

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT
January/February/March 2004

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

Wanted: Waste Wood

*Give us your tired, broken branches
Lurking in your back yards;*

*Give us your poor tree limbs
Languishing for a purpose;*

*Give us your huddled masses of wood waste
Piled and decaying next to your garage.*

*Give us your wretched wood refuse
To be energized for heating, cooling & electricity.*

Beginning April 3rd, four of Ramsey County's yard waste collection (compost) sites will accept tree and woody shrub waste at no additional charge. The wood waste will be chipped and sent to Saint Paul's District Energy Plant where it will be burned in the facility's new cogeneration plant to produce electricity, hot water for winter heating or chilled water for summer cooling.

The tree and shrub waste should be relatively clean (no nails, wires, ropes, etc.) and cut to a length that can be handled easily. It does not need to be cut into small pieces, just whatever length is necessary to fit into your vehicle or trailer. It will also need to be kept separate from leaves and grass clippings which must be dumped at another spot on the compost site.

Residents are also reminded that construction lumber and scrap wood should be placed in your regular trash or taken to a transfer station.

Out of consideration for those who live near the sites, Ramsey County staff reminds people to secure your load properly. And, please, do not try and drag a tree to the compost site no matter how close you live.

**No treated wood
No commercial drop-off
Ramsey County residents only
Best of all, no charge!**

Locations: Eastside (Frank & Sims Streets)
Midway (Pierce Butler at Fairview)
Arden Hills & White Bear Township

Hours: Mon-Wed-Friday – 11-7
Saturday – 9-5; Sunday – 11-5
(weather permitting)

This on-going environmental project is a joint effort by Ramsey County and Saint Paul District Heating sponsored by Commissioner Janice Rettman, and inspired by District 3 Citizens.

For information call (651) 222-7678 or check the website (www.co.ramsey.mn.us).

Getting Rid of Buckthorn

The new tree/shrub waste collection now makes it possible for residents to trim trees and bushes, especially lilacs that should be thinned periodically to thrive. But Ramsey County residents are also encouraged to remove buckthorn from property you control.

Buckthorn has been classed as a noxious weed because it is not native to Minnesota, spreads rapidly and can kill off other vegetation. It also is spread over long distances by birds who carry and then drop the seeds. If controlled, buckthorn can be used effectively in gardens. Unfortunately, it usually gets out of hand and then spreads well beyond its intended space. Also, unfortunately, most of this spreading occurs in our parks and river bluffs where natural areas are not maintained.

To help with the problem the volunteer "Buckthorn Busters" are continuing their efforts this spring in Como Park.

Need A New Tree?

While we are on the subject of trees, the Friends of Saint Paul and Ramsey County Parks are holding their annual tree sale in April. Trees are an important part of landscaping projects and make an excellent gift to remember loved ones.

Make sure you choose the proper tree for the intended location. Tall, fast growing trees should not be planted under power lines or near houses but they may be appropriate if you have space and want to shade your house. Conversely, slow growing or small ornamental trees can work well in small yards and provide color in spring and fall.

Don't have space? Consider donating a tree to one of our many parks. Each tree costs \$50 (additional donations are accepted) and the Friends of the Parks makes all of the arrangements.

Trees are available for pickup on May 1st. Contact Friends of the Parks at 651-698-4543 or check their website (www.friendsoftheparks.org).

Commissioner Requests Strike Settlement

Commissioner Janice Rettman's request at a recent County Board meeting to appeal to the striking bus drivers union and the Metropolitan Council to return to the table fell on deaf ears. In her request Rettman stated that many citizens are totally dependant on public transportation to get to work, schools, doctors appointments and the basics like getting to the grocery store.

At a subsequent meeting the County Board approved a request from staff to spend \$130,000 for transportation for some aid recipients. Rettman opposed this plan primarily because it would not help some of the most dependent citizens but also because it interfered with negotiations and would not help get the buses running.

Labor unions and citizen groups success-fully demanded that the Board rescind that action because it interfered with the collective bargaining process and because it did not provide funds for the working poor, the handicapped or senior citizens whose needs are no less important – a fact that Rettman had stressed early on. In addition, many of the groups that would have helped provide transportation services would not accept the funds or become involved.

In a letter to Metropolitan Council Chair Peter Bell, Commissioner Rettman asked both the Met Council and the drivers' union to return immediately to the bargaining table. She stated that "To many of my constituents delay means more pain and more disadvantage, including the loss of income." The Commissioner also told Mr. Bell that proposals to fund non-profit agencies to provide transportation undercuts the process and delays resolution of the contract.

Finally, Commissioner Rettman expressed her misgivings about statements from individuals and organizations who claim that the shutdown shows that this metropolitan

area does not need buses. "We are one of the largest metropolitan areas in the country and to not have a working public transportation system is a crime."

Take Advantage of Tax Refunds, Credits And Services

As April 15 draws near we want to remind county residents that there may be a way to save on the tax bill. Property tax refunds are a frequently overlooked item. After finishing their Minnesota income tax form many people do not look for the property tax refund form while others assume they do not qualify. It only takes a few minutes to fill out the form (M1PR) and you may be pleasantly surprised, especially if you have had an increase.

