

RETTMAN'S RAMSEY REPORT

Spring 2012

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 or send a note to us, Room 220 ,City Hall/Court House, 15 West Kellogg Boulevard, St. Paul, MN 55102.

Rettman Challenges Fee Changes

Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman discovered some language changes in the recently proposed *Solid Waste Master Plan* that would have authorized county staff to use solid waste funds to purchase and clean up contaminated properties. The problem was that the new language had never been discussed or presented to citizens for review and comment even though the *Master Plan* has been in the works for nearly a year. By definition, solid waste or "mixed municipal solid waste" means garbage, refuse, and other solid waste from residential, commercial, industrial, and community activities that a person or business aggregates for collection or carries to a collection site themselves. It is not "hazardous waste" and does not include such things as ash, construction debris, mining waste, sludges, wood waste, tires, lead acid batteries, motor and vehicle fluids and filters.

The County's *Solid Waste Master Plan*, required by state law, outlines its efforts to reduce the amount of trash going into landfills. The plan

goes through a formal review process that includes a citizens' advisory committee, the Solid Waste Coordinating Board and the Metropolitan Council. The problematic language was slipped in at the last minute at the request of other county staff and would allow staff to move forward with the purchase and cleanup of sites such as the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) site discussed as a possible location for a new Minnesota Vikings stadium. Such a purchase likely would not require board approval but could put the county on the hook for long term responsibility of a polluted site.

Efforts outlined in the Plan are funded with a special 28% tax on garbage bills for residential properties, a 53% rate for nonresidential properties and a 53% rate for waste taken to a transfer station. The \$16,600,000 raised in 2012 are used to pay down the tipping fees at the mixed solid waste separation facility in Newport, to fund recycling efforts in the county and for other waste reduction efforts. While it is an environmental problem, cleaning up landfills is not a solid waste issue.

Prior to final consideration by the Board the language was quietly removed and the Plan was then approved on March 20, 2012. Had that language been included, Rettman was prepared to challenge the need and the expenditure of solid waste funds for activities unrelated to solid waste reduction. During last year's budget discussions Rettman had proposed eliminating the residential fee for two years as one of four ways to reduce property taxes. A sizable surplus has been accumulated in the fund but the proposal failed and the budget proceeded without further discussion about garbage fees.

Promise Neighborhoods Update

In December the city of Saint Paul was informed that it was not included in a federal program through the Department of Education to improve student achievement. The city had applied for a \$23 to \$26 million implementation grant and had received some \$750,000 in 2010 for planning efforts. The proposal would have been the second phase of the grant process wherein the city, the school district and other partners would implement efforts identified in the planning process.

While disappointed, city and Wilder Foundation officials and their partners said they would continue their efforts with four programs beginning in 2012 including:

- Expanded Family Resource Centers at Jackson and Maxfield Elementary Schools providing low-income students with medical and dental care;
- A tracking system and shared data base to help the school district and other public agencies understand what is working and what is not working.

For its part, Ramsey County had adopted a resolution supporting the grant application but had a number of reservations about its role. Commissioner Janice Rettman identified a statement that the county would commit to spending \$2,935,000 specifically in the designated area each year for at least 5 years. That amount is the estimate for all county benefits and services going into those neighborhoods in 2011. Other commissioners joined in with concerns that such a commitment

would limit their ability to align resources with need and to make budget reductions if the state changes its allocations for state-mandated services. It was agreed that any language specifying a commitment to spending in just one or two areas of the county would be removed.

Another item of concern was the use of personal data for the study. Rettman said that "Our promise is to do the best job to all of the people wherever they are. My promise has always been that we will do the best with the dollars we have to focus those where we need to do it."

Vikings' Stadium Update

The opening of the legislative session offered some hope that the Vikings' stadium situation would be resolved. At this moment that has not been the case. The current plan calls for the stadium to be constructed next to and on the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome site and it would be funded locally by extending a special tax in the city. The two Ramsey County Commissioners who proposed the stadium for an Arden Hills site continue to push for their plan. The County Board has taken no action in support of a stadium proposal or either of the two funding plans the two commissioners had put forth. The board did commit funds to explore the stadium concept on February 15, 2011 (6-1, Rettman opposed).

