

Roll Call

The Kalamazoo City Commission met in special session as a Committee of the Whole on Wednesday, October 15, 2025 at 4:05 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at City Hall. The purpose of the meeting was to interview candidates for the City Manager position.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Mayor David Anderson
Vice Mayor Jeanne Hess
Don Cooney
Qianna Decker
Stephanie Hoffman
Esteven Juarez
Alonzo Wilson

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

None

Opening Remarks

Also present were City Attorney Aaron Leal and City Clerk Scott Borling.

Mayor Anderson reviewed the City Manager candidate events from Tuesday, October 14th and Wednesday, October 15th.

Pamela Wideman from Raftelis provided an overview of the City Manager search process and described the interview protocol that would be followed.

2023-44-01Interview of City
Manager Candidates

The City Commission interviewed the following candidates for the City Manager position:

Malcolm Hankins
Laura Lam
Odis Jones, Sr.
Elle Cole

Commissioners asked each candidate the following questions in a round-robin format:

- We have reviewed your cover letter, resume, and other application materials. Tell us what specific skills and experiences you bring to this position and why you are interested and uniquely qualified to become our next City Manager.
- As you have prepared for this interview, you have had the opportunity to research the City of Kalamazoo. Please share with us what you feel are the top three opportunities or challenges currently facing the community or organization right now.
- Share with us how you describe the role of the City Manager in the Commission-Manager form of government and your approach to leading in the role of City Manager.
- Described your approach to interacting with elected officials, especially when there is significant disagreement on a key issue. What is your approach to building and maintaining trust, productive communication, and good relationships within the governing body?
- Describe a time when you were asked to advance a policy or program that you disagreed with. What was your approach?

- Share with us the most challenging ethical issues you have faced in your career.
- Some of the top priorities for the next City Manager include addressing the issues of affordable housing and homelessness, downtown redevelopment, and infrastructure improvements. As our next City Manager, how would you approach downtown development in a way that supports growth and revitalization while balancing the issue of displacement for vulnerable members of our community. Also, please share any relevant experience you have in each of these areas.
- The City of Kalamazoo is a very collaborative community. Describe your approach to establishing relationships, more specifically, advancing equitable practices for diverse groups or traditionally underrepresented populations within our community and in the workplace.
- Is there anything else you feel we should know about you? What questions do you have for us?

The interview with Malcolm Hankins began at 4:15 p.m.

Mr. Hankins answered the questions asked by City Commissioners and presented his qualifications for the City Manager position. When given an opportunity to ask questions of the City Commission, Mr. Hankins offered the following:

- Will there be a time for overlap with the current City Manager?
- There will be a transition with the City Commission in the next month. What might be the impact of that transition on the new City Manager?

The interview with Malcolm Hankins ended at 4:45 p.m.

The interview with Laura Lam began at 4:52 p.m.

Ms. Lam answered the questions asked by City Commissioners and presented her qualifications for the City Manager position. When given an opportunity to ask questions of the City Commission, Ms. Lam offered the following:

- With the coming of a new City Commission and City Manager, how do you think about building trust?

The interview with Laura Lam ended at 5:44 p.m.

Mayor Anderson announced there would be a dinner break for approximately one hour.

The meeting recessed at 5:45 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 6:42 p.m.

The interview with Odis Jones, Sr. began at 6:44 p.m.

Mr. Jones answered the questions asked by City Commissioners and presented his qualifications for the City Manager position. In addition to the questions posed to all candidates, Mr. Jones responded to the following custom questions:

2023-14-01

Interview of City
Manager Candidates
(cont'd)

Malcolm Hankins
Interview

Laura Lam Interview

Meeting Recessed
Meeting Resumed

Odis Jones Interview

Odis Jones Interview
(cont'd)

- What is your background in neighborhood development, poverty reduction, and improving the quality of life in neighborhoods?
- Can you tell us more about the development in Camden, New Jersey?
- Have you started to consider innovative solutions you might implement to address economic development, affordable housing, and homelessness? (Commissioner Wilson)
- How would you establish relationships with City staff and lead them? (Vice Mayor Hess)

The interview with Odis Jones ended at 7:20 p.m.

Meeting Recessed
Meeting Resumed

The meeting recessed at 7:21 p.m.
The meeting reconvened at 7:46 p.m.

Discussion re:
Rescheduling the Elle
Cole Interview

Following the recess Mayor Anderson announced Elle Cole would not be interviewing at this time due to unforeseen circumstances. Mayor Anderson suggested the City Commission consider rescheduling Ms. Cole's interview to Friday, October 17th at 7:00 a.m., with Ms. Cole participating remotely.

Discussion followed.

City Attorney Leal noted the current meeting could be recessed for up to 36 hours without a new meeting notice. City Attorney Leal indicated the City Clerk would provide notice of the recess.

By consensus the City Commission agreed to recess the meeting after receiving public comments and to interview Ms. Cole on Friday, October 17th.

Public Comments

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

Maggie Adams, City resident and member of ISAAC, regarding the City Manager candidate meet-and-greet event on October 14th.

