

Aiken City Council MinutesWORK SESSION – COMMITTEE MEETING

Department Directors – Recreation and Planning – City Manager

July 30, 2014

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, and Councilmembers Dewar, Merry, and Price.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Sara Ridout, Ron Feller, Richard Johnson, Gary Allington of the Chamber of Commerce, and Maayan Schechter and Michael Ulmer from the Aiken Standard.

The meeting was called to order at 4 P. M. Councilman Merry moved, seconded by Councilman Dewar, that the meeting come to order.

Mr. LeDuc stated there were two issues to discuss at this meeting, including the two Department Head vacancies and the City Manager vacancy. The Department Head vacancies include the Recreation Department and the Planning Department. He pointed out that when Glenn Parker, Recreation Director, retired, Kim Coleman was placed in the position as Interim PRT Director. Ms. Coleman was expecting to be in the position for a couple of weeks. The former City Manager had already advertised for the position and had interviewed for the position, but had not made the decision yet. Mr. LeDuc stated he had asked Ms. Coleman if she would consider continuing as Interim PRT Director until the next City Manager is selected and let that Manager select the PRT director. Ms. Coleman is willing to do that. He pointed out that Ms. Coleman has been with the city over 25 years and has a lot of knowledge and some great staff to assist her.

Mr. LeDuc stated that Ed Evans, Planning Director, left on July 25, 2014. He said he had asked Tommy Paradise to serve as Interim Director. Mr. Paradise has been with the city over 25 years. He has a Master's in Public Administration. He worked in Inspections at Public Safety and was a certified Public Safety Officer. He served in Building Inspections for a while and then moved into the Planning Department, serving as Zoning Official. He is one of the few in the Planning Department who has gone to all the different meetings. Mr. LeDuc also pointed out that Sandra Korbelik will be leaving the city in November. Mr. Paradise will serve as Interim until the new City Manager appoints a new Director.

Mr. LeDuc stated the Handbook states that when the City Manager makes a selection of an interim director, the person should get a salary increase. He said he would like to give Ms. Coleman and Mr. Paradise a 10% increase in salary while they serve as interim directors, with the salary reverting to their previous salary when new directors are selected. The consensus of Councilmembers was agreement to the appointments and the salary adjustment while serving as interim directors.

City Manager

Mr. LeDuc stated when he was hired on June 16, 2014, one of the things he mentioned to Council was that he felt they should wait a while until a few things were settled, so Council could see where we are on the budget and projects, and give Council an opportunity to get an idea as to what they wanted in a City Manager. He said currently the contract with him ends sometime in December. He said the contract could be cancelled earlier or extended, depending on what Council wants and where we are in the process.

Mr. LeDuc stated, as far as the committees, there will be more meetings on the northside and the Gem Lakes issue, but there is still the budget process to complete. He said he wants to set some times for Council to start going through the budget. He pointed out there are probably 20 to 30 projects to talk about. He said the projects are in various stages; some have full funding; some have no funding. He said we need to know where

we stand on some projects. He said he had some meetings set up, one with the Highway Department and others to get some answers.

Mr. LeDuc stated any time Council feels they are ready to start looking for the City Manager, we could start the process. He felt it would be good that before the next City Manager is hired that we have the foundation as to where Council wants to go on the budget. He said currently the budget is probably out of balance by \$500,000. He said we either need to lower expenditures by \$500,000 or raise revenue by \$500,000. He pointed out that just recently two Public Safety Officers turned in their resignation, and we need to talk about that at the next Council meeting. He said there is to be one new School Resource Officer position being funded by the schools, so we have a third vacancy. He said this would be discussed at the next Council meeting.

Councilman Dewar asked for a list of the 20 to 30 projects mentioned. Mr. LeDuc stated he had given Council a partial list at the last Council meeting, but would be giving Council another list. He said staff should be able to make an announcement regarding the Capital Projects Sales Tax Manager position next week.

Mr. LeDuc asked what Council would like to do about a City Manager.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he felt we need to wait until we go through the budget or at least go through the things we need to do so we know where we are and what we can and cannot do.

Mr. LeDuc stated it will probably be a couple of months before we would be through with the budget. He said he was fine with that, but the budget probably will not be settled in the next few weeks.

Council then discussed how they would like to proceed with hiring a new City Manager.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that it will take 4 to 6 weeks to advertise the position. He felt they should not wait until they were completely finished with the budget before advertising.

