

**RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT**  
**July/August/September - 2004**

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**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](mailto:janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us).

Sincerely, **Janice**

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**Manager Proposes 4.9 % Budget Increase**

On July 27th Ramsey County Manager David Twa presented his recommendations for the 2005 budget to the County Board. Total spending for next year could be about \$514 million with about 40% (\$207 million) funded by property taxes. The remainder of the budget is supported by state aid, federal aid, grants and a variety of fees such as golf green fees. For the past 2 months and over the next 3 months the Board will review the budget and discuss various priorities with county staff.

The Board is expected to adopt the maximum tax levy for 2005 on September 14. By state law it must do this no later than September 15th. Once the levy is adopted the Board may reduce that amount when it approves its budget, and the tax levy that funds it, in December but they cannot increase the levy, regardless of what happens in the interim.

Several citizens commented on the proposed budget at a public hearing on September 7. A second hearing, called a truth-in-taxation hearing will be held in December. You should contact Bonnie Jackelen at 266-8014 for information or if you wish to speak. Written comments are also encouraged. Details of the budget can be found at the County webpage at [www.co.ramsey.mn.us](http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us).

Most of the budget increase will fund increases in employee costs, particularly health insurance premiums, and new mandates passed on from the legislature in its efforts to solve the state budget problems. This includes housing state prisoners at the end of their sentences. The Board made some thoughtful yet significant budget and program cuts last

year to accommodate other changes in funding and programs adopted by the state legislature. No new cuts are expected at this time.

**Commissioner Janice Rettman**, known as a “fiscal watchdog”, stated that “ it is my intent to find ways to lower the proposed levy increase by 1 or 2% before we adopt the final levy. I recognize that there is no longer fat to trim or corners to cut but I think we can tweak it a little bit to achieve this without losing any of our core services.” A 1% cut would be about \$1.98 million, however, 83% of the tax levy is for mandated services so any adjustment must come from the 17% that the Board can control.”

For further information on the budget or the adoption schedule contact the County Manager’s office at 266-8009 or check the webpage.

For information on property taxes check Commissioner Janice Rettman’s website at [www.co.ramsey.mn.us](http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us).

### **County Board Adopts Limited Smoking Ban**

As expected, Ramsey County Commissioner Rafael Ortega, whose district is in Saint Paul, introduced an ordinance that would prohibit smoking in all restaurants within the county. The ordinance, a compromise for the Board, is identical to the Olmsted County (MN) ordinance that has been in effect since January 1, 2002. Commissioner Janice Rettman, whose district includes Falcon Heights and part of Saint Paul, had indicated she did not support a total smoking ban at this time. She stated that this is an issue that should be dealt with by each of the 19 communities in Ramsey County or, in the alternative, dealt with at a regional or state level.

Minnesota state law already prohibits smoking in public places except in designated smoking areas. That law also prohibits smoking in licensed day care centers and group homes during hours of operation, as well as hospitals, health care facilities, doctor’s offices and our state prison facilities.

Commissioner Rettman also said that “ People have the right and the ability to make choices about where they spend their hard-earned dollars, including where they want to eat and drink. Equally, establishments in the bar and restaurant business have the ability right now to offer a smoke free environment to their customers and install great ventilation systems. I recognize the health factors here but resources for enforcement are very limited. I think the Board needs to focus more on the issues that county government should be directly involved in like child protection, support for individuals and families in distress, public safety and solid waste.”

Commissioner Rettman did vote in favor of the compromise ordinance but only after conferring with each of the 150 or so bars, restaurants, bowling alleys and Legion or VFW Posts in her district. The County ordinance also had the support of the hospitality industry who view it as a workable compromise. The new ordinance bans smoking in all restaurants that earn more than half of their revenue from food sales. Smoking will be permitted in all

bars and restaurants whose revenue from liquor sales is more than 50% at the discretion of the owner.

One question that remains is whether or not the county actually has the authority to dictate smoking rules in establishments that are not regulated by the county, such as those in Saint Paul. It appears at this point, however, that the authority issue will not be challenged, at least by Saint Paul.

In a related matter, the Saint Paul City Council voted 4-3 twice to adopt a much stricter ordinance for that city. The controversial law was not supported by the Mayor, who vetoed it both times shortly after it was passed, or by the hospitality industry that includes bars and restaurants.

### **Register To Vote!**

If you moved recently or are a first time voter you can ease the process by registering to vote in advance. This is as simple as calling the Election Bureau at 266-2171 and asking for a Voter Registration Card or you can download one on your home computer from the elections section of the County's webpage. You can also register at your new polling location by bringing a valid photo ID with your current address or a photo ID along with proof of residency such as a phone bill or electric bill with your name and current address.

Out of town on election day? Absentee ballots are available by mail until October 27 or you may vote in person at the County Election Bureau until November 1.

### **Property Tax Information Available**

Are property taxes confusing to you? Do terms like levy, assessments, limited market values and tax capacity sound like a foreign language? Minnesota's property tax system is one of the most complex systems in the nation and very few people really understand it. Commissioner Janice Rettman has added an information sheet to her website that should help all property owners better understand just what it is that people are talking about when they say things like "total tax capacity". To access this information go to the elected officials section of the Ramsey County webpage ([co.ramsey.mn.us](http://co.ramsey.mn.us)) and click on District 3.

Don't have access to a computer? Contact the Commissioner at 266-8360 for a free copy. Be sure to leave your name, address, city and zip code.

