

## RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT

Summer 2011

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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### 2011 County Budget Hearings

On Tuesday, January 25<sup>th</sup> the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners heard from staff that the budget outlook for the next 2-year cycle and beyond is not good given the financial condition of the state and its seeming inability to deal with its own budget. County Manager Julie Kleinschmidt told the Board that she expects a loss of about \$26 million if the legislature proceeds as expected. Many of the cuts would be in the human services area and are either pass-through dollars from the federal government or state dollars for services that the state mandates counties to provide. The County Board must now work on setting priorities and deciding what are must-fund programs. Of its 2011 budget, only about 17% is discretionary and that primarily includes parks and recreation and public works services.

Lee Mehrkins, County Budget Director, reported that about 56% of the budget is employee costs including obligated retiree health insurance benefits. He noted that the county employees are the people who provide the necessary services or

those that are mandated by the state. These include public health inspectors and nurses, sheriff's deputies, correctional officers and county prosecutors. Lee also pointed out that, while a little better off than many states, Minnesota still has a 7% un-employment rate (versus 9.4% nationally) and that 14% of households nationally are delinquent in their mortgage payments. Additionally, while Ramsey County retains its AAA bond rating (the highest possible rating which yields the lowest finance costs to taxpayers) the securities market "is very closely scrutinized" meaning that any use of debt will be watched carefully. For certain, the County Board is not interested in using debt to pay operating costs or meet legal obligations.

Both Commissioner Parker and Commissioner Ortega commented that the taxpayers don't want to pay any more and that property taxes have become unbearable for most people. This will mean the Board will have to be willing to cut programs and lay off staff if funding for specific services is not provided by the state. Some commissioners suggested that there can be no "sacred cows" in this cycle. After discussing the issue, however, some of the Board members said there are some programs they would not consider leaving unfunded or underfunded.

Those details will be worked out during the course of the summer.

Other issues raised were the possibility of using staff furloughs, salary freezes and early retirements to minimize layoffs but no decisions were made. Following the meeting, District 3 Commissioner Janice Rettman said that the Board seems to be more aware of the impacts of the state's budget problems but that it will truly hit home when the legislature finishes its work. For the past several years she has been advocating modest budget and levy reductions, as well as preserving funds for future obligations, in anticipation of this changing fiscal landscape. Equally, putting dollars into the currently underfunded OPED obligation is one of Commissioner Rettman's priorities.

The issue of unfunded state mandates always comes up during the county budget process because the cost of state services is passed on to local property tax payers. Many counties have said they would not pay for the mandates but in the end must do so or risk losing other state funding or face court orders to do so.

One of the purposes for mandated services is to assure that residents of all counties receive the same services and that counties can't send residents who need services to other counties for help. This would pass the burden on to other taxpayers. Mandates also prevent people from "shopping" for the best services.

### **Are The Vikings Moving To Ramsey County?**

It has been reported in the news recently that Ramsey County officials are talking to the Minnesota Vikings football team to locate a new stadium on a site located near I-694 and I-35W in the city of Arden Hills. The vacant Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) property is currently owned by the United States Army and has been declared surplus and for sale. Their process could include either a closed bid or public auction with the property going to the highest bidder.

At this point the GSA (General Services Administration) has made it clear that it intends to get the maximum value out of the 430 acre development site and will not be turning it over to the county or city free and clear. The major

stumbling block is that the property has some major pollution problems and would only be cleaned to industrial use standards. To clean the land for residential or park use would be very costly but the amount is yet to be determined. That cost would be borne by the purchaser. The purchaser would also likely become liable if future problems occur.

In the early 1980's the city of New Brighton was forced to dig deeper wells due to contamination from trichloroethylene and other chlorinated organic compounds while owners of private wells needed to have bottled potable water supplied by the army.

On February 15th the County Board approved a resolution to study the costs and begin negotiations with the team. At that point no funding source had been identified nor had it been determined what public infrastructure was needed to get people in and out of the site. Commissioner Tony Bennett, who represents the area, has stated that planned major improvements to I-694 and I-35W in that quadrant must be a part of the site preparation.