Councilman Merry expressed concern about having the Planning Director position open until the new City Manager is hired if the Manager position is not filled for some time. He pointed out that there are a lot of things concerning ordinances, and particularly the Zoning Ordinance, where the Planning Director has a lot of discretion. He also pointed out that the Planning Director sets the tone for so much and will be the person involved in the replacement for Sandra Korbelik. He felt the sooner Council gets started on hiring a City Manager the sooner there will be a new Planning Director. He agreed with Councilman Dewar that Council may not want to wait until the budget is done. He pointed out, even if they start now, it will take several months to complete the process and get someone here.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he did not feel that Council should wait until everything is completely laid out, but he felt they should have a good idea where we stand. He agreed that Council needs to start the process as soon as they can.

Mayor Cavanaugh pointed out there had been some discussion regarding getting a company to help in the search for a City Manager. He felt Council should make a decision on that matter soon so they know what direction to take.

Councilman Merry stated he had done some research on firms to help in the search for a City Manager. He discussed his feelings in using a search firm. He felt Council should perhaps search nationally, state-wide, and locally so they might have a better opportunity to find the right person. He felt having the advertisement on the website was not enough to find the right person, and that a search firm knows where to look for people.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that she had discussed Council's search for a City Manager with Miriam Hair with the Municipal Association, and that Ms. Hair urged that Council exercise caution in doing a national search. Many have impressive resumes, but if you check closely there may be some issues. She pointed out that State Executive Directors talk to each other and they know who has background problems that Council should be aware of. She urged Council to check with State Directors in looking at candidates. Councilwoman Price felt that 30 days was a good time to advertise for a City Manager.

Council then discussed a possible time line for the process. A suggestion was to advertise the first of September, and have applications and resumes by the first of October. Council could review the applications in October and do interviews in November, and hire someone in November or December.

Councilwoman Price pointed out that Councilmembers all have qualities that they are looking for in the City Manager in terms of experience, fiscal management, etc.

Councilman Merry pointed out that if a search firm is used, representatives will meet with Council and try to help figure out what type person Council wants for a City Manager. One benefit of using a firm is that they help in finding the person with the qualities that Council is looking for. He also pointed out they have a data base of persons who may be looking to make a move and who might fit the qualifications that Council is looking for. He said these firms are able to make contact with potential candidates that Council would never reach. He also stated he had done research on pay for City Managers. About 80% of the municipal administrators make between \$90,000 and \$165,000 a year. He also pointed out that personality of a City Manager is very important.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he has a concern about going nationally. He suggested advertising in the few states around us. He said he would like to get the best person who also knows something about Aiken. He pointed out going nationally may bring in people from California, etc. which will take a lot of time and money. He felt Council needed to go fairly locally in the search.

Councilman Merry said he had mentioned going nationally, but his focus was more on using a professional firm to help find the right person.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated the point that the committee needs to decide is whether or not to use a professional firm in the search for a City Manager and then present that to all of Council for a decision.

Councilman Merry continued his discussion on use of a professional firm. He said in his research he got a couple of proposals from firms and how they do their work. He said the cost would be about \$15,000 plus expenses such as travel or other related expenses. They would do preliminary work with Council on the type manager Council wants. They would make recommendations for Council and find candidates. They would do background checks, follow up on references, and help do negotiations.

Councilman Dewar stated Council has been through the process and went to the Municipal Association, Georgia, and other means of advertising and received plenty of applications. The seven Councilmembers, in going through the applications independently, ended with the same top three applicants. He said he was satisfied with the previous application process. He felt it was very important that Council try as hard as possible to get someone who has been in city administration in South Carolina, as they would be familiar with the area. He felt there are a lot of big issues in Aiken that will challenge the best City Manager. He stated he felt Council should start advertising for the position the first of September. He felt we need to get a City Manager on board as quickly as possible.

Councilman Merry stated he could see the value of getting someone from South Carolina with the person knowing people that the Manager would have to deal with such as SCDOT, etc., South Carolina laws, etc.

Councilman Dewar pointed out the candidates who are looking will check on the Municipal Association website. He said candidates from Georgia, Alabama, or North Carolina will look at that page. He felt the candidates will find us. He said Aiken is a great city, and a great place for someone to come in and run a good city. He felt we would like to get someone who would be with us for 10 to 15 years at least. He said he was satisfied in advertising with the Municipal Association, and Georgia and North Carolina. He felt we would get some good candidates.

Councilman Merry stated he felt Council would have a better likelihood of success if they took a systematic approach by using someone who has experience doing it. He pointed out there is also the International City Manager's Association.

