

## RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT

Early Spring 2008

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, send an e-mail to [janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us](mailto:janice.rettman@co.ramsey.mn.us) or send a note to us, Room 220 ,City Hall/Court House, 15 West Kellogg Boulevard, St. Paul, MN 55102.

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### Central Corridor Chugs Forward

The proposed Central Corridor light rail transit line along University Avenue moves slowly but critical deadlines are being met. At the request of Governor Pawlenty, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, the Metropolitan Council and the University of Minnesota sharpened their pencils to bring the project closer to the projected budget. Initially the line, as proposed, would have cost \$990 million dollars - over \$1.1 billion if all the desired bells and whistles were included. By compromising on plans the price came down to about \$909 million.

Cuts from the plan included a tunnel through the U of M campus and an extension to the back of the Union Depot in Saint Paul. Revisions included building three-car platforms for longer trains allowing more riders, cutting diagonally across a downtown St. Paul block at Fourth and Cedar Streets and building a maintenance facility on Ramsey County land near the Union Depot.

Additional stations in St. Paul, sought by the neighborhoods most affected and where many of the expected riders live, were not included. However, the plan will include building the underground infrastructure for three additional stations in Saint Paul between Snelling and Rice Street. The neighborhoods have recommended Hamline, Victoria and Western Avenues as the best locations.

The neighborhoods were displeased that the stations requested would not be built as part of the project. Many people are concerned that without the stations the line would simply cut their neighborhood in half, make it inconvenient or impossible for many people to get to a station and make the line useless for meeting day-to-day travel needs.

While understanding the need for compromise, Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman remains concerned that the University Avenue neighborhoods could pay a high price for the system. "We still need to fight for service improvements, feeder buses in the residential

neighborhoods and additional stations for starters. That pencil can't be so sharp that it redlines the neighborhoods that have to live with the system."

### **Cost-Effectiveness Index Lowered**

By making these changes the Met Council, who will be the builder and operator of the line, was able to lower what is known as the cost-effectiveness index (CI) to an amount below what the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires for federal funding. Because there are several communities vying for the same transit funds, the FTA has established rules requiring that projects must be cost effective, that is, the money spent must provide riders with transportation alternatives that save time and increase ridership in the corridor. The CI is a ratio based on the expected annual operating costs and the capital (construction) costs divided by the travel time saved by the number of riders who use it.

Operating costs are pretty well fixed and predictable but lowering the construction costs, increasing the number of riders adding more or longer trains and/or reducing travel times (fewer stops) will bring the CI value down. In order for projects to move into the final design stage the FTA has set this value at \$23.99. By making cuts and other changes decision makers were able to get the Central Corridor CI value down to \$23.80.

No other decisions have been made at this time and details will be finalized over the next few months as the Met Council works on its preliminary engineering study. The study is supposed to identify other, yet unknown, problems as well as answer the voluminous questions community residents have already asked. For further information and notices for community meetings check out the Metropolitan Council's website at [www.metrocouncil.org/transportation/ccorridor/CCcalendar.htm](http://www.metrocouncil.org/transportation/ccorridor/CCcalendar.htm).

In an ironic twist, after the LRT compromise was reached the Governor used his line-item veto to delete the \$90 million Central Corridor appropriation from the state bonding bill possibly jeopardizing the whole project. This action came as a surprise to everyone involved but negotiations will continue in the legislature

which must end its session by May 19<sup>th</sup>. Stay tuned.

### **Most University Avenue Parking Will Be Lost**

As the preliminary engineering plans are slowly being released for public review it was learned that as much as 85% of the on-street parking along University Avenue in Saint Paul will disappear. This would have a significant impact on dozens of existing businesses that rely on street parking for their customers. The FTA will ask the Met Council to show how they will deal with it.

Many buildings are constructed lot line to lot line so there is no chance for an owner to create replacement parking spaces. To this point in time, the city of Saint Paul has not discussed options for businesses but the zoning guidelines and planning documents actually discourage new parking lots. While parking is a critical issue for businesses, adjacent residential neighborhoods are expected to feel the impacts as commuters use side streets near LRT stations for parking which would add to the problems.

