluth, where he served in the same capacity. He has also worked in Blue Earth County and has been a practicing attorney. His official starting date was October 1, however, he used unpaid leave in the first two weeks to close out his duties from his previous position and to move his family.

The county manager is responsible to the Board and operates an organization with 3,800 employees and an annual budget of \$510 million plus pass-through funds.

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COMO LAKE SHORELINE RESTORATION PROCEEDS

If you spent some time in Saint Paul's Como Park this summer you may have noticed all the construction activity on the shores of Como Lake. The work project involves the restoration of a good portion of the shoreline by the Ramsey Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), the Capital Region Watershed District (CRWD) and the Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation.

Como Lake is a natural basin that does not have a stream or spring to feed fresh water into it. It had become a major holding pond for rainwater and snowmelt runoff from city streets. Along with that runoff comes sand, dirt, trash, salt and fertilizers. Throw in all of the waste from the ducks and geese and it adds up to a recipe for disaster, especially when the lake level drops in dry weather.

If you grew up in Saint Paul you know that Como was not the lake to eat fish from and you had second thoughts about even wading in the water on a hot day. Today, however, aeration now affords new opportunities for quality fishing and, even though boats are not allowed, the pier on the south end provides access

Efforts have been underway in the last few years to restore the lake by redirecting street runoff to other storm sewers, separating ponds to collect sediment and runoff from the golf course and then restoring the shoreline to a more natural state. Taller plants, for instance, stop sediments from getting to the lake and common aquatic plants help filter the water making it more suitable for fish.

With the aid of an \$18,000 grant from the Department of Natural Resources and a \$33,000 grant from the CRWD the Ramsey SWCD will be planting 700 feet of shoreline on the west side of the lake, planting the steep banks on the southeast corner, planting "Duck Point" on the east side and planting hard stem bulrushes on several sites. In all, some 15,000 feet of shoreline will be restored this summer with much of the work done by volunteers, including Ramsey County **Commissioner Janice Rettman**. Hopefully this effort will go a long way in improving the water quality of the lake for many years to come.

Property tax Truth-in-Taxation notices will be sent this November. The joint public hearing is set for December 9, 2003 at 6:00 P.M., Arlington High School, 1495 Rice Street in Saint Paul.

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RETTMAN INTRODUCES PLAN FOR BRUSH COLLECTION

On September 23rd Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman saw one of her top 2003 priorities adopted unanimously by the County Board. The resolution directs

county staff to explore the possibility of allowing county residents to drop tree and shrub waste, "strub" as staff calls it, at all or some of the county's compost sites.

During last year's discussion of organized collection the Commissioner door knocked over 4000 homes and found one of the biggest complaint was that there did not appear to be a way to get rid of branches and brush because it should not go into the regular garbage collection. As a result it accumulates in backyards or behind garages and often is dumped in road ditches, parks and other public property. Commissioner Rettman discovered that the construction of Saint Paul District Energy's new cogeneration plant created an opportunity for a possible joint project between the County and District Energy.

The new cogeneration plant burns shredded waste wood – trees, hard-bodied plants and construction waste - to produce hot water for heating, chilled water for cooling and electricity. When fully operational the plant will require 280,000 tons of wood waste for maximum capacity and has been searching a radius of nearly 17 miles for possible sources. Anders Rydaker, President of District Energy, was excited to be able to participate in the process because of the company's goals to solve energy problems with environmentally sound tools.

County staff will report back to the Board by the end of October with a plan for implementation and a cost analysis. The plan will include where waste wood will be dropped off, how it will be collected, transported and processed plus a possible way to deal with tree branches from storms. Under the resolution the plan must also include a provision that the wood collected will be sent to the co-generation plant rather than shipped out of state or sent to a landfill. This program will then be included in the request for bids to manage the compost site collection and processing program.

After the vote Janice Rettman stated that " I am thrilled to be able to help solve a major problem for county residents by bringing together two separate needs. It is especially exciting that we might be able to do this at no cost to anyone." Information on when and where wood waste may be dropped off will be included in the next newsletter.

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RAIN GARDEN CREATED

The Ramsey Soil & Water Conservation District was also busy this past summer helping residents of the Coffman Condominiums in Falcon Heights turn a backyard wet spot into a new rain garden. In the past rainwater runoff collected in the low area then entered the storm sewers and eventually flowed into the Mississippi River. Such runoff can contain salt, chemicals and sand from city streets and nearby yards.