Mr. LeDuc reviewed his experience with search firms and pointed out that they do get the information out to a lot of people. He pointed out some negatives that Council will be facing. He said Myrtle Beach is looking for a City Manager. Newberry was looking and finally hired their former retired City Manager again. He said there are not a lot of people who are wanting to get into the "pressure cooker" job of being a City Manager, but there are some out there. He said if Council finds someone whom they feel could do the job, but may need some assistance, he would be around to help. He pointed out that sometimes people from way off do not fit in with the culture of our area. He felt there may be some good candidates in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina—the Southeastern area that understands the culture and the south.

Councilman Merry stated he felt Council had a better chance of getting the best if the search is wider. He felt there are people that they might have the opportunity to bring to Aiken through a professional search firm that they would not have otherwise.

Councilman Dewar pointed out there are a lot of variables in the process. One question is whether the person is qualified for the job on paper. Do they have the experience that we need. In looking at the resume do they feel the person can take Aiken where Council feels we need to be. Another important variable is personality. How the person would fit with the City of Aiken and staff. He said a professional firm would not tell you that and neither would the website. He said Council has to find on paper people that are qualified for the job. He said he felt they got a lot of applicants last time when looking for a City Manager. He pointed out you only see personality when you see the person.

Mayor Cavanaugh asked if the consensus of the committee was to go forward locally like we did last time. He said the committee needs to make the point as to whether we would recommend going with a professional firm or go locally, with surrounding states, and through the Municipal Associations.

Councilwoman Price felt that Council should advertise locally, with the surrounding states such as Georgia and North Carolina, and the state associations. She pointed out people in the associations know each other.

Mr. LeDuc stated last time we advertised in South Carolina. He said finding the right fit personality-wise is very important. Some other things can be accomplished through training. He suggested Council might want to have the candidates do a personality test to see if they are CEO type material. He also suggested that the family of those they interview should be brought in.

Councilman Merry stated the suggestion to broaden the search to surrounding states quells his concerns about limiting the search to South Carolina. He felt having the candidate take a personality test is a good idea. He said another concern of his is that all seven Councilmembers all see a different individual in their mind for the job and also see a different purpose for the person to pursue. He said that was a reason to have a professional organization to help find the focus for a person.

Councilman Dewar pointed out the reason for waiting a while before proceeding with the search for a City Manager was that Council has the best people to solve the problems we have now instead of hiring a City Manager to fix them. He also suggested listing the vacancy with the City Managers' Association and the County Managers' Association.

Councilman Dewar stated he feels we should have an advertisement out around September 1. He said the process would last until Council determines to stop the applications. He said if we could get the budget process ended by October, that would be ideal for the timing to interview. He felt if the process is too long, we will not be able to hire anyone until January or February, and he felt that was too long. He said the goal should be to have a City Manager by January 1, 2015, so they would be available for Horizons and the next budget process.

Mr. LeDuc stated he would draft an advertisement for Council's review and have that ready in the next couple of weeks. After approval of the advertisement, he said he would work with the surrounding state associations to get the ad on their lists.

Mayor Cavanaugh asked if any of the citizens would like to make any comments.

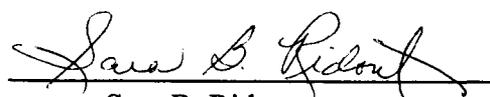
Mr. Ron Feller stated, in listening to the Council conversations, he noted that culture is very important as well as the personality type. He pointed out that Council would be the ones making the decision for the next City Manager. He said Councilmembers need to know what they want in a City Manager. He said Council might want to consider having a professional firm come in and tell Council what they can do and for how much and then make a decision about that. He said the professional firms might reach into areas that we would not normally touch with the normal advertisement on the website. He said a professional firm might have a process that could help Council with determining what they might deem acceptable when it comes time to interview.

Mr. Richard Johnson stated he liked the discussion on the process. He suggested that Council not set their sights too high that they may overlook someone they think is not the person they want, but, in fact, is the person they need. He suggested looking far and near.

Mr. Gary Allington, of the Chamber of Commerce, stated he was sure that the Chamber would want the most professional, capable person that could be found. He said we know Aiken has some issues that need to be addressed in the next few years. He said one issue is to look responsibly at growth. He felt the City Manager should have some capabilities in recruiting business and working with issues in dealing with zoning and other things that have impacts on businesses.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business Councilman Merry moved, seconded by Councilman Dewar, that the meeting adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 4:55 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk