

SPECIAL SESSION
Discussion of Personnel Vacancies
July 7, 2014

Council present: Aldermen Mboka Mwilambwe, Kevin Lower, Judy Stearns, Jim Fruin, David Sage, Karen Schmidt, Scott Black, Rob Fazzini and Joni Painter and Mayor Tari Renner.

Staff present: David Hales, City Manager, Angela Fyans-Jimenez, Deputy Corporation Counsel, and Tracey Covert, City Clerk.

Mayor Renner called the meeting to order at City Hall at 5:30 p.m. He noted the Special Session topic: Personnel, Section 2(c)(1). There would be a discussion regarding the City's culture change. He noted the departure of various City department heads and cited the Council's discussion at the fall retreat.

He informed the Council that the City had received an email regarding the fact that Public Comment was not listed on the meeting agenda. There were no action items listed on same.

There would be a discussion of specific individuals in Executive Session and the meeting would conclude after the Special Session.

Alderman Stearns questioned the Personnel exception. She believed that the Council needed to address the hiring, firing and/or performance of specific employees.

Angela Fyans-Jimenez, Deputy Corporation Counsel, addressed the Council. She read from the Open Meetings Act, (OMA) regarding Exemptions, Section 2(c)(1). *The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance or dismissal of specific employees of the public body or legal counsel for the public body, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodge against an employee of the public body or against legal counsel for the public body to determine its validity.*

Alderman Stearns noted that some of the individuals who would be addressed were no longer employed at the City. Ms. Fyans-Jimenez noted that dismissal was included in this exemption. This section did not specify current or no longer employed employees. It used the term employee. Alderman Stearns noted that these individuals had resigned. Ms. Fyans-Jimenez stated that dismissal was an employment action. Alderman Stearns restated that these individuals were no longer employed by the City.

Motion by Alderman Fazzini, seconded by Alderman Painter to recess into Executive Session, regarding Personnel, Section 2(c)(1). Time: 5:36 p.m.

Ayes: Aldermen Lower, Sage, Mwilambwe, Stearns, Painter, Schmidt, Black, Fazzini and Fruin.

Nays: None.

Motion carried.

Motion by Alderman Sage, seconded by Alderman Fazzini to return to Regular Session.
Time: 6:36 p.m.

Ayes: Lower, Sage, Mwilambwe, Stearns, Painter, Schmidt, Black, Fazzini and Fruin.

Nays: None.

Motion carried.

Mayor Renner noted that the Council would continue the discussion in Special session. He noted the City's culture change. He believed that for specific employees there were reasons for their departure. As the City moved forward, the Council wanted to know why individuals were leaving the City. The City's Human Resources Department conducted exit interviews. The Council would consider retaining an external firm to conduct exit interviews. The Council planned to schedule another Executive Session after receipt of exit interview information and discuss the findings. He acknowledged that this information might include criticism of the Council. The Council wanted to know what an external firm would cost and what results the Council could anticipate. The Council would not take action this evening. He cited the City's customer service focus. The City had adopted a philosophy of openness and transparency. Staff promotions would be based upon merit. He knew that that people would choose to leave the City. The Council had addressed specific individuals in Executive Session. The Council had returned to Special Session to address particular issues.

David Hales, City Manager, addressed the Council. Fifty-six (56) employees had left, (i.e. resigned and/or retired), City employment in the last eighteen to twenty-four (18 – 24) months. Twenty percent (20%) of the City's work force was over the age of fifty/fifty-five (50/55). The City had an older work force and was experiencing the effect of baby-boomer retirements.

Mayor Renner stated that the Council had noted during the Executive Session that the City had only interviewed those who had left the City. The Council was interested in a broader employee survey. The Council questioned the cost for same and what it might yield.

Alderman Schmidt cited a broader interest. The Council needed to find out how to improve the environment. She questioned if a broader survey would be cost effective.

Alderman Black noted that the Council would not take any action this evening. He was interested in an employee engagement survey. Mr. Hales noted that no survey was being done City wide. An employee engagement survey would have been included in the revitalizing City government project.

Alderman Black expressed his interest in a comprehensive survey conducted by an external firm. He questioned the cost. He was interested in the data and an action plan. He believed that there were benefits from retaining an outside firm.

Mayor Renner added that it would be important to track information over time.

Alderman Fazzini believed an outside firm would bring a level of expertise. He questioned the amount of information that would be obtained. He believed that the City would receive better information from an outside firm. He was interested in the cost for same. He hoped that all employees would be included. The survey could be scaled back as necessary.

Alderman Fruin noted that the Council had discussed employee opinion surveys in the past. He believed that there was a consensus to move forward.

Alderman Mwilambwe had questions for the City Manager. He was interested in a discussion regarding the evaluation process. He also questioned the use of external feedback, i.e. customers. He hoped that there would be an opportunity to consider a variety of ideas.

Mr. Hales noted that the City's employee performance evaluation was archaic. It only covered Classified employees. There was no formal performance evaluation system for the City's union employees. The current performance evaluation was centered on the management by objectives model. Supervisors needed opportunities to reach out to others. There was not a formal, consistent organization wide system. He expressed his concern regarding employee morale and fair treatment.

