

COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS
Special Meeting
September 21, 2020

CALL TO ORDER: By Mayor Armitage on Monday, September 21, 2020 at 6:01 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Pro-Tem Dyer, Councilmembers Baker, Hoogstra, McRae, VanStee, Weissenborn, and Mayor Armitage

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Guetschow, City City/Treasurer McClary

PURPOSE OF SPECIAL MEETING:

Mayor Armitage stated that the purpose of the special meeting is to interview interim city manager candidates and to consider approving the selection of an interim city manager.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

INTERIM CITY MANAGER CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS:

Mayor Armitage introduced Ryan Cotton from GovTemps and asked if Mr. Cotton had any opening comments. Mr. Cotton stated that he was here to assist with the process in any way he could.

Mayor Armitage explained the interview process. The city council has prepared a series of interview questions, and council members will

take turns asking questions. If council members have follow up questions, they may ask those questions. However, council should keep to the time limits for each interview.

Interview of Aaron Thelenwood:

Council conducted an interview with Aaron Thelenwood. Mr. Thelenwood currently serves as Operations Manager for the West Michigan Regional Airport Authority for the City of Holland. He provided an overview of his educational and professional background. His ideal work environment is one in which people are motivated, where staff are highly committed and engaged and are not micromanaged. His management style involves building a consensus around a shared objective. His communication style with council is to build a good rapport to carry policy directives and agenda of the council forward. The value he would bring to the city is that he is good under pressure, meets deadlines, is creative, and his level of experience. His reservations about the interim position is that there is a steep learning curve and will need to serve more in a utilitarian role and will not be able to spend as much face time with staff and others. He stated that his biggest failure involved a parking study he worked on for the City of Holland and some mistakes he made in messaging and communication. He misunderstood his role in the project and relied too heavily on recommendations from the police chief. He will become familiar with the organization and community with “boots on the ground” by getting to know the leadership team and their priorities, meeting with key stakeholders, and relying heavily on the expertise within the organization. He stated that he prepared for the interview by doing background research and reviewing meeting minutes. He prefers to communicate with council through face to face interaction and electronic communication with a goal of understanding council

priorities. He prefers to communicate with staff through an open door policy with a goal of understanding department priorities and to be astute as to types of communication that work best. Mr. Thelenwood stated that he has no experience with labor relations, but he was a member of the Teamsters at one time and would work to balance council and union priorities and be open, upfront, and honest. For an example of delegation and accountability, he shared his experience with splitting the communication coordinator job duties when the previous coordinator left and how he reached out to contacts, including City of Holland, when he needed advice. He stated that previous employers would say that his strengths are adaptability, reliability, and can be in the room with almost anyone. They would say his weakness is his public speaking skills – being able to form sentences – and that he is taking public speaking classes. He stated that his role during council meetings would be to bring information and recommendations to help council make informed decisions. He stated that there is no negative information about him of which council should be aware. He asked council how they see the role of city manager. He also asked council, from a strategic standpoint, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the position. Council members responded to his questions.

Interview of Thomas Thomas:

Council conducted an interview with Thomas Thomas. Mr. Thomas is currently serving as a certified substitute teacher for public and private schools. He provided an overview of his educational and professional background. He stated that his ideal work environment would be one that is collaborative, where everyone is working as a team and is accountable. His leadership style is to lead by example, and his management style is to manage by goals and to collaborate.

He issues 3 to 4 month corrective action plans if department heads get off track. His personal style of interacting and communicating with council is to be flexible, engage in 1-on-1 communication, and use multiple tools to communicate. He stated the value he would bring to the organization would be his experience working in multiple governments in several states, his financial planning skills, and his budgeting skills. The reservations he has about the position are being able to learn the culture of the organization and council in the short time frame of the interim position and that this learning would need to happen faster. He would need to meet with council to determine the pace and priorities. He stated that his biggest failure was the super Walmart development project in one community that did not go forward. He stated that he will become familiar with the organization and the community by having meetings with department heads, meeting with the Rotary Club and other organizations, and meeting with council to determine goals for the next 90 days. He prefers to communicate with council and staff through face-to-face interaction but also uses FaceTime, Zoom, phone calls, texting, and e-mail. He stated that he has labor relations experience with fire fighters, police, UAW and working with six-year labor contracts. He would approach negotiations by looking at finances, have the labor attorney involved, get feedback from council at sessions, and get feedback from the unions on needs first before submitting the city's proposal. He shared an example of delegation and accountability regarding a street condition ratings project, during which the DPW director recommended hot asphalt treatment for road repairs. The solution was very successful, and he gave the director a lot of praise for the suggestion. He stated that previous employers would say that he takes no sick days, he loves his job, he is very aggressive in getting things done, and he makes sure that actions are fair and balanced. He stated that his role during council meetings is to give a general outline of

items; the city council asks questions, and the city manager answers the questions; city council makes the decisions or, sometimes, the city manager will bring additional information back to council for further discussion. He stated that there is no negative information about him of which council should be aware, except the super Walmart project. Mr. Thomas asked council what the council is looking for the interim city manager to achieve. He also asked council what the council wants in an interim city manager. Council responded to his questions.