Throughout this latest review process Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman has expressed a number of concerns about this project and how it may affect University Avenue neighborhoods. "From the beginning we were told that on-street parking would continue to be available on University except at intersections where stations would be located. Now we are told that is not the case. These small businesses are the life blood for these neighborhoods and for St. Paul. They provide more than half of the new jobs in the city. To take away their only source of parking will destroy them. "

To review the design and parking plans you can check the Metropolitan Council's website <http://www.metrocouncil.org/transportation/ccorridor/UnivAv.htm>

### **Local Sales Tax For Transit Approved**

Earlier this year the Minnesota state legislature gave the seven metropolitan counties the option of initiating a local sales tax to help pay the cost for public transportation in the region. To proceed, at least two of the counties needed to approve the tax and join what is known as a joint powers board that would disperse the restricted

funds according to rules and plans the joint powers board adopts.

The Ramsey County Board, acting as the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority, has now adopted the ¼ of one-percent sales tax in lieu of using property taxes to pay for its share of the construction and operational costs for the Central Corridor. Anoka, Hennepin, Washington and Dakota counties have also approved the sales tax and have also created the required joint powers board to administer funds collected.

Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman supported the plan because (1) it would actually lower the amount county property owners would be paying for transit and (2) the use is severely restricted. The county has the option to pull out if the joint powers board does not work and. Rettman stated that “I voted against the original memorandum of understanding (for the operation and maintenance of the LRT line) because it was an open checkbook for the Met Council in which the property taxpayers supplied the dollars without any voice on spending. The local sales tax puts control back in the hands of the county board, spreads the operating cost among more users and visitors and removes the long-term burden from the property tax.” (See *Transit Sales Tax Statement 2008* at [www.co.ramsey.mn.us/cb/district3/index.asp](http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/cb/district3/index.asp) for the Commissioner’s full details.)

### **Have You Filed For Your Property Tax Refund?**

Speaking of property taxes, in Minnesota, homeowners and renters may be eligible for a refund on their property taxes if they meet certain income criteria. For 2008, the income limit for a renter is \$50,430 and the household limit is \$93,480 for homesteaded property owners. In addition, a special refund is available for people whose property taxes increased by more than 12% over the previous year and at least \$100.

To receive your refund you must file Form M1PR before August 15<sup>th</sup>. For further information on the rebate or to get an M1PR form check with the Department of Revenue at 651-296-3781 or on their website at [www.taxes.state.mn.us/taxes/index.shtml](http://www.taxes.state.mn.us/taxes/index.shtml)

### **Foreclosure Help Available**

Ramsey County property owners have a number of sources to help them when foreclosure is a possibility. The key is to get to help early in the process. Counselors have told us that too many times people come in late and, sadly, “we have to tell them they need to make arrangements for themselves and their families because they are going to lose the home.” If you know someone who needs assistance they can call

Home Ownership Center – 651-659-9336  
ACORN Housing – 651-203-0008  
City of St. Paul Foreclosure Prevention Program - 651-266-6626  
Neighborhood Development Alliance - 651-292-0131  
Lutheran Social services (Suburban Ramsey) - 1-800-777-7419

Interpreters are often available so that language should not be a barrier to getting help.

### **Property Tax Deferral For Seniors**

With the cost of gasoline expected to approach \$4 per gallon and other basic living expenses, like food and heating fuel, increasing by leaps and bounds, many Minnesota senior citizens may find a little help from the state by deferring some of their property taxes. Under state law, homeowners may defer a portion of their property tax until their home is sold or transferred, all qualifying homeowners die or the property no longer qualifies as a homestead, that is, one in which the homeowner actually lives.

The amount that can be deferred varies depending on your financial circumstances but the owners will be responsible for paying part of the property tax up to 3% of their income.

To qualify the owner:

- (1) Must be over the age of 65 (both spouses if married);
- (2) Have a household income under \$60,000;
- (3) At least one spouse has lived in the house for at least 15 years;
- (4) Have no tax liens against the property;
- (5) Does not have mortgage or other debt against the property more than 75% of the estimated market value.

**To sign up for the deferral program contact the Minnesota Department of Revenue at 651-555-6088 and ask for form CR-SCD and the instructions that go with it. You must apply by July and the deferral starts the following year. Seniors can apply at any age beginning in the year you turn 65.**

To be clear, this is a loan program with interest (not to exceed 5% annually) and not tax forgiveness. The state actually pays the property tax to the local governments on behalf of the homeowner. The yearly loan plus interest is then repaid at a later date, usually when the property is sold. Any property tax rebates and state income tax refunds you would normally receive, or lottery winnings should you be so lucky, will be applied toward the balance due on your deferral. If your household annual income rises above \$60,000 you no longer qualify until it falls below that amount.

