

**CITY OF WIXOM
49045 PONTIAC TRAIL
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2024**

Mayor Beagle called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

Present:

Mayor: P. Beagle
Deputy Mayor: T. Rzeknik
Councilmembers: P. Behrmann
K. Gottschall
T. Gronlund-Fox
P. Sharpe
R. Smiley

AGENDA CHANGES: (None)

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

There were no comments by the public.

NEW BUSINESS:

1.) Discussion Regarding the City Clerk Position

CM-02-20-24: Moved and seconded by Councilmember Gronlund-Fox and Deputy Mayor Rzeknik to approve the discussion regarding the City Clerk position.

Mayor Beagle indicated that City Clerk, Catherine Buck, submitted her request to retire in May. Considering there were so many elections in 2024, they should be on the fast track to find her successor. He believed the Deputy Clerk, Crystal Opalko, was a very capable candidate. He said that she could handle the job and would be a great City Clerk. He thought once they offered her the position of City Clerk, they would authorize the City Manager to post the Deputy Clerk position. Ideally, he would like to have the new Deputy Clerk hired by the third week in April so they could participate in one light election before the August Primary and November Presidential Elections.

Mr. Brown stated that the decision to be made was whether the Council wanted to move ahead with the internal candidate, which was someone they've been training and grooming for that position, or if the Council wanted to solicit outside.

Mayor Beagle reminded everyone that the City Clerk position was approved and hired by the City Council while the Deputy Clerk was hired by the City Manager.

Councilmember Gronlund-Fox asked if Ms. Opalko had her Master Municipal Clerk Certification. Ms. Buck said she didn't, but believed she had most of her education and experience points. Councilmember Gronlund-Fox asked if there were any functions of the Clerk's position that she was not able to do because she didn't have her certification. Ms. Buck replied no. Councilmember Gronlund-Fox asked if the City had any policies regarding posting positions. Mr. Brown answered that the only posting requirements were related to union positions.

Councilmember Smiley agreed with Mayor Beagle. After he heard the Clerk was retiring, he thought they had someone already in place that had been trained and groomed over several years. He asked if Ms. Opalko was interested in the job and Mr. Brown said that she was. Councilmember Smiley supported the idea whole-heartedly.

Deputy Mayor Rzeznik said the Master Municipal Clerk certification wasn't as important to him because he'd seen Ms. Opalko work through tough elections and easy elections. She's also been through the passport program for many years and had been one of the first faces that new residents saw over the years when they came in. She was always smiling and friendly. From a capability standpoint, he had absolutely no issues. He had watched her work at elections and knew the Clerk had mentored her very well. He felt that she understood the position. He indicated that he would definitely support Ms. Opalko if she was one of the candidates to apply.

Councilmember Gottschall was aware that it's been difficult to hire Clerks right now and that a lot were retiring in today's climate. He didn't think a lot of people were going into public government. He asked if it would be easier to hire a Deputy Clerk instead of a City Clerk. Mr. Brown stated that it would be difficult to hire an experienced Deputy Clerk. He indicated that both Ms. Buck and Ms. Opalko would be comfortable in not valuing someone too much with a heavy amount of experience in the Clerk field, but rather somebody who would be a good fit personality-wise and skill-wise. It was easy to get someone trained in the Clerk field because of all the training opportunities. Councilmember Gottschall said "hire the fit, train the role."

Councilmember Sharpe was surprised this discussion was being held in an open session. Mayor Beagle said they checked with the City Attorney and were told this discussion couldn't be held in a closed session. Councilmember Sharpe believed Ms. Opalko was wonderful and had all positive experiences with her, but he hadn't seen her resume. It sounded as if they were going to hire her at this meeting. It wasn't that he didn't feel she was the best candidate, it's just that he wanted to see more information. He felt with all the public eyes on Clerks these days they should post the position. He figured that most likely she would be the best candidate, but they needed to do their due diligence. He stated again that he was not opposed to Ms. Opalko being the next City Clerk; he only wanted to weigh the options.

Mayor Beagle said they would have to rewrite the job description because the Clerk position had changed so much over the years. He said there were more responsibilities that the Clerk had to do these days than ever before. Additionally, the Wage and Salary would have to meet to set the parameters for the City Clerk and Deputy Clerk.

Councilmember Behrmann asked how long Ms. Buck had been the Clerk in Wixom. Ms. Buck replied twelve years. Councilmember Behrmann wondered how many years she worked with Ms. Opalko. Ms. Buck said that she worked with her in Walled Lake for ten years and almost eleven years in Wixom. Councilmember Behrmann understood the logic of posting the position, but he didn't see how they would find someone better for Wixom that had worked hand-in-hand with our current Clerk for the last twenty years. He thought they'd be foolish to even attempt to find somebody else. Also, it could look poorly on the Council to even post the position. He did not see any reason why the Council shouldn't offer the position to Ms. Opalko if she wanted it. He had complete confidence that she would be able to handle it. He imagined the harder part would be finding a Deputy Clerk that would fit in our community as well as Ms. Opalko has. He said he would like to see this move forward as quickly as possible to make the transition as smooth as possible. He appreciated the multiple years of service that our current Clerk and Deputy Clerk have given to Wixom. He believed that Ms. Opalko had earned to be promoted immediately.