Cathy Phason, non-resident and member of ISAAC, regarding the City Manager candidate meet-and-greet event on October 14th.

Charlae Davis, City resident and member of ISAAC, regarding the City Manager candidate meet-and-greet event on October 14th and opportunities for public input on the City Manager candidates.

Kaleb, regarding opportunities for public input on the City Manager candidates.

K, non-resident, regarding the search process and community trust.

Chris Glasser, City resident, regarding the need to select a candidate who was innovative, nuanced, and modern.

Tobi Hanna-Davies, City resident, regarding the need for a City Manager who would focus on enforcing the Fair Housing Ordinance.

Rochelle Habeck, regarding the need for a City Manager who would address structural racism.

Public Comments
(cont'd)

Finally, an opportunity was given for miscellaneous comments and concerns of City Commissioners.

Commissioner
Comments

Commissioner Decker thanked the candidates who interviewed.

Commissioner Praedel stated he had no preconceptions about the candidates, and he offered remarks on the importance of this decision, his experience interviewing and hiring, and the effort he would put into reviewing candidate materials over the weekend.

Vice Mayor Hess reported the candidates were impressed with the meet-and-greet event and the number of people who participated. Vice Mayor Hess stated she encouraged people to offer public comments at the 5:00 Committee of the Whole meeting so that Commissioners would have that feedback prior to making their decision.

Commissioner Praedel, seconded by Vice Mayor Hess, moved to recess the meeting until 7:00 a.m. on Friday, October 17, 2025 to allow Elle Cole to interview with the City Commission in the Community Room via remote technology.

Motion to Recess

Prior to a vote on the motion and in response to a question from Commissioner Wilson, City Attorney Leal indicated the motion language implied the meeting would not be reconvened on Friday should Ms. Cole not be able or willing to interview at that time.

Commissioner Wilson suggested the City Manager Search Subcommittee request confirmation of Ms. Cole's intentions within a timeframe that would allow for notice of a meeting cancellation, if necessary.

With a roll call vote this motion passed 7-0.

AYES: Commissioners Cooney, Decker, Hoffman, Praedel, Wilson, Vice Mayor Hess, Mayor Anderson

NAYS: None

The meeting was recessed at 8:23 p.m.

Meeting Recessed

The meeting resumed on Friday, October 17, 2025 at 7:00 a.m. in the City Commission Chambers at City Hall.

Meeting Resumed

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Mayor David Anderson
Vice Mayor Jeanne Hess
Don Cooney
Qianna Decker
Stephanie Hoffman
Esteven Juarez
Alonzo Wilson

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

None

Elle Cole Interview

The interview with Elle Cole began at 7:02 a.m. Ms. Cole participated in the meeting using remote technology.

Commissioners asked Ms. Cole the following questions in a round-robin format (the same questions asked of the other candidates, but in a different order):

- As you have prepared for this interview, you have had the opportunity to research the City of Kalamazoo. Please share with us what you feel are the top three opportunities or challenges currently facing the community or organization right now.
- Share with us how you describe the role of the City Manager in the Commission-Manager form of government and your approach to leading in the role of City Manager.
- The City of Kalamazoo is a very collaborative community. Describe your approach to establishing relationships, more specifically, advancing equitable practices for diverse groups or traditionally underrepresented populations within our community and in the workplace.
- We have reviewed your cover letter, resume, and other application materials. Tell us what specific skills and experiences you bring to this position and why you are interested and uniquely qualified to become our next City Manager.
- Share with us the most challenging ethical issues you have faced in your career.
- Describe your approach to interacting with elected officials, especially when there is significant disagreement on a key issue. What is your approach to building and maintaining trust, productive communication, and good relationships within the governing body?
- Describe a time when you were asked to advance a policy or program that you disagreed with. What was your approach?
- Some of the top priorities for the next City Manager include addressing the issues of affordable housing and homelessness, downtown redevelopment, and infrastructure improvements. As our next City Manager, how would you approach downtown development in a way that supports growth and revitalization while balancing the issue of displacement for vulnerable members of our community. Also, please share any relevant experience you have in each of these areas.
- Is there anything else you feel we should know about you? What questions do you have for us?

When given an opportunity to ask questions of the City Commission, Ms. Cole offered the following:

- One year from now, if you have a new City Manager in place who is the perfect fit for your community, what would have happened over the past year that would make you feel that way and make you say that?

The interview with Elle Cole ended at 7:40 a.m.

Vice Mayor Hess reviewed the ways members of the community could provide feedback about the candidates to City Commissioners.

Next, an opportunity was given for general public comments, but no comments were offered.

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

Mayor Anderson announced Odis Jones had withdrawn his name from consideration as a candidate for the City Manager position.

Commissioner Praedel thanked City staff for their work on the technology and logistics to make this meeting happen.

The meeting adjourned at 7:44 a.m. on Friday, October 17, 2025.

Scott A. Borling
City Clerk

Approved by the City Commission on: _____

Public Comments

Commissioner
Comments

Adjournment