As for funding sources, a number of possible sources have been talked about by Commissioner Bennett but he, Commissioner Ortega and other county negotiators have requested a Ramsey County-only 1/2 % sales tax. Most Ramsey County legislators have signed a letter making it clear that a county sales tax was not an option but it remains the only option put forth by legislative authors Representative Morrie Lanning (R-Moorhead) and Senator Julie Rosen (R- Fairmont).

For her part, Commissioner Janice Rettman has not been involved in meetings with the team. She did state that the county does not own the property and does not have the tax capacity to purchase the land, clean it up and provide the infrastructure, including roads, water and sewers, needed to make the site usable. "I will not pass this burden on to the property tax payers or vote for a county sales tax. This is a private business and a statewide issue."

The commissioner has suggested some benefit-based financing options meaning that those who use the stadium would pay for it. This would include parking fees from a county-owned lot, naming rights and ticket surcharges. And, in

addition, she raised concerns about a proposed 40-year bond financing plan noting that the team will likely be requesting a new stadium or major upgrades in about 25 years. That concept has since evolved into a 30 year plan with an option for a 10-year lease extension. Rettman also said she would support the stadium deal “if we had the parking revenue and other fee options rather than a sales tax.”

The city of Minneapolis is also vying for the stadium but has stated it would not add sales or other taxes to pay for it. Rather than a new stadium on a new site, the city has proposed a major renovation of the Metrodome at a cost of \$895 million. Vikings officials have said this plan would not raise enough revenue for the team to be financially competitive.

At the state level, Governor Mark Dayton has said he wants to get a new stadium built and has appointed Ted Mondale to the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission as his point person. The governor has committed \$300 million to the project but made it clear that road improvements in the corridor are a part of that commitment. This could create a shortfall in the financing plan depending on the cost and design of the highway improvements. However, no plan has been put forth by the administration.

The proposal has created a stir in the county with commissioners receiving many calls and emails for and against the plan. Commissioner Rettman has responded to a number of constituents regarding her position. A copy of her response is attached and also available on her webpage at <http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/cb/district3/index.asp>.

You can also write to Rep. Morrie Lanning at [rep.morrie.lanning@house.mn](mailto:rep.morrie.lanning@house.mn) and Senator Julie Rosen at [sen.julie.rosen@senate.mn](mailto:sen.julie.rosen@senate.mn).

### **LRT Construction Creates Obstacles**

The final plan for light rail transit along University Avenue calls for two lanes of traffic in each direction, LRT in the center and limited on-street parking opportunities. To get to the final plan by 2014 both drivers and pedestrians face major obstacles as lanes are reduced or shifted to accommodate construction equipment. Pedestrian access will be limited, especially for those trying to cross the street, and some

businesses may be temporarily inaccessible. In addition, buses will be using the same lanes as other vehicles so there may be delays as passengers board and exit. And bus riders will need to walk farther to get to substitute stops.

For 2011, the impact area is from Hamline west to the Saint Paul border and on into Minneapolis. In this area traffic is restricted to one lane in each direction, there will be no on-street parking, left turns from University to side streets will be limited as will left turns on to University. In addition, some north/south streets will see similar lane reductions and perhaps even temporary closings in order for utilities to be moved. For instance, Snelling Avenue will be restricted to one lane in each direction from Sherburne to I-94 for much of the summer.

### **Discover Central Corridor Cards Available**

A loyalty card has been created for customers of businesses along University Avenue who are willing to navigate the challenges during construction of light rail transit. The program was put together by businesses and associations along University Avenue from Saint Paul to Dinkytown near the University of Minnesota. The program offers discounts and other incentives to loyal customers. The Metropolitan Council, the builder of the LRT system, is not involved in the effort.

The “Discover Central Corridor” card is free and available at many businesses along University Avenue in Saint Paul or Minneapolis. Check the website at [CentralCorridorPerks.com](http://CentralCorridorPerks.com) for details or to have a card sent to your home. This is likely one of many efforts by Central Corridor businesses to keep customers coming during and after construction.

