

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT
December - 2003

JANICE RETTMAN
County Commissioner
District 3

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

Sincerely, **Janice**

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[PUBLIC WORKS FACILITY UNDERWAY](#)

After two years of planning, construction on the new Ramsey County Public Works facility got underway this summer. The 250,000 square foot facility is a joint effort between the County, the City of Arden Hills, the Moundsview School District and the Ramsey County Library. Each entity will have space for offices and storage as well as vehicle maintenance where necessary.

The facility is located on property that once housed the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant. The building that was previously on that site was basically "recycled". Most of the

building, including the steel framing and the hardwood floors were recovered to be reused for some other purpose.

You can drive by the site, which is located on Highway 96 near Hamline Avenue, or you can view the construction from your own home by entering the Ramsey County webpage at www.co.ramsey.mn.us and clicking on the webcam link. The project should be completed by the fall of 2004.

A new patrol station for the Ramsey County Sheriff's Department to support suburban communities that contract for police service is also being planned for the site.

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FALCON HEIGHTS TOWN SQUARE UPDATE

Construction is under way for the new Town Square development at Snelling and Larpenier in Falcon Heights. The 4-1/2 acre project consists of 58 senior housing units, 15 for-sale homes and 10,000 square feet of retail space at a total cost of \$7.5 million.

In order to keep the senior housing units affordable for the long-term, Ramsey County assisted by providing \$500,000 from its Housing Endowment Fund, \$200,000 in federal CDBG (Block Grant) funds and \$200,000 in federal HOME Investment Partnership Funds.

The Housing Endowment Fund is funded by proceeds from the sale of excess County properties and provides support for affordable housing. The program is designed to get the maximum amount of value for excess property, return such property to the tax rolls, provide funds to build housing to meet the needs of county residents and, at the same time, build up the property tax base for the new or upgraded housing sites.

One area of need that is most likely to increase over the next 30 years is housing for people who want to move out of their large, single family home and into something better suited for their age and lifestyle without moving out of their neighborhood.

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HRA LEVY LAID OVER

In the last newsletter we reported that the Ramsey County HRA (Housing and Redevelopment Authority) was considering a suburban-only property tax levy to fund housing efforts for the County's 18 suburban communities. On December 4 the HRA Board decided not to implement a levy for next year but will continue to discuss the options available and seek a consensus among communities. Eight cities opposed the levy, three supported the plan and seven did not respond.

Commissioner Janice Rettman, who proposed the levy for discussion, stated that "I am never disappointed when we don't institute a tax but we still need to find a way to help our

smaller cities with the housing services they need. My main goal is to make sure that senior citizens are able to stay in their own homes or at least in their own neighborhoods rather than be forced out when they no longer need the space or cannot maintain their single family home."

Additional meetings will be held next year as the HRA tries to bring the communities together to reach an agreement.

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COUNTY BUDGET ADOPTED

In early November the Ramsey County Board's Budget Committee recommended its 2004 budget that will reduce County spending by \$19.7 million (3.9%) from 2003. In spite of this reduction in spending the property tax levy will increase 5.36%. The reason for the increase lies in the state legislature's shift of some costs to the county. For instance, Minnesota counties will now have to house some prisoners on behalf of the state and pay for those costs. The counties have also been directed to pay costs for nursing home residents under age 65. Other county services and programs have been eliminated or reduced because of changes in state priorities and funding.

Throughout the Board's deliberation the common theme was "if the state cut the program we need to cut it". As a result the County has cut 125 positions or about 4.5% of its workforce. Because of some timely and thoughtful staff management and early retirements layoffs were kept to a minimum.

The adopted budget does, however, reflect an increase in facility spending including the recently completed Law Enforcement Center, a new Sheriff's patrol station to support suburban communities, the Public Works facility and an emergency communications system that will allow communication between cities.

Of the County's budget, 70.4% of the spending is mandated by state law. Nearly half of that (47%) is paid by property taxes. Of the county's total spending, 39.7% is funded by property taxes and the rest is paid primarily by the state or by grants. A small portion is supported by fees such as ice arena rental, golf fees and other charges.

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PROPERTY TAX LEVY ADOPTED

On December 9th the Ramsey County Board, the Saint Paul City Council and the Saint Paul School District held a joint public hearing on their proposed property tax levies for 2003. Approximately 65 citizens were there and commented on a variety of issues including light rail transit and the County Board salary increase (which Commissioner Janice Rettman was the lone vote against).

On December 16th the County Board adopted its budget of \$488,713,622, down 3.59% from 2003, and its 2004 property tax levy of \$197,811,166, up 6.44% from 2003.

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SNOW SHOVELING PROGRAM PROCEEDS

At the request of **Commissioner Janice Rettman**, the Ramsey County Department of Corrections is working with some Saint Paul neighborhoods to get street corners cleared of snow and ice during the winter.

The County's Sentence-to-Serve program puts selected individuals convicted of minor transgressions to work in the community. The program has helped many neighborhood groups clean up parks, plant gardens and provide labor for neighborhood cleanups. Unfortunately, these activities are limited to the spring, summer and fall, yet Minnesota has four seasons. This effort will provide another opportunity for community service during the winter.

In our efforts to get traffic moving snow gets pushed up on the sidewalks at intersections where it often freezes solid and it remains until spring. Many citizens, especially seniors, struggle to get over the mountains of snow and ice just to get the bus they rely on and for many people it can affect their health and welfare. This becomes more than a temporary inconvenience.

Commissioner Rettman stated that "I know from door knocking that a lot of people just stay home rather than deal with the ice and snow. Doctor's appointments are sometimes missed and food or medicine can become a problem. This is a win-win situation. Citizens become mobile again and workers get satisfaction from helping the community."

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WHAT IS YOUR PROPERTY WORTH?

Ramsey County property assessors were busy before the Joint Truth-In-Taxation hearing on December 9. Residents had a variety of questions about the estimated market value of their property and how that value is determined.

Every property owner should receive a valuation statement some time in March that indicates the property's value upon which the following year's property tax is based. Keep in mind that there are two values for each parcel. The first is the estimated market value which is the assessor's best guess as to the amount a buyer might pay. The second is the taxable value upon which the property tax is actually based.

Because of state legislation, limits were set on how much of the increased value may be taxed. The idea was to help stabilize taxes, prevent huge jumps in property taxes during periods of inflation or when values climbed rapidly. If you recently purchased your

property these values will be very close. If you have lived in your home for many years and the sale price of homes in your area have increased dramatically there could be a large gap. A more recent state law requires that this gap will be closed by 2008.

If you believe the estimated market value assigned to your home is higher than it is actually worth you can appeal the decision. The first step is to contact the Assessors' Office at 266-2131 and discuss with them how your valuation was set. Make sure the information on file is accurate and that the property is properly classed. For instance, if this is your home, make sure the property is homesteaded. If you recently refinanced have a copy of the appraisal handy to support your case.

If you still disagree you can appeal to the Board of Equalization and then, if necessary, to the Minnesota Tax Court. The Assessor's Office (266-2131) has printed guides to help you through the process.

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FYI:

The new Ramsey County Law Enforcement Center (LEC) is now up and operating. The facility, located at Lafayette Road and Grove Street near downtown Saint Paul, includes the Sheriff's Department Offices, 2 courtrooms and the jail. The old jail on Kellogg Boulevard, across from the Court House, is now up for sale. Are you interested?

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