Income limits apply to one part of the refund program, however, current Minnesota law also has provisions that provide refunds in other cases. For instance, if a homeowner's property tax rises more than 12% and at least \$100 from the previous year they may be eligible for a refund, regardless of income.

Even if you do not own your home you may be eligible for a refund that is available for qualified renters and many nursing home residents.

There is no rush to fill out the property tax refund form because the deadline for filing for a property tax refund is August 16, not April 15th as many people assume.

Also under Minnesota law, property owners over age 65 may defer some of their property tax until their home is sold. Special rules apply including a maximum household income of \$60,000 for the year before the application is made and owners must have homesteaded the property for at least 15 years. Interest not to exceed 5% will be applied to the deferred tax.

Some Ramsey County residents may be eligible for the federal Earned Income Credit and Minnesota's related Working Family Credit, another often overlooked refund. Families must have at least one child and there are income limits. Like the property tax refund this is a separate tax form but it is due by April 15. Under some circumstances families may be eligible to get next year's earned credit in advance.

Finally, you may actually save some expenses by taking advantage of the services you already pay for.

For instance, in Ramsey County, trash haulers are required to have a volume-based fee structure. If you are paying the maximum amount but consistently have only one or two bags of trash contact your hauler and request a lower level of service.

You can reduce your trash volume by taking out recyclable items for curbside pickup and by donating used clothing.

If you use wood chips in your gardens remember that they are free at Ramsey County compost sites, when available.

Hard to dispose of items such as old paint, solvents, used motor oil, antifreeze and fluorescent light bulbs should be taken to the hazardous waste collection sites where the items are sorted and recycled for industrial use. There is no charge for this service.

Also at the hazardous waste collection sites you can turn in a mercury thermometer and get a free replacement (one per household).

Rettman Re-Elected HRA Chair

On January 6th Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman was re-elected as Chair of the County's Housing and Redevelopment Authority. She was also appointed Chair of the Board's Health Services Committee and Vice-chair of the Budget and Criminal Justice Committees. In addition, commissioner Rettman serves as a Law Library Trustee, on the State Community Health Services Committee, the Solid Waste Resource Recovery Board, the Ramsey Soil & Water Conservation District, the Ramsey County Extension Service and the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District.

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt was elected as Chair of the Ramsey County Board and Commissioner Tony Bennett was re-elected chair of the County's Budget Committee.

DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATE

District 7 – Thomas-Dale

Western State Bank is making plans to build a new building at its current location at University Avenue and St. Albans Street. Preliminary designs are for a two story building that encompasses many of the features of historic buildings along the Avenue. In fact, it looks exactly like one would expect a bank to look like in '04 – 1904, that is. Western Bank is a committed member of this part of Saint Paul that has provided banking and community development services when no other institution would take a chance.

District 7 elections are set for Tuesday, May 25th, and will include a dinner and guest speaker.

District 8 – Summit University

Along with District 7, the Summit-University community is looking forward to a **new library** on the southwest corner of Dale & University. The \$9 million project is a joint effort between the city and Legacy Management Company and will be 5 stories tall encompassing 31,800 square feet of space.

The library will include underground parking, a homework center, a business resource center, the library, a community meeting room and as many as 70 computer internet connections.

103 housing units will be above the library with 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units, all for rent. Separate parking for the apartments will be on the second level.

Legacy Management is not new to this area of Saint Paul. Owner Archie Givens grew up in the area and is working with the Selby Area CDC on a joint housing project located on Selby Avenue at Grotto.

Along with the Lexington-Hamline neighborhood, District 8 is reviewing a proposal for the southwest corner of Lexington and University. The project will be a mix of housing and retail space.

SUPC elections are set for Saturday, May 15th. Voting locations are as follows:

9:00 A.M. to Noon at the MLK Center,
270 N. Kent Street

Noon until 4:00 P.M. at the SUPC Offices, 627 Selby Avenue.

15 seats are open and the filing deadline is noon on Wednesday, May 5th.

Contact Jim McDonough at 228-1855 for information or a filing form.

SUPC'S Annual Meeting will also be held on May 15th and includes a "free" pancake breakfast from 9:00 A. M. until noon at the MLK Center, 270 N. Kent Street.

District 10 – Como Community

The annual **Community Garage Sale** is set for Saturday, May 22, 9-4:00. To sign up call the office at 651-644-3889 by May 15th.

The **North End/South Como Home Block Nurse Program** offers a variety of services to assist community residents and families through difficult times. Services include home health care and nursing services, housekeeping assistance, one-on-one home visits, van service and home safety checks to name a few. Contact them at 651-642-1127.

Crime prevention tips: With warmer weather on its way the community council reminds people not to become "volunteer" crime victims, especially for auto break-ins. Most break-ins are a matter of opportunity, so lock your doors and don't place anything of value in a visible. Because thieves often watch parking lots, lock valuables in your trunk before you get to your destination. It is also a good idea to keep your doors locked while you are driving.

Finally, the **North Dale Community Center** is open with regular activities for children and adults. The fields should be completed early this summer.

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