### **Requiem for Porky’s**

Porky’s drive-in on University Avenue shut down its grill on April 3<sup>rd</sup> with long lines of people waiting to get a last bite of fries, hamburgers and the specialties like fresh strawberry pie and onion rings. When the food supply ran out and the doors were locked people still stood around to reminisce about the Saint Paul icon.

Both old and new residents will remember Porky's for its food but also as the place for people to show off their muscle cars – from the 1950's to the day it closed for the last time. Even during a short shutdown in the 1990's cars could still be seen there on a Saturday evening in the summer. In the 50's and 60's Porky's was often the beginning and the end of an evening as car owners traveled east on University, through the loop downtown a couple of times and then back up the Avenue. This usually included a chance for drivers to test their skills with a drag race at lighted intersections.

Porky's owners believed that the construction of LRT on University would make it impossible for them to be economically viable even after completion of the project. The property has been sold to Episcopal Homes, possibly for housing, and the building has been sold and could be rebuilt on private property near Hastings. The iconic sign has been saved and rumor has it that it could re-appear someplace on the state fairgrounds.

### **Legislative Session Ends In A Draw**

The 2011 session of the Minnesota State Legislature ended with a whimper as legislators and the governor failed to reach an agreement on the two-year budget. The state now faces a shutdown beginning July 1<sup>st</sup> unless a deal can be made and adopted. State employees will start getting layoff notices in mid-June and only those workers deemed to be "essential" will continue on the payroll. During a shutdown in 2005 a Ramsey County District Court judge made a determination on whether or not certain positions are essential and that action will likely serve as a guide for 2011. However, we can expect challenges from both sides as the administration begins layoffs.

Regardless of the final adopted budget, it is likely that Ramsey County will lose as much as \$26 million in state payments for the services it provides to citizens. The final agreement could require that counties make

up the gap for some state services as it has sometimes done in the past. These are referred to as unfunded mandates because the state requires the counties to provide them but does not give necessary funding to do so. Counties are then forced to pass those costs on the property tax payers.

While County Board members have talked about it a number of times before, it is unlikely that they would refuse to provide services if funds are not provided. State agencies often do that for specific programs but they also cannot tax or raise fees to cover the costs. Counties do have the ability to tax and, therefore, are expected to use that authority to meet the directives.

### **County Budget Hearings Set**

The Ramsey County Board begins its deliberations on the 2-year budget beginning on August 1<sup>st</sup>. Nine sessions are set for various departments to make presentations to the Board on their requests and for the Board to ask questions. A public hearing is tentatively scheduled for September 6<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 P.M. for the public to comment on the budget. On September 13 the board will set the maximum property tax levy needed to support the proposed budget. Once this is done the board can reduce the proposed levy and shrink the budget but it cannot raise the levy higher than the amount it has set.

A second public hearing on the proposed levy and budget will be held on Monday, November 28 beginning at 6:30 P.M. at a site to be determined. Finally, the Board will adopt the final budget and tax levy at its regular meeting on December 13, 2011.

### **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.

Commissioner Janice Rettman's wood waste collection program continues to be considered a darling effort by many users. Brush and tree branches, which must be taken to the White Bear Township, Arden Hills, Midway or Frank & Sims sites, is ground up and used to create hot water and energy at the St. Paul District Energy Plant, a service pushed for by Commissioner Rettman at the request of District 3 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](http://www.paynephalen.org)

Board of Directors  
4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.  
@ SPPD Eastern District  
722 Payne Avenue

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 Rec Center  
1414 St. Albans Street

DISTRICT 7 (651-298-5068)

<http://www.frogtownmn.org/>

Board of Directors Meeting  
2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.  
@ West Minnehaha Rec Center

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.  
@ St. Albans Community Room  
665 Selby Avenue

DISTRICT 10 (651-644-3889)

<http://www.district10comopark.org/>

Board of Directors Meeting  
3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.  
@ Como Park Historic Street Car Station  
1224 N. Lexington Parkway

DISTRICT 11 (651-646-1986)

[www.hamlinemidwaycoalition.org](http://www.hamlinemidwaycoalition.org)

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

DISTRICT 12 (651-649-5992)

<http://sapcc.org/>

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

DISTRICT 13 (651-645-6887)

<http://www.unionparkdc.org/>

Board of Directors Meeting  
1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.  
@ SPPD Western District Station  
389 N. Hamline Avenue

CITY OF FALCON HEIGHTS (651-792-7600)

[www.ci.falcon-heights.mn.us](http://www.ci.falcon-heights.mn.us)

City Council Meetings ; 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays,  
7:00 p.m. @ Falcon Heights City Hall  
2077 W. Larpenter Avenue

### **Volunteers Needed**

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners is always looking for volunteers to assist staff, county programs and to advise the Board on issues that come before it. At this time there are vacancies on the following boards:

**The Capital Improvement Program Citizens Advisory Committee** provides participation for the planning process of the County's Capital Improvement Program. The members advise the County Board in setting priorities on proposed capital expenditures within Ramsey County. At-large seats are open at this time.

**The Community Health Services Advisory Committee** members act in an advisory capacity to the Ramsey County Board and the St. Paul City Council. Ramsey County is most interested in finding persons who work in a health or health-related field but that is not a requirement. At-large and district-specific seats are open at this time.

For these and other volunteer opportunities you can contact the county at 651-266-4090 or [www.co.ramsey.mn.us/cb/ma/volunteer.htm](http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/cb/ma/volunteer.htm)

May 19, 2011

To ALL who have contacted me regarding the Vikings' stadium:

Thank you so very much for sharing with me your comments, thoughts, insights, opinions and passion regarding the proposed Vikings Stadium at Arden Hills and the proposed Ramsey County involvement.

I am sending this letter to everyone as an update.

By resolution (2-15-11) (vote 6-1), Ramsey County became an active player in the effort to finance and construct a new stadium for the Minnesota Vikings professional football team. The current bill(s) in the legislature provides for a number of options under which the state and local governmental partner could finance their portions of the cost.

Two members of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners have been negotiating with the owners of the Vikings and have proposed that the local portion be paid with a .5% general sales tax.

While this may be an easy way, I believe there are **additional options** for both the state and the county that are being taken out of discussion or granted to the Vikings without the benefit of public review. Equally I believe that **Benefit-Based Financing Options offer a better financing option than the 1/2 percent Ramsey County only sales tax.**

In other words I believe that those who use it pay for it. Those who benefit pay for it.

Some of the benefit-based options I have looked at include **parking revenue, advertising, parking lot naming rights, and a stadium food and beverage surcharge**. I believe these options help create the benefit-based financing plan the governor and many citizens have sought and I whole-heartedly agree with. They also could provide sufficient revenue to pay for the county's portion without a sales tax. **However, these options are currently NOT in the "Pay Playbook" at the legislature nor in the Ramsey County and Vikings proposals. For example, all of the parking revenue right now will be in the Vikings financial score sheet.** (See Charlie Walters "Don't Print That" from the Saint Paul Pioneer Press, May 15,2011).

I am strongly in favor of the Vikings staying in Minnesota. I also believe the Vikings should pay for one half of the financing including infrastructure improvements. In addition, any contract or term agreement sheets must include language that all jobs created and retained, including construction and service jobs at the stadium, must pay prevailing wages and benefits.

My request is that you encourage decision makers to keep these mechanisms in or amend any legislative bill(s) to include them as the stadium plan moves through the process. Specifically, for example, Ramsey County should be permitted to collect all revenue from stadium parking facilities which is much of the "new money" in the move to Arden Hills. With the inclusion of these financing items we can have a thoughtful and thorough discussion at the local level before choosing the best revenue source for Ramsey County citizens should the location be at Arden Hills.

Thank you again.

Janice Rettman  
Ramsey County Commissioner, District 3