

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT

January-March 2007

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.

Rettman Challenges LRT Fees

Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman has challenged the County's Regional Rail Authority to come up with a better way to fund the on-going costs of operating and maintaining the proposed light rail transit line for University Avenue. The Commissioner has consistently questioned the wisdom of having county property tax payers pay much of the cost of a regional system when many of those that benefit live outside of the county.

According to Rettman, there are a number of reasons not to use the same financing model for the Central Corridor as the Hiawatha Corridor. First, it is expected that a large percentage of riders will come from outside of St. Paul and outside of the county. Second, many of those riders are expected to travel through the city to destinations in downtown Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota campus or jobs in the downtown St. Paul area.

Third, many St. Paul residents living in the corridor will be expected to continue to rely on the 16A (University Avenue) bus with less service or the I-94 Express bus because the few LRT stations along the Avenue will be located about one mile apart. Fourth, the 16A bus schedule will be reduced significantly from the

current 7 to 15 minutes to 27 minutes or more which means fewer buses and less service.

Fifth, unlike the larger Hennepin County, which now pays about one-half of the cost to operate and maintain the Hiawatha LRT line, Ramsey is the states smallest county and is nearly completely built up, thus having a limited tax base and limited opportunities for tax base expansion thus restricting its tax capacity.

Next, the county has many tax-exempt and government property owners that do not contribute to the tax levy yet could be major benefactors of the new system. And finally, the county will have no voice in the operation and maintenance of the LRT line.

Rettman stated that "To me it is unconscionable that we would give a blank check each year to a metropolitan agency with absolutely no voice in where the lines and stations will be located, when he trains will run, how often they will run, how many trains will be coupled together to serve riders at peak times and when or where needed maintenance will be done. It is already clear that we will have no voice in the operation of the 16A bus that is, and will continue to be, of critical service for residents in the corridor nor the feeder system that should serve our neighborhoods near to the LRT line."

Park Ordinance To Be Adopted

There are some great advantages to living adjacent to one of the county's many parks and open spaces. Today, there are more than 1500 properties that abut our parks but, unfortunately, a few of the owners have taken advantage of that by taking some space for their own use. The Ramsey County parks and open spaces belong to all of the county's 512,000 citizens and no one can claim space for their own use – even if it is adjacent to their property and “unused”. In addition, there are no adverse possession laws that apply to public spaces. A right to ownership by adverse possession can sometimes occur when a property owner has used, maintained and paid taxes on a piece of a neighbor's property for a long period of time.

Encroachment issues usually occur where backyards abut relatively unused open space. Violations identified by the county staff include mowing to add space to a backyard, installing gardens, dumping leaves and yard waste and putting up sheds or play equipment on open space. More serious violations include storing motor vehicles or boats, creating ATV trails, installing fences to claim space and trimming or even cutting down trees to improve the view or use as firewood.

In response, the County Board will soon be adopting an ordinance that will strengthen its ability to deal with these problems. Enforcement usually begins with a verbal notification from an inspector. If the matter is not taken care of in a timely fashion then it is followed by an order to correct the problem. If the matter is still not resolved, any private property can be removed by county staff and a criminal citation issued by the county sheriff..

The new ordinance language clarifies the current ordinance and should help staff more effectively communicate with property owners, to educate them about the proper use of county spaces and bring legal action if needed to resolve a problem.

Commissioner Janice Rettman, a long-time champion for clean properties and clean neighborhoods, also recommended that staff review local ordinances like St. Paul's which would allow billing offenders for cleaning up a site or fining the property for illegal activities or both, if the new ordinance does not work.

St. Paul's Long-Range Plan Available

The Long-Range Planning Committee of the St. Paul Planning Commission has released its report looking back over the last 25 years and identifying trends that might impact future growth and development in the city. The plan acknowledges that St. Paul has lost much of its industrial-based economy; the downtown area has changed from primarily office and retail to a mix of housing, entertainment and office; the river and riverfront are key elements to attract people rather than reserved for industrial use; historic preservation and new investment has transformed many neighborhoods; and immigration has changed the demographics of the city.

For the future, we can expect more people in the city and the region; fewer skilled workers coming into the job market just as a large percentage begin life in retirement; more jobs will be found outside of the city making “reverse commute” an issue; the population will continue to diversify; and rising residential values will make housing less affordable for some.

Entitled *A Lens for the Future: Saint Paul for the Next 25 Years*, the report, along with district council neighborhood plans and many neighborhood small area plans, can be found at the city's webpage at www.ci.stpaul.mn.us/depts/ped/

Volunteers Needed

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners is always looking for volunteers to assist various programs and advise the board on issues affecting citizens and departments. Currently, individuals are needed to serve on the Community Health Services Advisory Committee to advise both the board and the St. Paul City Council on health-related issues. Also, drivers are needed to transport Human Services clients to and from medical or social service appointments. You must be 18 years of age, be able to maintain confidential information, have a good driving record (and your own vehicle). Contact the Ramsey County Human Services Volunteer Services about this and other volunteer opportunities at 651-266-4090.

LRT Update, Etc.

It is anything but quiet as St. Paul's two Central Corridor task forces continue to meet and discuss zoning and design issues along University Avenue and in Downtown. The first, the University Avenue Task Force, focuses on the area west of Rice Street to the city border while the Downtown Task Force is looking at the capitol and downtown areas. Because the downtown area will not change much, that task force has expressed concerns about skyway access and the ability of pedestrians to move to the "entertainment district", that is, the Xcel Center and the Ordway Theatre.

