

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT

Summer 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.

County Board Adopts New Pay Rate Despite Protest

On Tuesday, April 17 the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners adopted a 25% salary increase despite objections from some county residents. Others objected to the time of the meeting indicating that it did not allow working people to be present to speak for or against the proposal.

Commissioner Janice Rettman voted against the increase as well as the procedures used to bring the request forward. At the request of some citizens, Commissioner Rettman proposed an evening public hearing so the "regular folks can get here". That request died for lack of a second on the motion. Under Board rules, every issue up for a vote must be moved by one commissioner and seconded by another, neither of which may be the chair of the meeting. Commissioner Jim McDonough stated he would not support Rettman's request unless all public hearings were held in the evening but that was not before the Board and the discussion would be best addressed at a different time. Commissioner Rettman responded that she "would love to have evening public

hearings" however there was no additional support for the proposal. Commissioner Jan Parker was excused from the meeting and Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt was speaking at the legislature while the matter was being discussed. Neither voted on the issue but had expressed support at other meetings.

Rettman Addresses Holiday Assembly

To some, Memorial Day is a day off of work or school and an opportunity to open up the cabin or have a picnic. To most of us it is a somber reminder that our friends, neighbors, sons, daughters, parents or distant relatives fought for this country. In small towns across the country people use this as a time to clean up grave sites and decorate them in recognition of service. In fact, many older citizens refer to it as Decoration Day.

Many men and even women have died in battle but many more were citizen soldiers who spent time in service and then returned home to continue their lives. We owe a debt of gratitude to all who have served this country and Memorial Day is the time we

set aside politics and recognize their contributions.

For the second year in a row, Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman had the privilege of being the keynote speaker at Oakland Cemetery in St. Paul. This cemetery is unique to St. Paul in that it holds veterans dating back the Civil War in addition to many of the city's early founders and leaders.

In her remarks the Commissioner quoted Robert Frost's poem *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening* noting the "we are not just here to enjoy the beauty of this setting. Instead I submit his words must be listened to carefully. For indeed we have promises to keep those who are laid to rest... And on this memorial Day as we honor our fallen heroes and pray for those yet serving and those who are still mending, we indeed, have miles to go before we sleep. Promises to keep and miles before we sleep."

Legislative Update

Despite a long session and lots of activity, Ramsey County received little from the Minnesota state legislature this year. One program they sought to continue is the Environmental Response Fund, also known as ERF. This program uses a special tax on mortgage deed registrations to assist in reclaiming polluted lands for housing, jobs and new property taxes (See Maxon Steel/Dale Street Shops story below). The current law is set to expire this year and cannot be continued unless the legislature passes it and the governor signs it into law. This year ERF was extended by the legislature based, in part, by Ramsey County's success but it was included in the tax bill that Governor Pawlenty vetoed after the session ended. Other items that got lost in state politics include funding for the Central Corridor light rail transit line and for state and local road construction and repair.

The gas tax, paid at the pump, has not been raised since 1988 and will not rise this year

either due to the Governor's veto yet the demand for new roads and more freeway lanes continues to increase as congestion in the metro area rises. Demand easily exceeds available funds leaving cities and counties that rely on state aid under funded.

Ramsey County public works officials estimate it will take over 100 years to repair and upgrade the county's roads based on the current aid formula and allocation. Other counties and cities face similar problems leaving property taxes as the only choice for road repair and upgrading. Some metro area counties are looking at a \$5 "wheelage" tax for each motor vehicle registered in the county, but this is not considered a long-term solution because it generates limited revenue and construction costs continue to rise. Proponents like it because it is a "user fee" and because most homeowners would not see a difference in their taxes. But there are a number of other problems with the current wheelage tax law that makes it unattractive including

- many vehicles are registered on-line or in other counties;
- funds are deposited at the state and then reimbursed to the county;
- the state may delay its reimbursements, use the funds temporarily and retain any interest earned;
- the county property tax levy must be reduced by the amount generated.

In addition to funding for roads, the legislative session failed to provide additional funding for transportation alternatives such as bus service and light rail transit. In order to proceed with its North Star Line, Hennepin County will be using property tax dollars to keep the project moving forward in hopes of future reimbursement. Ramsey County has chosen not to take that step for the Central Corridor but is providing upfront support to the Metropolitan Council for the preliminary engineering phase.

