

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT
January/February/March - 2005

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. Community Meetings on Transportation	2. First Meetings Draw Interest
3. What's Next For Transit Issues	4. County Compost Sites Open
5. District Council Update	6. Joint Communications Center Inches Forward
7. Government Made Easier	
Rettman's Home Page	Board of Commissioners

[Community Meetings On Transportation](#)

Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman has scheduled a series of community meetings to get the public's input on proposed changes to public transportation on University Avenue. The primary purpose of these meetings is (1) to let people know how to respond to the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)* tentatively scheduled to be released this summer and (2) to get direct feedback from residents and businesses on the proposed light rail or bus transit systems.

The DEIS, which has not yet been released, should include information on a dedicated bus way, a light rail system and better bus management on University Avenue. The purpose of

the EIS is to identify all of the issues that arise from each of these alternatives and compare them with the other proposals. That comparison is then used to determine which of the systems is most cost effective, which provides the most benefit to the community and which warrants funding from public dollars.

Once released, the DEIS is available for community review and an opportunity is provided for citizens and business owners to make comments on the data, commentary on possible impacts and any recommendations. A minimum of 30 days from the date of release is usually required but Ramsey County has requested that the Metropolitan Council provide a 60-day response time. It is expected that copies of the DEIS will be available in some of the public libraries in Saint Paul. The old DEIS is currently available in the Lexington, Hamline, Merriam Park, St. Anthony Park and Rice Street Libraries.

Residents and University Avenue businesses have not yet weighed in on possible transit changes and impacts but one thing is certain - if light rail or bus rapid transit is built, there will be changes in the surrounding community. What those changes will be and how they will be addressed should be included in the final EIS. Preliminary engineering and design work would provide further detail.

Residents in the I-94/University/Thomas Avenue corridor were notified by mail of a meeting in their neighborhood. While the meetings have been organized by neighborhoods to facilitate input, anyone may attend upcoming meetings yet to be scheduled.

[Return to the report menu](#)

First Meetings Draw Interest

Nearly 200 people showed up on a cold February evening to learn more about the *Central Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (DEIS) and to express their views on the proposed transit changes. The final copy of

the DEIS has not yet been released for public input but the initial submission to the federal government was poured over by a number of meeting attendees.

The St. Paul Chamber of Commerce and the Midway Chamber, both of whom have come out in support of light rail transit on University Avenue, were represented but the vast majority were community residents who are concerned about the possible impacts such a system might have on their neighborhood and their individual homes. Resident parking, convenience and loss of some bus service were major concerns as was access to retail needs. Business owners expressed concerns about construction schedules and access both during and after construction. Equally, concerns about loss of on-street parking, on-going costs of doing business, such as snow removal, and re-claiming lost customers once the project was completed were raised. Many residents suggested that the I-94 or Pierce Butler corridors would be better suited to relieve freeway congestion.

At the forum Commissioner Janice Rettman and her staff were available to talk to people on an individual basis to explain the proposals as well as some of the information from the draft EIS. Participants were asked to identify issues, indicate possible solutions and make general comments. Forms were also available for individual written comments. All citizen input from these community meetings will be forwarded to the Metropolitan Council as part of the hearing process.

Following the meeting Commissioner Rettman said "I am thrilled that so many regular folks came out. It shows that they are knowledgeable about major issues and are interested in preserving their community. The Metropolitan Council has to make sure that residents and businesses are included in this process all the way to its conclusion. We also have to make sure that neighborhood issues are dealt with up front, not as an after-thought."

The second meeting, held at St. Peter Claver Church for the Aurora/St. Anthony neighborhood, drew about half the number of residents but the area is about 1/3 the size of the Hamline-Midway neighborhood. That meeting included a lively discussion and many more specific questions about what will happen in the community, many of which need to be addressed in the final EIS. Again, residents suggested that the I-94 corridor would be better suited to relieve freeway congestion and that convenient local bus service is critical to meet the needs of community residents.

Also in attendance were Ramsey County Board candidate Toni Carter and proponents of personal rapid transit (PRT). This is a small vehicle for 1-3 people that travels on a fixed guideway above the street. That technology has not been included in the current central corridor discussion.

Comments Wanted !!!

While the focus of the community meeting efforts was to contact every property owner in the University Avenue area, Commissioner Janice Rettman also recognizes that public meetings do not always work with citizen's schedules. Equally, the proposed changes would impact all St. Paul and Ramsey County residents who will be called upon to pay a portion of the costs. As a result, she is still looking for community input on the proposed transit changes so anyone who wants to comment can do so by calling her or her staff at 651-266-8360, sending an e-mail at janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us or sending in the attached comment sheet. All comments received will be forwarded to the Metropolitan Council and the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority for inclusion in the DEIS testimony.

[Return to the report menu](#)

[What's Next For Transit Issues?](#)

The Metropolitan Council is expected to receive the draft EIS from the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) sometime this summer, possibly as late as August. Once it is here, a 30-day comment period is required but Commissioner Rettman will request that the Regional Rail Authority ask for a minimum of 60 days. During that time a series of public hearings will be held for community input. The Commissioner will also make every effort to notify property owners in the University Avenue directly, as well as everyone who sent in written comments. All interested people will need to watch for announcements as they are posted in newspapers and on the Ramsey County website.

