

CITY OF CHARLOTTE COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS
111 E. Lawrence Ave., Charlotte, MI 48813 (517) 543-2750
Special Council Meeting
March 28, 2022

CALL TO ORDER:

By Mayor Armitage on Monday March 28, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

Mayor Armitage, Mayor Pro-Tem Weissenborn, Council members Dyer, Rodriguez, Van Langevelde, Horvath and Lake. A quorum was met. Also in attendance were City Manager LaPere, Attorney Hitch via Zoom, and City Clerk LaRocque.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Led by Mayor Armitage

ABSENCE OF COUNCIL MEMBERS:

All present

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve the special meeting agenda by Weissenborn supported by Dyer. Carried, Yea 7; Nay 0, Absent 0.

DISCUSSION ON RESIGNATION OF THE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS:

Meeting opened with the Mayor explaining the reason for the special meeting and introducing Attorney Hitch who gave context to the relationship between Council, the City Manager, and City employees as outlined in the City charter.

Volunteer Firefighter (VFF), Ron Smith, Chief of the VFF, addressed Council, listing several experiences beginning in 2020 until today, of interactions with or by the Mayor, City Council and City Administration that have caused the VFF group to feel there is a disconnect between City and VFF.

Smith, on behalf of VFF offered a community apology for the abrupt resignation that left the City vulnerable lacking adequate fire protection. A promise this will never happen again and has implemented ways for better communication between the VFF and the City

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Approximately 60 or so city residents attended the meeting in person (including VFF) in support of the VFF and several voiced opinions in favor including; Mary Maine, Jody Pruden; Tony Pruden; Allison Newman; Mark Pellegrino; Dan Daly reading an excerpt written by Jessica Droscha; Kim Pruden; Tim Burk; Rob Herig (Eaton Twp.); Linda Newman; Jeff Christiansen; Aaron; Steve Passic; Zack Story; and Teresa Hart (Carmel Twp.) who voiced support for the Mayor.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL COMMENTS:

Van Langevelde; offered her history of working in public service and is dedicated to making Charlotte safe, called upon the community to work together. Supports VFF to return to service.

Lake; has a history of friendship and memories with members of the VFF and has spent 15 plus hours working with VFF to understand issues and offer his support to them. Supports VFF to return to service.

Rodriguez; seeks understanding before speaking. Supports the ability of the Mayor to speak. Supports VFF to return to service.

Horvath; Thanked all attendees, thanked VFF and praised Chief Vogel. Called for resignations of Mayor Armitage and City

Manager LaPere citing lack of trust. Supports VFF to return to service.

Weissenborn; Thanked all attendees, apologized if her prepared comments given at the March 21 Council meeting were deemed disrespectful by not recognizing the abrupt mass resignation, she was not prepared to comment on actions she was surprised at. She voiced her concerns about the serious position VFF put the City in by resigning in the manner they did. Supports VFF to return to service.

Dyer; Despite the limitations of council (as outlined in City Charter and explained by Hitch) to resolve the issue by taking action with a decision to reinstate the VFF, he would like Council to offer direction to the City Manager for a resolution to reinstate the VFF. Supports VFF to return to service.

LaPere; Thanked attendees and will consider the public perspectives given, along with the VFF concerns, and public apology, to help her formulate a path of moving forward. Wants VFF to understand the seriousness of leaving the city without adequate emergency coverage and needs assurances this will never happen again. She believes all issues are fixable problems. She understands the urgency of needing a quick resolution but is not prepared to make a statement at this time. Supports VFF to return to service.

Armitage; He believed most of the VFF issues given by Smith had been addressed properly and were behind them. He apologized if efforts to obtain answers were taken as accusatory against the CFD/VFF. During discussion with Chief Vogel, it was explained to him present issues were with the Rural Fire Assn. (RFA). Armitage is open, responsive, and listening, he wants resolution to this issue. He explained that his comments at the March 21 meeting, after the mass resignation were an attempt to reassure the public a plan will be put in place, not that he prefers to replace VFF. Supports VFF to return to service.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by Rodriguez, supported by Horvath to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m. Carried; Yea 4 (Horvath, Rodriguez, Weissenborn, Armitage); Nay 3 (Van Langevelde, Lake, Dyer).

Mayor Armitage

Mary LaRocque, City Clerk