### **Como Park To Remain Free**

Saint Paul residents received some good news in late July when Mayor Randy Kelly withdrew all plans to charge fees for users of the city's most popular park. Commissioner Janice Rettman, who has represented the area for over 20 years, either as a City Councilmember or County Commissioner, was thrilled to hear the news. "It seems like we

have worked forever to fight efforts to charge people who use the park. Hope-fully, this will put it to rest for a long time.”

This decision has broad policy impacts for Saint Paul as it tries to balance long-standing practices against efforts to fund city services without raising the tax levy. The nationally known zoo, conservatory and other park facilities are expensive to operate and maintain and resources to upgrade the facilities to current standards are difficult to find or must compete with other city needs, such as streets and playgrounds, in the capital improvement budget.

The city has received several million dollars in grants from the state and Metropolitan Council through various regional parks programs, most of which has been allocated to facility improvements. However, because of the high number of “non-residents” who use the park, it has often been looked at as a possible money raiser in tough financial times. “The tradition in this country is that parks and libraries are amenities that should be there to serve all citizens regardless of income. If you spend any time at Como, you realize that working folks who sometimes struggle to pay their bills and put food on the table can still enjoy a picnic and a walk through a wonderful zoo without feeling different or being turned away. When it comes to our parks, I don’t think we should have a two-class system - those that can pay and those who must stay home.”

Como Park is viewed as a metropolitan treasure and it is estimated that some 2 million people visit the park each year. Area residents frequently bring out-of-town visitors there to enjoy its facilities and the zoo is used as an educational resource for schools and day-care providers. In addition, thousands of people walk, run or bicycle around the lake or use the park’s playground facilities.

Not to be forgotten, the community has also stepped forward to aid the Como Park campus with the Como Zoo and Conservatory Society which has literally raised over \$8 million for Como’s new Educational Resource Center. Equally, it has assisted the Parks and Recreation Department staff with fundraising and volunteer efforts that continue as the Conservatory and Zoo Society enters its 22nd year with gusto.

If you are interested in membership or volunteer opportunities call the Society at 487-8229. And, if you stop by Linder’s Greenhouse (270 West Larpenter Avenue) you can be one of the first to have a Como Park Rose that is specially grown by Bailey Nursery.

Finally, for those who do want to contribute something, several donation boxes are available throughout the zoo and conservatory. Collected funds go directly to support the park, not the city budget.

### **Election Judges Needed**

The success - or failure - of our democratic process lies, in part, with a group of dedicated volunteers who make sure that every vote gets counted and every person who votes is eligible to do so. Volunteers are needed for the general election on November 2nd.

## Qualified judges

- work half-days (6:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. or 2:00 until 9:00 P.M.) or full days (6:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M.)
- Are paid \$8.00 per hour
- May get time off regular jobs with pay in some circumstances
- Receive necessary training
- Often can work in their home precincts

To volunteer contact the Ramsey County Elections Office at 266-2171 or download an application from the website at [www.co.ramsey.mn.us/elections/judge.asp](http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/elections/judge.asp)

## **Protect Your Personal Information**

The fastest growing crime today involves theft and re-use of personal information. Below are just a few ways to protect your information - and your identity - from abuse.

Always tear up or shred bank and tax records before putting them in the trash. Shredders are an inexpensive tool to save you a lot of grief. Cross-cut shredders are considered the best. If you don't have a shredder, your bank may shred canceled checks for you. Just be sure to save the checks from donations with your tax statements.

Regardless of the interruption, pay full attention to your cash machine transaction and do not let anyone stand near you - especially someone on a cell phone. A common practice is for thieves to use the cell phone to video your transaction and then access your accounts later.

Never give out your social security number unless you are required by law or specifically to do business with some companies. Employees are often upset when you decline but you have a right to know what it will be used for and who will have access to it. In addition, if you do give it out, write it down on a piece of paper rather than give it verbally where others may hear.

And never give personal information over the phone or on-line unless it is a business contact that you initiate. Bank and credit card companies never use the phone or computer network (e-mails) to check out their security. Thieves, on the other hand, find these effective tools.

## **District Council Update**

District 10 - Como Park

In a joint effort to deal with surface water run-off Saint Paul, Roseville, Falcon Heights, Ramsey County and the Capitol Region Watershed District are putting the final touches on a community plan. Flooding and pollution are continuing problems as more and more

rainwater and snowmelt are added to our sewer system and overflow ponds. Contact the Watershed District at 644-8888 for information.

Shoreland restoration continues around Como Lake in another joint effort to clean up the lake and make it healthier and more attractive for fish and urban wildlife. Egrets, herons and other birds can now be seen along with the myriad of ducks, geese and turtles.

The annual cleanup will be held on October 9 from 8:00 A.M. until 2:00 P.M. at the Fairgrounds. Watch your mail in September for information and a voucher.

Finally, funds are still available to have boulevard tree stumps ground up for just \$35. Residents are responsible for waste removal and refilling the hole. Call District 10 at 644-3889 for information.

#### District 11 - Hamline/Midway

The Coalition is offering its fall Micro Entrepreneur Training and Support Program for those considering a new business or who have just started one. Contact Dave Gagne at 646-1986.

Hoa Bien Restaurant is considering plans to expand to a new building on the northwest corner of Lexington Parkway and University.

Like other district councils, funds are still available to have boulevard tree stumps ground up for just \$35. Call 646-1968 for information.

#### District 13 - Lexington/Hamline

The Annual Dinner is set for October 25th. This is a great opportunity to meet your neighbors and the people who are elected to represent them, as well as to find out what issues face the community and strategies to solve problems.

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[Ramsey County Home Page](#)

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