[Return to the report menu](#)

County Compost Sites Open

Winter usually lingers into April and hits us with one last blast, but not this year. With spring upon us and the ground drying out quickly the urge to cleanup five months of debris also comes early. Ramsey County's seven compost sites are now open with a reminder of two recent changes.

Beginning last year four sites (Midway, Arden Hills, White Bear Township & Frank/Sims) accept tree and brush waste from county residents so those accumulated broken branches, woody garden waste and trimmed shrubs like lilac bushes can now be disposed of properly. Amazingly, some 25,000 tons of wood waste was collected and turned into electrical energy last year. This equates to 91,000 cubic yards or 18 football fields piled 3 feet high.

Secondly, arborists and master gardeners recommend that most trees be trimmed while they are dormant so next winter these same sites will be open periodically to take only tree and shrub waste. Commissioner Janice Rettman, who authored the tree waste legislation, stated that " Our staff tells us that this wood waste collection has been the most popular county program to come forward in years. I am proud to be a part of it, but I am more pleased that it is an idea that came from a District 3 citizen."

For further information residents should check the Environmental Health section of the Ramsey County website www.co.ramsey.mn.us for locations. Summer hours of operation are Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 11:00-7:00, Saturdays from 9-5:00 and Sundays from 11-5:00. They are closed Tuesdays and Thursdays.

[Return to the report menu](#)

District Council Update

District 5

May 17 – Neighborhood Action Committee, 6:30 P.M.. at Arlington Library

May 21 – Neighborhood Cleanup, NRG Processing site

May 24 – District 5 Board Meeting, 7:00 P.M. at Arlington Library

District 6

May 25 – Land Use Committee, 1021 Marion St.

District 7

May 14 – Community Cleanup, 8-1:00 p.m.- Vasko Rubbish, 309 Como Ave.

May 21- Annual Meeting, 5-7:00 p.m. - St. Stephanus Church

District 8

May 21 - Pancake Breakfast and Elections, 9:00-Noon, SE corner of Selby & Dale

District 10

May 17 – Board Meeting, Arbor Point Community Room, 635 Maryland Ave.

District 11

May 12 - Picnic and Annual Meeting, Hamline Playground

Lex-Ham Community Council

June 11 – Neighborhood Garage Sale

June 18 – Neighborhood Cleanup

July 24 – Ice Cream Social

[Return to the report menu](#)

Joint Communications Center Inches Forward

On Tuesday, April 26 the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners approved the criteria for further discussions with the cities of St. Paul, Maplewood and White Bear Lake to combine their police and fire communication centers into a single unit. The criteria includes an eight year "buy-down" under which the cities would agree to pay the County a declining amount each for seven years based on a percentage of their 2005 dispatch center budget allocation. The County would then cover the additional costs for both construction of a new facility and its operations.

This was a very contentious issue because the cost will be spread to all cities in the county. Currently, suburban communities pay about 55% of the county tax levy while St. Paul pays

45%. Under the plan, the 18 suburban communities will pay for a portion of St. Paul's bill for dispatching services.

The heavy use of tax increment financing by St. Paul, especially in the downtown area, also means that residential properties pay a higher share of the cost.

Commissioner Janice Rettman, representing Falcon Heights and parts of St. Paul, and Commissioner Jan Wiessner, who represents the northwest suburbs, made attempts to amend the criteria to include more input from unrepresented communities and to allow for cost allocation based on the number of calls. These efforts were rebuffed by a majority of the Board.

Following the meeting Janice Rettman stated that "This is a fairness issue for everyone involved and our suburbs should not have to subsidize St. Paul's government. What we have yet to see is the additional cost of meeting the acceptable standards for dispatching. It appears that St. Paul's current operations do not meet those standards so suburban communities will pick up an even larger part of the cost than what was presented."

While it was difficult to determine what the actual cost will be because no financial information was presented, what is clear is that property taxes will rise both in the suburbs and St. Paul. St. Paul elected officials have already stated that they would not cut taxes corresponding to the County increase but would instead use those funds to pay for other budget items.

The second major issue is the makeup of the governing committee. After a great deal of discussion and failed amendments the Board voted in a split vote for St. Paul to have 5 representatives, suburban communities 4 representatives with the Ramsey County Sheriff completing the 10 member governance committee. While this is only an advisory group the voting mix gives greater control to St. Paul even though it will be paying less than half of the cost.

Other issues that need to be resolved in the negotiations is the merging of staffs and common protocol so that police and fire personnel understand what each of the various codes and jargon mean. Currently each department uses variations in their work.

The joint communications center is part of the county's switch to an 800 MHz radio system that will allow police and fire departments from all 19 cities to talk on the same radio frequencies. Under the current VHF system that is not possible because of the different assigned frequencies so police working from multiple departments working to apprehend a suspect, for instance, can only communicate through a dispatcher or via cell phone. Commissioner Rettman has always supported the construction of the 800 MHz public safety system.

[Return to the report menu](#)

[Government Made Easier](#)

Your first-half property tax payment is due by May 15 and the second-half portion is due by October 15. Tax payments can now be dropped off at the Saint Paul Water Utility building just north of Rice Street and Larpenter Ave. Just another idea from a District 3 resident looking for ways to make local government more convenient and accessible.

If you have your own suggestions for efficiencies in county government feel free to contact Janice Rettman at 266-8360.

For county issues and links to other government information the Ramsey County website is www.co.ramsey.mn.us.

[Return to the report menu](#)

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

[Ramsey County Home Page](#)

Author: Commissioner Rettman's Office