Ramsey city engineer leaves for Coon Rapids

By Tammy Sakry on July 26, 2012 at 7:02 am

After five years with Ramsey, City Engineer Tim Himmer has headed down the road — to Coon Rapids.

Himmer started with Ramsey in 2007 as the assistant city engineer and was promoted in 2009 to city engineer.

The Ramsey position interested him because of the town center project and it was a good fit for his background in municipal and private sector engineering, said Himmer, who left at the end of June.

"It was phenomenal fit," he said.

"I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity and I am really thankful for that."

While his venture into private sector engineering with Rotlumlnd Homes was challenging, municipal work is just as challenging.

The most challenging part of municipal engineering is the politics, Himmer said.

"I will deal with angry residents any day of the week, but politics play into the (decisions) and that's the hardest part of my job," he said.

Politics always enter into the equation no matter the decision, Himmer said.

The most challenging project for Himmer in Ramsey was The Draw park.

The council had a lot of uncertainty on what the final project would be and discussed it for six months only to return to the 2004 plans created for the original Ramsey Town Center park by URS, Himmer said.

Discussion on the park started in September 2009 and the plans were approved in February 2010.

Once the plans were approved, his department had to focus mainly on updating the
plans to finish the project by June 30, 2010, Himmer said.

From January to April, the engineering department mainly worked on this one project, he said.

The biggest challenge to the project was that the council kept changing the rules and would not supply the extra help the engineering department needed for the job, Himmer said.

Himmer also had to coordinate the work being done by contractors for the pool liners and bridges.

"Failure was not an option. We sucked it up and did it," he said.

Most of the department’s resources went into the park and other projects slipped to make sure the park was done by the deadline, Himmer said.

The city had a $363,756 Metropolitan Council grant for the construction of an amphitheater, pedestrian bridge and the trails, which had to be finished June 30, 2010.

Adding to the stress of the project, the day the city awarded the contracts for the projects Himmer’s father died.

"The project came with a lot of heartburn, headaches and a lot of Tums, but I think it turned out really well," he said.

One of his longest running project was the quality of top soil allowed in Ramsey.

The city staff had been working on the project and its corresponding ordinance for a year before he arrived and he could not understand why it was taking so long, Himmer said.

To move the project along, Himmer took on the project. To his regret.

"I never figured I would become the soil czar," he said.

Investigating soil types, what was available and what would be best for water retention was an ongoing project for most of his five years.

If the ordinance is ever redone, he would recommend eliminating it and going with a policy, which is easier to change, Himmer said.

The whole point was to conserve water and water consumption has gone down over the last couple of years and he thinks it will only get better with time, he said.

It was a very long process, but in the end they came up with something that was fair, said Himmer, who has the numerous soil samples lining his wall to his garden.
Himmer's favorite part of the job is the people.

"I like the public interaction and I like dealing with the public and the daily successes," he said.

Even though he is likely to take a beating every day, it is a win if he can make one person happy that day, Himmer said.

"I like talking to people and I like to helping them," he said.

Although he is leaving Ramsey for new challenges, Himmer said he is kind of sad about the move.

While it's a great job and the city has a lot of things happening, including the Highway 10/Armstrong Boulevard interchange, The COR and the park, the council has limited his job and the opportunities to advance in within the city, he said.

He had hoped to advance into the public works director position, but the council separated engineering and public works into two management structures and that eliminated any chance for him to be public works director, Himmer said.

With Landform performing most of the engineering work for The COR, city staff was not given the opportunity to fit into the project's team, he said.

It was too bad because he was looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that The COR would provide, Himmer said.

Over the last couple of years, the engineering team was reduced from six, including the public works director, to four and with some of the city's engineering work being done by consultants, Himmer said.

**New challenges**

He was very fortunate that Coon Rapids was looking for a new city engineer, Himmer said.

It is his dream job and it will give him a chance to work on redevelopment projects as well as maintaining an older infrastructure, Himmer said.

One of the other things he is looking forward to is working with consistent and strong leadership, Himmer said.

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