Alderman Stearns commented on external exit interviews. The City needed to discover the heart of the matter. She questioned retaining a local attorney. She also questioned the need to bring in an external firm to obtain data and discover the truth. Finally, she questioned how this information would be presented to the Council.

Mayor Renner believed that there would be a report with a statistical summary based upon the data collected. The survey should also include open ended questions.

Alderman Stearns expressed her support for a confidential employee survey. The Council should look for patterns in the work environment.

Alderman Lower questioned support for including the next level down in the short term. The City needed a broad based program. The City's overall performance was based upon individual performance. There needed to be a conversation with the team.

Alderman Sage expressed his concern. An assumption had been made that supervisors were not soliciting input. He cited changes to the City's Permanent Patching Program. This had been based upon employee feedback. The Council had talked about an employee survey. This survey was not part of the Action Agenda. He was not ready to

support same. There was insufficient context/framework. An employee survey would take staff time. He questioned what project would not be completed. The City had been criticized for spending too much on consultants. He questioned the unit cost and what the expected results were. The top priority was filling department head vacancies. The City had conducted nationwide searches. He questioned budgeted amounts for same.

Mr. Hales presented the Council with a current listing of vacancies. The City had the resources to conduct nationwide searches. He considered interim directors to fill vacancies. This provided him with the opportunity to survey City employees, (i.e. plus or minus of the position, role to play, interest in what was important skills, etc.). Employee feedback could be enlightening. The City also worked with local personnel resources. The goal was to hire the right people who would become part of the City's future culture. The City was taking the time to reach a good decision.

Mayor Renner suggested that the Council move forward. He cited his concern regarding the cost of a survey. He questioned what data the City already had. He also addressed the cost to retain an external firm to conduct exit interviews. He recommended that the City give consideration to Illinois State University. He also questioned the cost for an annual employee survey. He noted that the Council was interested in exit interviews. The Council would consider the cost and the City might have to start small. The Council wanted to see the exit interviews and was also interested in external exit interviews. In addition, the cost for an employee survey should be presented based upon various levels.

Alderman Fruin suggested that if City staff would be gathering information, then they should reach out to the Illinois Municipal League and other similar sized cities.

Alderman Black questioned what the City would do with the data.

Alderman Sage questioned if the City should do any of this. He was not sure what the Council had directed the City Manager to do. The first step appeared to be that the Council wanted to see exit interviews. He questioned what projects the City Manager would not complete to move this project forward.

Mayor Renner stated that City was attempting to fill vacancies. The City needed to obtain complete information during the exit interviews. This was key before the Council took any further action.

Alderman Sage believed that hiring new department heads was a vital first step. If the Council wanted to make a change, then the City Manager would need to stop doing something. Mr. Hales was unable to address Alderman Sage's concerns.

Mayor Renner noted the recent departure of fifty-six (56) employees. The exit interviews needed to be assembled so that the Council could review same in Executive Session.

Alderman Black restated that the exit interviews would be provided to the Council for review.

Mayor Renner noted that the Council needed to have an understanding as to why people had left the City's employment. The critical task was filling vacancies.

Alderman Black believed that twenty-five (25) employees had left City employment in the last six (6) months. The reasons for same would be subject to Council interpretation.

Mayor Renner restated that the Council would review the information and discuss same in Executive Session.

Mr. Hales made two (2) comments: 1.) that there be a legal review as he questioned if these were open documents; and 2.) Lynn Monte's diagram of the reactive versus the creative mode. Exit interviews were conducted for supervisors upon separation from the City. They were questioned about the City organization. The Council's discussion needed to be forward looking. The City should be a great place to work. The City wanted to attract and retain the best. The City wanted to continue the culture change. He questioned the Council's vision. The Council needed to direct resources and the allocation of same. City employees needed a work/life balance. He noted the November 13, 2013 survey. The City should be an organization that people wanted to come and work. The City needed to be a fun and satisfying work place. The City had the ability to adapt the work environment. This should be a priority. The Council needed to be creative and forward looking. The goal was to recruit and retain top notch staff.

Mayor Renner directed City staff to make the information available.

Alderman Stearns echoed Alderman Black's comments. She was not interested in opinions. She wanted to see the facts. She questioned retaining an outside consultant. She had heard antidotes that employees do not feel heard. The City had a narrow field of management staff. The goal should be to survey all employees.

Mayor Renner noted that the Council would be provided with the information from the November 2013 retreat. He planned to speak with the City's legal counsel regarding the exit interviews. The Council would schedule another meeting, either Executive or in Regular session.

Alderman Fazzini expressed his interest in the cost for an outside consultant. The survey should include the City's current and past department heads.

Alderman Fruin added that the City should contact similar organizations.

Mayor Renner stated that information would be provided to the Council. City staff would research the cost to retain a consultant to interview the City's department heads. A process would be established to review the exit interviews.

Alderman Black expressed his interest in the cost to interview all employees.

Mayor Renner offered to reach out to mayors and the Illinois Municipal League.

Alderman Lower recommended that the City start by contacting McLean County.

Motion by Alderman Fazzini, seconded by Alderman Painter to adjourn. Time 7:22 p.m.
Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Tracey Covert
City Clerk