Today, deep-rooted grass and flowers native to Minnesota prairies absorb some of the water or filters before it reaches the river. The garden also provides habitat for urban wildlife, especially songbirds and butterflies.

Condo residents, most of whom are U of M retirees, provided lunch for the many workers and volunteers. A "conservation corps" made up of youth from Saint Paul's east side was organized by the Community Design Center to assist on this and other environmental restoration projects. They were supported by condo residents, staff from the Conservation District and many volunteers, including **Commissioner Janice Rettman**, who spent the day planting.

Afterward, Rettman stated that " I am especially excited to see the involvement of youth. They are developing a strong sense of environmental stewardship that will hopefully always be part of their lives."

If you are looking for assistance on similar projects or using native plants in your yard contact the Conservation District at 651-488-1476 for information.

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MAXIMUM LEVY ADOPTED

On Tuesday, September 9th the Ramsey County Board adopted its proposed property tax levy for 2004. The proposed levy is 6.4% more than this year with nearly all of the increase going toward state required services.

By state law cities, counties and school districts are required to adopt a maximum levy by September 10 but budgets, that is, the actual spending plan for the next year, are not adopted until December 16. Once the maximum levy is adopted, the boards cannot decide to raise it higher when the budget is approved, even if they find they won't have enough money to pay for the services they desire. However, if they find the proposed levy is more than they need County Boards may reduce the amount.

Property taxes pay only a portion of the services that Ramsey County provides with the rest coming from the state, the federal government and a small portion from foundation grants. For 2003, property taxes paid for just over 1/3 (36%) of the total budget. This is about 25% of your total property tax bill. It will be slightly higher for property owners in suburban communities because additional funds are added to operate the libraries. Saint Paul operates its own libraries so those costs are added to their portion of the property tax.

Minnesota counties provide many services that are dictated by the state legislature. Some of the mandated services are fully funded by the state while others are required but have no funding attached. If the county wants to reduce its spending it can only do so within a few departments, such as Public Works and Parks and Recreation. However, this "discretionary" spending is just a small portion of the County's budget so even major reductions would have little impact on the levy. Of the \$510 million budget for 2003, just 11.4% is

discretionary which means that 89 cents of every dollar spent by Ramsey County in 2003 has a state mandate attached to it.

The well-known financial problems at the state has had a significant impact on this year's budget and next, forcing the county to analyze all of the programs and services it provides. The consensus of the Board at this time appears to be that "if the state cut a program, or reduced funding, we will cut the program or reduce funding" because the county simply provides the services while the state sets the priorities.

Throughout the process **Commissioner Janice Rettman** has made it clear that, despite the need and despite the quality and effectiveness of the program, it is the state that decides the level of services for the county to provide. She stated that "The legislature has sent the message to cut services and that is what I am committed to doing. While I clearly understand the need out in the community I cannot support passing the responsibility on to the property tax payer. They are some of the people who can least afford to take up the slack. So there are no sacred cows to protect in next year's budget."

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DISCUSSION CONTINUES ON SUBURBAN HRA LEVY

Earlier this year the Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority proposed a property tax levy of under 1% for suburban communities to support local housing programs. Under the plan, every community would receive a set level of funding and would control how funds are spent, including pooling resources or saving it for up to five years for a large development. If agreement can be reached, a plan will be adopted in December.

The proposed levy plan was developed in response to a legislative request by some of the county's suburbs for additional HRA levy authority. **HRA Chair Janice Rettman**, who proposed the plan, stated that "I believe it will provide equity and local control and still maximize the County's leverage capacity. The issue has been discussed for at least two years and it is time to move forward or let it die. "

Saint Paul has its own development authority (HRA) and is not included in the plan.

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CITY ASKS FOR HELP ON SNOW EMERGENCIES

City of Saint Paul's Public Works Director, Bob Sandquist, will be asking residents to assist in telling people to move their cars off the street during snow emergencies. Over the years a number of methods have been used to try to inform the public that a snow emergency has been called and people need to get their cars out of the way so the streets can be plowed., including sounding the public safety sirens. In spite of these efforts

hundreds of tickets are issued making car owners angry as well as residents who then have to deal with mountains of snow in front of their homes.

Sandquist's plan is really quite simple: if you know a snow emergency has been called contact your neighbors and make sure they know also. Additionally, in areas where there a lot of renters it would be neighborly to offer the use of an off-street space if you have one available. It beats having to deal with the ice and snow pile after the plowing is done.

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