Maxson Steel/Dale Street Shops Project Now Complete

What once was an early thriving industrial area that supplied quality, living wage jobs to people who lived in the Frogtown and North End areas has now come full circle. Steel industry and railroad car repair dominated the site for nearly 100 years but changing markets and business practices pushed the area to become an unsightly, polluted mess nearly devoid of vegetation. Truck traffic and late light noises were a problem but perhaps not as much as the wind-blown dirt and pollution that entered nearby homes and businesses.

Through the assistance of a number of agencies, including Ramsey County, the City of St. Paul and the St. Paul Port Authority the land is now fully occupied with new activity. Nine new businesses have invested \$27 million in their buildings and generate nearly \$820,000 in property taxes each year, compared to about \$50,000 before the project started. Other partners included the area residents, North End Revitalization (now called SPARC), Frogtown Action Alliance, North End-South Como/District 6 Planning Council, Thomas-Dale/District 7 Planning Council, the Metropolitan Council, Minnesota DEED, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency .

On Saturday, June 2 a community ceremony was held to recognize the accomplishment with the unveiling of a historical plaque, tree planting, lunch and music. Plus, a few speeches to recognize those who helped in making the nearly 10-year project happen, as well as the acknowledging the site's early history and the magnitude of this accomplishment.

For its part, Ramsey County provided over \$1 million to help with cleaning up the polluted land to make it possible to rebuild on the site and donated the first parcel of land. The money was allocated by the County HRA Board through the

Environmental Response Fund. That fund is supported by a small tax on mortgage registrations that was authorized by the state legislature a number of years ago. Former state representative Tom Osthoff, who represented part of that area for many years, successfully championed the ERF program at the state legislature with this site in mind.

In her remarks, Commissioner Janice Rettman noted the community-wide effort to link the Frogtown and North End neighborhoods rather than have them divided by empty land and empty buildings. She also spoke about one area resident who, in need of a job, watched the site being cleaned up and redeveloped. He inquired many times as the building was being constructed and, because of his good timing and persistence, was finally given an application and was hired when the business opened. Not only is he proud of his new job, he has been promoted with added responsibilities.

The 34 acre site, now known as the Great Northern Business Center, will have about 650 jobs, many of which will be available to area residents.

Rock/Tenn Study Proceeds Slowly

Rock/Tenn's study of options for a new steam facility is proceeding in a slow, methodical process. The plant, once known as Horner-Waldorf Corporation and later Champion Paper, has been informed by Xcel Energy that Xcel will no longer be able to provide steam to the facility when it converts the High Bridge plant from coal to cleaner burning natural gas. Rock/Tenn needs the steam to process waste paper into corrugated cardboard and boxboard. If you eat Wheaties for breakfast or make Betty Crocker cakes they are likely packaged in Rock/Tenn boxboard.

In response, Rock/Tenn is looking at the best alternatives to produce steam from within their facility. In the near future they will burn fuel oil but that is not a long-term solution because of the cost and the

condition of its boilers, the newest of which dates back to the late 1960's. Plant managers are working with the Saint Paul Port Authority and District Energy to come up with a new facility that would generate steam and also electricity for the plant and the surrounding neighborhoods. Fuel options under study include wood waste, agricultural waste and refuse derived fuel (RFD). RFD, which should not be confused with mixed municipal waste (garbage), is already being used by Xcel Energy in its Red Wing power plant.

A community advisory panel, made up of community representatives and experts in finance, technology and environmental impacts will soon be working with Rock-Tenn on the study. The Ramsey County Health Department will help provide technical assistance.

In addition to cost, the long-term availability of each of the fuels will be part of the final decision. If local managers do not find a cost-effective solution, they have been informed that the plant will likely close. At the heels of the Ford Plant closure, that would leave a great void of living-wage jobs and another unusable industrial facility in Saint Paul.

District Council News and Schedules

District 5 (651-774-5234)

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

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

District 6 (651-488-4485)

www.neighborhoodlink.com/stpaul/dist6/

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)

www.d7mix.org/

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

Note: Tait Danielson has been hired as the new executive director replacing Kristen Kidder who has served in the position for several years. Mr. Danielson starts in August.

District 8 (651-228-1855)

www.summit-u.com/

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

District 10 (651-644-3889)

www.comopark.org/

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

District 11 (651-646-1986)

www.hamlinemidwaycoalition.org

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

District 12 (651-649-5992)

www.sapcc.org

Board of Directors Meeting
2nd Thursday, 7:00 p.m.
@ 890 Cromwell Avenue

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.
Location varies, call or check website

City of Falcon Heights (651-792-7600)

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