Councilmember Gottschall asked Ms. Buck what the hiring and interview process was when she was hired in Wixom. He asked if she met with the City Manager and the City Council. Ms. Buck said she only met with the City Manager and he gave his recommendation to the Mayor and Council. Councilmember Gottschall understood the apprehension of not posting the position but thought Ms. Opalko did a great job. He said their current Clerk worked with

her for a very long time and felt she could step into her shoes. He said if they didn't want a big change than Ms. Opalko should be their first option. He noted how they could go through the interview process and if someone were unhappy, they could discuss posting the position. He didn't think they would be in a position where anyone believed they needed to post it, but that could be a potential solution. He felt it would be a larger discussion come election time just trying to figure out if they had enough election workers considering everything that was going on. With all the changes, they might end up having to put some more money into the Clerk's budget to hire more help. This was one part of a larger discussion.

Deputy Mayor Rzesnik thought it would be more fruitful posting the Deputy Clerk position and casting a wider net to try to get someone to fill Ms. Opalko's position. That would allow Ms. Opalko the opportunity to be part of the interview process to find someone she could mentor. He assumed they would be much better off doing it that way. He knew of Ms. Buck and Ms. Opalko through friends that were on the Walled Lake City Council while they worked there. They both had longevity stretched over two different communities so he believed this transition was appropriate. He would support moving forward with Ms. Opalko being the next City Clerk.

Councilmember Smiley asked Ms. Buck if she would endorse Ms. Opalko. Ms. Buck stated that the two of them worked so well together because they were good friends. She felt strongly that the City of Wixom would be better off if the Council hired her. As far as the Deputy Clerk position, she thought it would be more beneficial to hire a good fit over experience. She explained that the new Deputy Clerk would have to go through all the educational classes put on by Oakland County and the State Bureau of Elections. The Clerk's Institute was a class offered for one week each year, for a total of three years, to earn their Michigan Association of Municipal Clerk designation. She mentioned that Ms. Opalko had that certification as well as the Certified Municipal Clerk designation through the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. She indicated that Ms. Opalko's goal was to obtain her Master Municipal Clerk certification which was the highest achievement. She did not believe that any members of Council would be disappointed with Ms. Opalko as their next Clerk.

Mayor Beagle asked Councilmember Sharpe if he would feel better about this decision if he were to meet with Ms. Opalko. He indicated that she was the number one candidate but an offer would not be made until after the Wage and Salary Committee met to amend the job description. Councilmember Sharpe said an interview would be appropriate to decide if she was the right person. He stated that 20 years as a Deputy was different than one year as a Clerk. He would prefer to stay in-house and thought Ms. Opalko was a fine person and did a good job, but wanted to make sure they were doing the right thing for the voters.

Councilmember Gronlund-Fox said she liked that idea because it was Council's responsibility for that position.

Mr. Brown explained that if the hiring move was to promote the Deputy Clerk, they would need to fill the Deputy Clerk position. There was a desire to fill the Deputy Clerk position by a certain point in time, which was not a lot of time for the process.

Councilmember Gottschall didn't want to delay the posting of the Deputy Clerk. Mr. Brown said he could go ahead with the posting of the Deputy Clerk. Councilmember Gottschall suggested taking Ms. Opalko out for coffee or have her give a presentation at a regular meeting letting them know what she wanted to do as Clerk. He didn't think it needed to be a special meeting because he wasn't in favor of hiring someone during a special meeting. He thought this was going to go one way, so why would they delay on the posting of the Deputy Clerk.

Councilmember Gronlund-Fox liked the idea of a presentation given by Ms. Opalko to City Council for it would take the pressure off of her, and nobody would ask her questions. She didn't think they should post the Deputy Clerk position until they actually offered Ms. Opalko the City Clerk position.

Mr. Brown said the only action taking place would be the posting and advertisements of the Deputy Clerk position during the interim period. They would not plan to meet with anybody before City Council made their decision. He supposed they would post the position for three weeks at a minimum but didn't believe it would take City Council that long to make their decision. If they posted the position and it didn't go that way then they could take the posting down. Councilmember Gronlund-Fox said she would not support that.

Mayor Beagle mentioned that the City Manager and the Deputy Mayor would not be present at the February 20th Council Meeting. He wondered if waiting until the first meeting in March would be too long. Mr. Brown stated that the goal was to get someone in place so they could get some experience with Early Voting before the May 7th Election.

Councilmember Behrmann understood the idea of wanting everyone to be present at the meeting but it could be difficult. Considering that the City Council hires the Clerk, he suggested they invite Ms. Opalko to the meeting next week. If the entire Council would not be present the remaining members would make the decision. He stressed that he wanted to move this forward because only delaying the process meant they would delay hiring a new person. He felt they really needed to have the new employee trained for a smooth process moving forward.

Deputy Mayor Rzeznik said since he would be absent next week, he wanted to mention that he had known Ms. Opalko for 20+ years and he did not need to interview her.

A general consensus was decided that Ms. Opalko would be invited to attend the regular meeting on February 20, 2024.

Councilmember Gronlund-Fox suggested she do a presentation on her qualifications and what she might do as the next City Clerk.

Councilmember Sharpe said supported inviting Ms. Opalko to the meeting and having her give a presentation. He planned to send the Clerk and City Manager a few items that he would like to see in Ms. Opalko's presentation, that way he wouldn't have to ask questions. He wanted to confirm they would not be offering any job at that meeting. Mayor Beagle said it would only be the presentation as the Wage and Salary would still have to meet before an offer could be given. He wouldn't want to offer anything until there was an updated job description so she knew exactly what the job was and the salary.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

There were no comments at this time.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Catherine Buck
City Clerk

Approved 2-20-2024