Interview of Toby Van Ess:

Council conducted an interview with Toby Van Ess. Mr. Van Ess currently serves as Supervisor/Manager and Zoning Administrator for Tallmadge Charter Township. He provided an overview of his educational and professional background. His ideal work environment would be one in which everyone enjoys what they do, have to be a “family”, everyone gets along and no fighting over power, no animosity. His management style is to work closely with others, not micromanage, willing to help and get his hands dirty, and have an open door policy. He stated that his personal style of interacting and communicating with council is that he wants to lead but keep council informed, phone calls, and stop by the house to try to keep everyone informed. He stated that the value he can bring to the organization is that he is able to see the business side of things, which is a benefit for economic development, but he understands that government is not in it for profit but, rather, for service. He stated that the reservations he has about the position is that it will be a little tough; the city is in good financial shape but the position is short term and he will need to adapt so that he can make a positive impact. He shared that one of his biggest failures was his lack of communication with some residents, especially residents who also own businesses in the community,

regarding code enforcement and the fact that there should have been more discussion and more compassion rather than coming down hard on them. He stated that he would become familiar with the organization and the community by getting to know people and business leaders, reviewing the budget, getting to know department employees; he believes that first impressions are very important. He prepared for the interview by reviewing previous council meetings; he knows that locker rooms for the police department are important. His preferred way of communicating with council and staff is through face-to-face interaction, an open door policy, build a family atmosphere, be hands-on, and communicate with council however the council prefers. He stated that he has some experience in labor relations from working in private business and that he believes council can be as involved as they want but that he will be forthright and fair. Regarding delegation and accountability, he stated that the buck stops with him, he empowers people to do their jobs without micromanaging but sometimes needs to take control of a situation when necessary. He stated that previous employers would say that his strengths are communication, getting the job done, honesty, work ethic, and creating a family atmosphere. He said that they would say his weakness is lack of knowledge of computers. He stated that his role at council meetings would be the same as a mayor, he runs day to day operations and has one vote on the council. He stated that he does not think there is any negative information about him of which council should be aware; he is a boring guy who likes to fish. Mr. Van Ess asked the council what the timeline is for the interim city manager selection. He also asked council what role the council sees for the interim city manager in helping with the city manager selection. Council responded to his questions.

Mayor Armitage recessed the meeting at 7:58 PM.

Mayor Armitage reconvened the meeting at 8:10 PM.

DISCUSSION OF CANDIDATES:

Mayor Armitage asked Mr. Cotton for further insight into the qualifications of the three candidates.

Mr. Cotton stated that the city council should follow a process of elimination in selecting the interim city manager. He stated that Mr. Thomas was the second top candidate in the Eastpointe and Adrian searches. He should have stayed longer in Alaska. He adheres to the concepts of management by objectives (MBO) and scientific management. He stated that Mr. Thelenwood is interested in the permanent position but it is not known if Mr. Thomas has the same interest.

The mayor and council members pointed out the following strengths and weaknesses of each candidate:

- AARON THELENWOOD
 - May lack competence and experience
 - Would get to know people quickly
 - Would be hardworking, thorough, and dedicated
 - Not quite as solid; does not have depth of experience
 - Is creative and innovative
 - Is a go-getter
 - Department heads could mentor him but need to hit the ground running
 - Strong candidate
- THOMAS THOMAS

- Strong candidate
- Much more experienced
- Meets most expectations
- Has legitimacy, competency, knows what is expected of staff
- Not sure if he wants to stay long term
- Would put out fires and give stability
- Strong in budgeting
- Did his homework
- Liked his answer about the learning curve and learning the culture
- Strong in labor relations and financial background
- TOBY VAN ESS
 - Has common sense
 - Knowledge centers more on townships
 - Would have a different approach
 - Would not meet our needs
 - Easy to approach and talk to

Mayor Armitage requested that council members rank order the candidates. Council rank ordered the candidates as follows:

- Thomas Thomas - #1 – all council members
- Aaron Thelen - #2 – all council members
- Toby Van Ess - #3 – all council members

Mayor Armitage stated that he would want further discussion if the top two candidates were not available.

CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL OF RESOLUTION NO. 2020-123 APPROVING THE SELECTION OF AN INTERIM CITY MANAGER:

RESOLUTION NO. 2020-123

A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE SELECTION OF AN INTERIM CITY MANAGER

WHEREAS, the City Council has approved the proposal of GovTemps for recruitment and other assistance in identifying an interim city manager; and

WHEREAS, the City Attorney has reviewed and approved as to form the employee leasing agreement between the City and GovTemps through which interim personnel services would be provided; and

WHEREAS, the City Council interviewed three candidates during a special meeting held on September 21, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has determined that [name of candidate] is the person who represents the best match for the position and that the provision of his services through a leasing agreement between the City and GovTemps would be in the best interests of the City;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that City Manager Guetschow is hereby instructed to notify GovTemps that the City wishes to proceed with retaining the services of [name of candidate] as interim city manager pursuant to the provisions of its employee leasing agreement; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that City Manager Guetschow is hereby authorized to execute the employee leasing agreement on behalf of the City.

Council member McRae moved, supported by Mayor Pro-Tem Dyer, to approve Resolution No. 2020-123 approving the selection of an interim city manager by inserting the name Mr. Thomas Thomas in the blanks and further amending the resolution to add a fifth WHEREAS that states as follows: “WHEREAS, the City Council has determined that Aaron Thelenwood is the person who represents the next best match for the position and that the provision of his services through a leasing agreement between the City and GovTemps would be in the best interests of the City.” Carried. 7 Yes. 0 No.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

Council member Baker moved, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Dyer to adjourn at 8:37 P.M. Carried. 7 Yes. 0 No.

Mayor Armitage

Darwin McClary, Interim City Clerk