The other city task force, the University Avenue Task Force has a much tougher time as it looks at possible uses for vacant land, studies transit-oriented development (TOD), looks at ways to increase density and address the concerns of the neighborhoods. Increased property values, protecting small businesses, and gentrification are key considerations for this group. They have made it clear that they want assurances that the people who live and work there now area able to afford to stay once the line is built.

If you want to view the consultant's reports and add comments you can stop by the Central Corridor Resource Center at 1080 University during the day, or check the Central Corridor section of the city of St. Paul's website at (www.ci.stpaul.nm.us).

On another level, the Metropolitan Council has established 3 committees to help guide its work. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meets on the third Thursday of each month at the Goodwill/Easter Seals Building at 553 Fairview Avenue (St. Paul). Their charge is to advise the Met Council on issues that arise primarily during the construction and operation of the system. This includes design, traffic flow, business conflicts, pedestrian crossings and access. The Business Advisory Council (BAC) was formed to deal with issues that businesses in the corridor may have and the Central Corridor Management Committee is set up to make major decisions on the system such as some expected cost cuts that will be controversial. The proposed line is already about \$150 million over the Federal Transit Administration's allowable budget.

In other news, the Ramsey County Board is considering buying the old Union Depot Concourse and the current downtown post office from the U.S. Postal Service. The county has already received \$50 million from the federal government to purchase and rehab the concourse to be used as a multi-modal hub. Here, high speed trains, local commuter trains and busses would come together with the light rail system so people could continue on to their destinations. Many of you may remember walking down the historic Depot concourse to the gates to board trains or meet arriving guests when we had passenger rail service in St. Paul. The Union Depot itself is under private ownership and not likely to be bought by the county.

The 1934 Post Office building, the largest (not tallest) building in downtown, houses 1277 employees that sort and distribute mail in the 385,000 square foot building. The Postal Service is making plans to move these operations (and all of the modernized equipment) to property in Eagan. On average, the plant now processes 8,243,988 pieces of mail daily.

There are still a number of issues for the Postal Service to resolve including new roads and bridges to get trucks to and from the Eagan site. A final decision by the Service is expected by the end of 2007. Even if they move, they have assured us that, on this side of the Mississippi, they will still be able to deliver local mail by the next day and there will continue to be a post office presence in the downtown building.

NACO Prescription Discounts Available

Ramsey County has recently entered into an agreement with the National Association of Counties (NACO) for a prescription drug benefit program for county residents. It is estimated that 8 out of 10 pharmacies participate in the program nationwide including Cub Pharmacies, CVS Pharmacies, Target Pharmacies, Snyder's and Walgreen's to name a few.

Under the plan, residents can save an average of 20% on prescription drugs that are not covered by insurance and that are purchased at participating pharmacies. There are no enrollment forms, no restrictions and no limits on how often you can use the card. Just present

NACO Discounts (Cont.)

your card at the time of purchase and the discount will be applied.

While savings can be achieved, it is important to note that this is not an insurance program and it cannot be used on top of your regular health insurance drug benefit to reduce your co-pay.

Cards are available at most St. Paul and Ramsey County libraries, Ramsey County offices, the City Hall/Court House Information Desk, or Commissioner Janice Rettman will even send you one if you call and leave a message including your name, address and zip code, at 266-8360.

Selling An Old Cell Phone?

As technology advances many people are selling cell phones when they upgrade to another system. They need to remember, however, that cell phones permanently store a great deal of information. Crime detectives have been able to use recovered data to crack homicide cases and retrieve photos putting people at the scene of a crime or even participating in it. However, this data can also be retrieved by others even though it was thought to be erased.

Like personal computers, data is stored in the memory and is never actually erased. Only the references to it are deleted. Knowledgeable hackers can access this and use it to take advantage of the previous owner. As a test, one company bought used "smart phones" on eBay and found such personal information as bank accounts numbers, passwords, medical prescriptions and even a business plan to win a multi-million dollar government contract.

Encrypted data is generally protected but be aware that what you thought was cleared from your phone may still be there. Your service provider or phone manufacturer may be able to provide you with information on how to secure your phone when you plan to sell it or give it to someone else.

District 5 (651-774-5234)

Neighborhood Action Committee
3rd Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
@Arlington Library

Board of Directors
Every 4th Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.
@ Arlington Library

District 6 (651-488-4485) district6@qwestoffice.net

Board of Directors
1st Monday, 6:30 p.m.
North Dale Recreation Center

Land Use Task Force
4th Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.

District 7 (651-298-5068)

Board of Directors Meeting
2nd Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
689 N. Dale Street

District 8 (651-228-1855)

Board of Directors Meeting
4th Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.
Hallie Q. Brown Center

District 10 (651-644-3889)

Board of Directors Meeting
3rd Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.
Como Park Historic Street Car Station

District 11 (651-646-1986)

Board of Directors Meeting
3rd Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
1564 Lafond Avenue

District 12 (651-649-5992)

Board of Directors Meeting
2nd Thursday 7:00 p.m.
890 Cromwell Ave.

Lexington-Hamline (651-644-3207)

Board of Directors Meeting
Last Monday of each month, 7:00 p.m.
@ Dunning Recreation Center

Snelling-Hamline (651-644-1085)

Board of Directors Meeting
First Thursday of each month, 7:00 p.m.

City of Falcon Heights (651-792-7600)

City Council
2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 7:00 p.m.
Falcon Heights City Hall