As with any major financial decisions consult with knowledgeable people to make sure it is right for your and your family.

### **Early Childhood Education Scholarships Available**

Do you have a child who will be 3 years old by September 1<sup>st</sup>? If so, you may be eligible for yearly scholarships to place your child in a quality early education program that fits your needs. Under a new program proposed by the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank's Chief Economist, Art Rolnick, scholarships of up to \$13,000 per year (for 2 years) will be offered to some St. Paul families in an effort to better prepare their children for school. Why would an economist be interested? Studies consistently show that children who are prepared for school have better success in school and in life and usually do better financially than children who were not prepared. In other words, an investment in early childhood education is the best investment we can make for positive, long-term results – it's proven "cost-effective".

Participating families are not limited to one child in the program plus, once accepted, the scholarship stays with the child if he or she changes education programs or moves to another area of the city.

Families with children under the age of 3 or soon to have a baby will not be left out. They

will be eligible for parent mentoring until the child is 3 and eligible for a qualified early childhood education program.

Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman has already been active trying to sign up families for the program. "I agree with Mr. Rolnick and Mayor Chris Coleman that one of the best investments we can make our children is by starting their education early. Many parents have to work two jobs or long hours so this gives the children a chance to start out on equal footing."

To be eligible, families (which includes single parents) must

- live in Planning District 6 (North End/South Como) or 7 (Frogtown); and
- have an annual income less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (which calculates to about \$38,000 for a family of 4).

In addition to the family program, home daycare operators can be a part of the early education program by meeting certain training and qualification standards. Those details are yet to be worked out but by going through training providers could raise their business income substantially.

For information and an application contact Resources for Child Caring at 651-641-6604.

### **Workers Training Program Open**

The Merrick Community Center in Saint Paul is the lead service agency for the Brownfields Workers Training Program that teaches workers how to succeed in their job.

Funded by grants from 3M and the national Institute for Environmental Health Science the eight year old program is designed to train workers for the environmental and construction trades.

Each year thirty-five individuals go through a rigorous, full-scale program that teaches not only work skills but also life skills that will help candidates deal with a changing job market. This includes resume' and job application writing, budgeting, effective communication and even First Aid. GED assistance is also available for those who do not have their high school diploma.

Program staff work with contractors to place students in jobs and then provide support for one year from help in getting the right trade tools to dealing with personal problems that might be an impediment to job success.

For information on the program or to see if you meet qualifications contact the Merrick Community center at 771-9339.

### **Take Advantage of Yard Waste Sites**

Ramsey County's 7 yard waste sites are now open for the summer. Leaves, grass clippings and other yard waste are banned from your regular garbage but they may be dropped off free of charge at any of the sites. The waste is then composted and that material can be picked up free of charge, generally throughout the summer.

Brush and tree branches must be taken to the White Bear Township, Arden Hills, Midway or Frank & Sims sites. This waste is ground up and used to create hot water and energy at the St. Paul District Energy Plant, a service authorized by Commissioner Rettman at the request of district residents.

Summer hours for all sites are:

Saturday:	9:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M.
Sunday:	11:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M.
Monday:	11:00 A.M. - 7:00 P.M.
Tuesday	CLOSED
Wednesday	11:00 A.M. - 7:00 P.M.
Thursday	CLOSED
Friday	11:00 A.M. - 7:00 P.M.

### **District Council News and Schedules**

District 5 (651-774-5234)  
[www.paynephalen.org/index.html](http://www.paynephalen.org/index.html)

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

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

District 6 (651-488-4485)  
[www.district6stpaul.org/](http://www.district6stpaul.org/)

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

Land Use Task Force  
4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.

District 7 (651-298-5068)  
[www.d7mix.org/](http://www.d7mix.org/)

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

District 8 (651-228-1855)  
[www.summit-u.com/](http://www.summit-u.com/)

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

District 10 (651-644-3889)  
[www.comopark.org/](http://www.comopark.org/)

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

District 11 (651-646-1986)  
[www.hamlinmidwaycoalition.org](http://www.hamlinmidwaycoalition.org)

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

District 12 (651-649-5992)  
[www.district6stpaul.org/](http://www.district6stpaul.org/)

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

District 13 (651-645-6887)  
[www.unionparkdc.org/](http://www.unionparkdc.org/)

Board of Directors Meeting  
1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.  
Merriam Park Community Center

City of Falcon Heights (651-792-7600)  
[www.ci.falcon-heights.mn.us](http://www.ci.falcon-heights.mn.us)

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