

Roll Call

The Kalamazoo City Commission met as a Committee of the Whole on Tuesday, September 6, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at City Hall.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Mayor David Anderson
 Qianna Decker
 Jeanne Hess
 Stephanie Hoffman
 Chris Praedel

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

Vice Mayor Don Cooney
 Esteven Juarez

Also present were City Manager Jim Ritsema, City Attorney Clyde Robinson, and City Clerk Scott Borling.

Commissioners Excused

Commissioner Hess, seconded by Commissioner Decker, moved to excuse the absences of Commissioner Juarez and Vice Mayor Cooney. With a voice vote the motion passed.

Public Comments

When an opportunity was given for general public comments, the following people addressed the City Commission:

In-Person Comments

Jack Urban, City resident, encouraged the City Commission to seek a City Attorney who would give advice that was less conservative and more “on the edge.” Mr. Urban encouraged Commissioners to ask the City Attorney for opinions that analyzed risks and rewards rather than ways to protect the City.

Shardae Chambers, City resident, spoke about the lack of transparency and respect with regard to the on-going investigation of Public Safety Chief Vernon Coakley.

Call-In Comments

None

2022-0288

Discussion re: the City
 Attorney Search Process

Human Resources and Labor Relations Director Shelly Dusek introduced Jeff Mueller, Executive Recruiter from the Michigan Municipal League, who reviewed the recruitment and hiring process for the City Attorney position and facilitated Commissioner discussion about the job description and job posting. Commissioners offered the following comments in response to Mr. Mueller's questions:

Do you feel Kalamazoo is a safe community?

- in general, Kalamazoo is safe, but it could be safer. There are areas where it is not safe, and ages that are not safe.
- Kalamazoo's growth will increase exponentially once certain safety milestones were hit.
- we need to document safety with data.
- crime often followed poverty; some crimes were more prevalent than others.
- Kalamazoo was not immune from the challenges of urban life and national trends.

- some neighborhoods did not feel safe, and some neighborhoods do not even think about safety.
- community surveys show that safety is the top priority for residents.
- within the past year the City Commission has allocated \$1 million each to address gun violence and youth development.

How do you feel about the schools?

- Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) is always evolving. We need to put more pride and hope into the school system. We need to support teachers and staff.
- The Kalamazoo Promise is a great opportunity. No other school district has The Promise.
- the new KPS Superintendent is dynamic and cares about the kids.
- Kalamazoo is the "Education City" with The Promise, Western Michigan, Kalamazoo College, and Kalamazoo Community College.
- KPS is partner and not under the City's purview.
- the community is devoted to supporting KPS.
- the City flag features representations of Industry, Progress, and Education

What change is the community experiencing?

- the community is becoming more aware of who we are and who we want to become regarding issues like racism, violence, and youth issues.
- the City's resident population is changing.
- there has been a shift from being creative in how we cut budgets and services to being creative in our dreaming. Examples include the Foundation for Excellence, The Kalamazoo Promise, KRESA's \$100 million career readiness center, and community philanthropy.
- our intent to be an inclusive community is part of the change.
- change is being driven by a great community engagement process, community vision, and master plan.
- barriers to healthcare for the community's most vulnerable residents were removed in 2020, but COVID programs and benefits were going away. The barriers need to be removed.

What are the opportunities in Kalamazoo?

- Kalamazoo has a great arts community and is family oriented.
- we have a great location, between Detroit and Chicago.
- Kalamazoo is one of the most affordable places to live in the Midwest.
- in 5-10 years, Kalamazoo will be one of the most cool and vibrant cities in the state.
- there are great projects in the works. Kalamazoo is growing; we need to make sure to bring everyone along.
- we have a Fair Housing Ordinance, and Kalamazoo County has a millage for affordable housing.
- the Attorney General said recently that Kalamazoo "is doing it right."

What challenges are facing the community?

- poverty; racism; disparities of income and opportunity
- accountability and transparency for the City organization; building and rebuilding trust with the community.
- a lack of housing across all income ranges.

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Discussion re: the City
Attorney Search Process
(cont'd)

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(cont'd)

- Attracting people who care about the community to be Public Safety Officers.
- the City has old housing stock that needs upkeep and repair.
- realizing all the ideals we put on paper.
- the unhoused

What skills do you want in the next City Attorney?

- knowledge of Michigan municipal law
- integrity; above reproach; unbiased
- the ability to give options within the boundaries of the law and empower decision-making
- the ability to see through an anti-racism and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) lens.
- the ability to look beyond the letter of the law to what is right and just.
- an ability to educate staff and the public about legal topics.
- a good manager: the ability to manage an office
- knowledge and experience in the following areas: Freedom of Information laws and processes; Open Meetings Act; human resources and employment law.
- an even-keeled temperament; someone who does not let ego or personalities get in the way.
- the ability to work collaboratively, both with staff and people/groups outside the City organization.
- the ability to outsource and use/manage outside counsel for specialized areas of the law.

Do any changes need to be made to the job description?

- the FOIA request process needs to be efficient and sustainable.
- the ordinance decriminalization project needs to keep moving forward.
- the City Attorney needs to empower their staff.
- the City Attorney needs to be intentional in building relationships with the City Commission and City Administration.
- the City Attorney needs to be responsive to the City Commission; knowing when and how to communicate with Commissioners.

In response to questions from Commissioner Hess, Mr. Mueller stated the role of a municipal attorney varied from community to community, but things like contract review and monitoring state and federal law for local impacts were common duties. Mr. Mueller stated an applicant from out of state could potentially practice law in Michigan, but they would not be able to meet the City's position requirement of experience practicing Michigan municipal law.

In response to a question from Mayor Anderson, Mr. Mueller presented the following timeline for the recruitment/hiring process:

- notes from this meeting would be sent to Director Dusek in one or two days.
- the position would be advertised for four weeks.
- candidates would be presented to the City Commission for consideration a few weeks after the advertising closed.

In response to questions from Commissioner Decker, Mr Meuller stated it was difficult to estimate the number of applications the City might receive. Mr. Meuller noted the City of Grand Rapids received 50 applications when they advertised for their attorney position. The City Commission would receive a matrix with scores for all applicants, and a screening report with more detailed information on all candidates who met the City's criteria.

In response to a question from Commissioner Hess, Mr. Meuller indicated he had people in mind for the position, and he would work his contacts in larger law departments across the state.

Finally, an opportunity was given for comments from City Commissioners.

Commissioner Hess thanked City Attorney Robinson for his experience and integrity.

The meeting adjourned at 6:21 p.m.

Scott A. Borling
City Clerk

Approved by the City Commission on: _____

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(cont'd)

Commissioner
Comments

Adjournment