The county board also agreed in November to purchase the vacant Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) property (located near I-694 and I-35W in the city of Arden Hills) under certain conditions. The site is currently owned by the United States Army but has been declared surplus. The purchase agreement clearly states that the purpose is to clean up the site for future development of any kind, not just for a stadium. The agreement also states that the purchase will proceed only if the state reimburses the total cost. That action requires legislative approval and a signature from Governor Dayton. Costs for the cleanup would be deducted from the final purchase price.

Commissioner Janice Rettman has said 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 (a Vikings stadium) and a statewide issue."

Last year Commissioner Rettman suggested some benefit-based financing options as a way to pay for a stadium (meaning that those who use the stadium would pay for it) such as parking fees from a county-owned lot, naming rights and ticket surcharges. Those ideas are now under consideration by the legislature regardless of where the stadium is built. A copy of her responses is available on her webpage at <http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/cb/>. The county plan and other information is available on-line at <http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/home/index.htm>

As of January 31, 2012 Ramsey County spent almost \$600,000 in its quest for the stadium. The Vikings reimbursed the county \$114,547.26 for some of those expenses bringing the county total to \$484,837.50. This amount does not include staff time spent in meetings with the team and consultants, lobbying efforts or other staff involvement. If counted, staff costs would raise the cost significantly. Of the identified expenses, \$135,973.95 went to a sports consulting group, \$315,575 for attorney fees and \$30,611.78 for public relations. Anoka County spent an estimated \$1 million, \$2 million if you count staff time, in its efforts to secure the Vikings proposal for a \$1 billion "Northern Lights" facility in Blaine presented in 2006.

Property Tax Statements Surprise Some

Ramsey County sent out their 2012 property tax notices in late March 26, 2012 and property owners, particularly residential properties, may be in for a surprise. According to Chris Samuel, Property Records and Revenue manager, "Property tax increases on the tax statements will generally be higher than last year for residential property. The median *increase* in property taxes on homes in Ramsey County is 5.3% or \$110 and 8.5% of residential properties will have property tax decreases. 22.2% of residential properties will have property tax increases greater than 10%."

For Saint Paul's 73,101 properties, 20,461 will see decrease or no change, 35,066 will see an increase of 10% or less, 15,134 will see an

increase between 10% and 20%, 949 an increase of 20-30% and 1491 properties will see increases of 30% or more.

There are a number of reasons for the increases including

- Increase in valuation
- Decrease in valuation of other properties
- Change in classification
- Change in state policy
- Improvements to the property

For their part, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners adopted a 2012 budget reflecting a 1.7% increase in December of last year. Commissioner Rettman voted against the budget increase.

If you want to contest the market value or classification of your property you must do so by filing with the Minnesota Tax Court on or before April 30th. This is a very formal process and you should be fully prepared to defend the valuation reduction you are requesting.

If you want to appeal your value you can do so by attending an open book meeting held each spring to discuss your concerns with the assessor. The meeting times and location are shown on the front of your valuation statement. You can also ask to meet with staff to review your property status at anytime or request an assessor to go through your property for an evaluation.

In either case, bring any documentation supporting your claim of overvaluation or erroneous classification with you to the meeting. This could be a recent appraisal, a recent purchase or a change in use. An interior review of your property will be required before any value adjustment can be made but based on the documentation you bring and the assessor's review of the property, they may be able to adjust the valuation or classification of your property without further appeals.

Property Records and Revenue is located at [90 W. Plato Blvd.](http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/prr/Assessor/ImportantAppealInfo.htm), St. Paul, MN 55107

For more information can also go to <http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/prr/Assessor/ImportantAppealInfo.htm>

Rettman Challenges MNDOT To Do Better

Ramsey County District 3 Commissioner Janice Rettman has challenged the Minnesota Department of Transportation to work to with district councils in the planning and reconstruction of I-35E between Pennsylvania and Little Canada Road.

The impetus for the exchange came when MNDOT introduced an \$80 million plan to construct a MNPASS lane along this stretch. The I-35E reconstruction has gone through a long planning process including a number of meetings with neighborhood groups, but this is the first time the MNPASS lane was discussed in the current plan.

On March 26th the District 5 Community Council voted against a sound barrier on the east side of the freeway. Residents felt their views would be blocked by the wall and it would not solve the noise problem. In fact, it could make matters worse. Instead, they felt enhanced plantings would make the area more attractive and help deaden the sound. They also voted unanimously in full support of Commissioner Rettman's letter requesting that the current trail remain as is, among other things.

The District 7 (Frogtown) community has consistently supported improvements for pedestrians and bicycle riders in the Pennsylvania Avenue and Cayuga Street areas as well as expressed concerns about increased vehicle trips and air emissions. This area and the I-94 corridor in Saint Paul has one of the highest incidences of asthma and other health issues in the state. Ramsey County was recently given a failing grade for air quality by the American Lung Association.

Rettman stated that the district councils in Payne-Phalen, North End/South Como (District 6) and Frogtown have been generally supportive of the MnPASS lanes and the freeway upgrades, provided that they come with a few pedestrian-friendly amenities. In fact, the District 6 Community Council was adamant on keeping the existing path under the freeway as well as amenities such as coloring concrete and giving it a brick-like texture. She stated that "We've been

waiting for 17 years for the I-35E/Cayuga project to get done."

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, who moved the resolution had made it abundantly clear that county support for the MNPASS lane also includes caveats that the existing bicycle and pedestrian connections should be maintained in their current locations and that any excess revenue generated by MNPASS operations on I-35E must be used solely to support additional MNPASS investments or public transportation improvements on the I-35E corridor.

In addition to the MNPASS lane, the I-35E reconstruction will cost an about \$260 million with bridge reconstruction beginning this year.

LRT Construction For 2012

Met Council staff have been meeting with community groups along the Central Corridor to prepare Saint Paul neighborhoods for construction. At a recent meeting of the Frogtown Neighborhood Association (District 7) residents were told that beginning in 2012 University Avenue from Hamline to Robert Street will be under construction with most side streets closed to cross traffic and reduced lanes at major intersections. Twelve of the side streets will be closed to through traffic when construction is completed.

Work will start on the south side with one lane of traffic in each direction on the north side. Once completed, traffic will move to the south side and construction will begin on the north. Fire Station #18 at Saint Albans will create a temporary entrance on Saint Albans to allow emergency vehicles better access during construction. Once LRT is completed access will return to University Avenue.

Several concerns were raised about pedestrian access, light timing and driver distractions which would make it impossible for people to get across University, especially at Dale Street. Staff indicated that it will be difficult for everyone to navigate but they will work on signage to make it as easy as possible. It should be noted that pedestrian access will be very difficult on most blocks because safety fences will be up to separate walkers from equipment. There will be

no parking on University adding to access problems for business customers. 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.

The city has already decided to remove over 90% of the parking along the Avenue, more than 1000 spaces, in order to widen sidewalks and add other amenities. Construction should be nearly completed by the end of November, weather permitting.

The final plan for light rail transit along University calls for two lanes of traffic in each direction, LRT in the center and limited on-street parking opportunities. Most work is expected to be complete by the end of 2013 with full train service operating in 2014.

Union Depot Reconstruction on Target

Despite a number of surprises that always occur when redoing an old building, the renovation of the Union Depot in downtown Saint Paul is progressing. The Headhouse, which includes the main entry and former ticketing area, is nearly complete and open to the public and Christos restaurant has been open for service and special events since last December.

As part of the renovation the historic features have been restored and the original paint colors were used to bring the station back to life. Work continues on the concourse leading to the train gates as murals and plaster work are restored. Detailed efforts are the work of the day as the building is refitted with heating, air conditioning and electrical service that must be carefully hidden behind the original plaster and concrete work.

Once completed, the Depot will be the center point of a multi-modal transportation system moving people from high speed rail service, passenger rail service, continental bus service, light rail transit, automobiles and even bicycles. Completion is expected by the end of this year with funding for the \$243 million cost provided by the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority, the state of Minnesota and the federal government.

Yard Waste Sites Open

The mild weather made it possible for us to do spring yard work in mid-March but the county's seven compost sites were not ready for drop-offs. To prepare the sites the ground needed to thaw and dry up for vehicles, compost and wood chips delivered for pick-up and staff hired to monitor the sites. That work was expedited, the weather cooperated and the sites were opened before the end of the month.

As in years past, leaves, grass clippings and other yard waste may be dropped off by county residents free of charge at any of the sites. The Arden Hills, Frank & Sims, Midway and White Bear Township sites will also accept trees, branches and other woody waste.

Summer hours are:

Monday | 11 am - 7 pm
Tuesday | CLOSED
Wednesday | 11 am - 7 pm
Thursday | CLOSED
Friday | 11 am - 7 pm
Saturday | 9 am - 5 pm
Sunday | 11 am - 5 pm

All sites are closed on Memorial Day (May 28th), Independence Day (July 4th) and Labor Day (September 3rd).

And thanks to Commissioner Janice Rettman and some District 3 residents, brush and tree branches and your Christmas trees can be taken to four sites in addition to other yard waste. The woody material is ground up and used to create hot water and electrical energy at the St. Paul District Energy Plant.

Memorial Day Celebration 2012

Memorial Day is the time set aside to honor those men and women who have died in service to our country. Once referred to as Decoration Day, Memorial Day was officially proclaimed on May 5, 1868 by General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, in his General Order Number 11. It was first observed on May 30, 1868 when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and

Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery.

Waterloo, N.Y. was officially declared the birthplace of Memorial Day by President Lyndon Johnson in May of 1966 but it's difficult to prove the day's origins because of the many and varied ceremonies in the 1868 era, including some held during the Civil War in the south.

While cemeteries often are maintained by a corporation, in many small towns across the country the days before are a time for family and friends to cleanup grave sites and place flowers, wreaths and flags on them. The red poppies are inspired by Moina Michael's 1915 poem:

*We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.*

Her poem was inspired by the poem *In Flanders Field* written by John McCrae also in 1915.

American Legion North End Post 474 and the George Gruel Post 572 sponsor their celebration at Oakland Cemetery. As in the past few years, Ramsey County Commissioner Janice Rettman will address those present honoring all who have died in service. This has become an especially poignant time as veterans of World War II, members of the "Greatest Generation", are leaving us all too quickly. All are welcome,

**Monday, May 28, 10:00 A.M.
Oakland Cemetery
927 Jackson Street**

A guided tour of the cemetery focusing on Civil War veterans will follow at 11:30.

DISTRICT COUNCIL NEWS AND SCHEDULES

DISTRICT 5 (651-774-5234)
www.paynephalen.org
Board of Directors
4th Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
@ SPPD Eastern District
722 Payne Avenue

DISTRICT 6 (651-488-4485)
www.district6stpaul.org
Board of Directors
1st 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
2nd Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
@ West Minnehaha Rec Center

DISTRICT 8 (651-228-1855)
www.summit-u.com/
Board of Directors Meeting
4th 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
3rd Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.
@ Como Park Historic Street Car Station
1224 N. Lexington Parkway

DISTRICT 11 (651-646-1986)
www.hamlinemidwaycoalition.org
Board of Directors Meeting
3rd Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
Hamline Library
@ 1558 West Minnehaha Avenue

DISTRICT 12 (651-649-5992)
<http://sapcc.org/>
Board of Directors Meeting
2nd Thursday, 7:00 p.m.
@ 890 Cromwell Avenue

DISTRICT 13 (651-645-6887)
<http://www.unionparkdc.org/>
Board of Directors Meeting
1st 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
City Council Meetings ; 2nd and 4th Wednesdays,
7:00 p.m. @ Falcon Heights City Hall
2077 W. Larpenter Avenue

