

Local Government Study Commission #6

Wednesday, January 22nd, 2025 @ 5:30 PM

Council Chambers – City Hall

The meeting was called to order by DC Orr at 5:34 pm. The pledge of allegiance was performed.

The following members were present:

- DC Orr – Temporary Presiding Officer
- Vincent Backen
- John Bebee – New Member
- Hugh Taylor – City Council Liaison
- Karen Dinkins – Temporary Secretary

1. Approve minutes

- **Motion** by Vincent Backen to approve the minutes of the January 8th, 2025, meeting. Second by John Bebee. **Motion passed.**

Public Comment: No public comment.

2. New Member

- John Bebee was sworn in at the City Council Meeting on January 21st, 2025. Welcome.

Public Comment: No public comment.

3. Election of permanent presiding officer

- **Motion** by Vincent Backen to appoint DC Orr as presiding officer. Second by John Bebee. **Motion passed.**

Public Comment: No public comment.

4. Election of permanent vice-presiding officer

- **Motion** by Vincent Backen to appoint John Bebee as vice-presiding officer. Second by DC Orr. **Motion passed.**

Public Comment: No public comment.

5. Timeline

- DC Orr presented a timeline of events. Karen Dinkins provided a project calendar.

Motion by John Bebee to approve timeline. Second by Vincent Backen. **Motion passed.**

Public Comment: No public comment.

6. Budget Items

a) Seeking secretarial assistance

- Per DC Orr, the county is unclear also if this would be an independent contractor or an employee and if benefits have to be paid. **Action Item:** DC will be discussing it further with Jen McCully before the next meeting.

b) Establish costs for media and mailings

- Vincent Backen talked with the Lincoln County election administrator and was told the cost of an election would cost \$6,144 which includes envelopes, wages and all other costs associated with an election. If no election is held, this would go back to the general fund.
- Karen Dinkins provided the current budget information from the City Budget including the expenses incurred.
- Media Costs & mailings: DC Orr talked with Jen McCully (Lincoln County Local Government Review), and they are planning \$200 every time an ad is put in the paper. Vincent asked how many times we must publish items in the paper. Probably should estimate at least one per month. Per Hugh Taylor Public Notice guidelines are identified in MCA 7-1-4127 (7 mailings twice per month at \$200 per mailing = \$2,800)

7. Public Engagement

a) Discuss page on City website with group email

- LeAnn is working on the Local Government Review (LGR) webpage. **Action item:** Karen will follow up with LeAnn.

b) Establish date for first Public Hearing

- Vincent Backen feels the public meeting should be earlier than June 11th to get the public involved as soon as possible.

c) Public Information

- Vincent Backen has had several discussions with residents. Water rates is the topic that continues to come up especially with our low incomes residents. The City Charter could address low incomes residents as a class of people.
- DC Orr has been approached by citizens that have stated our government does not listen and this is a constitutional issue.
- The Charter form of government is the most complex form of government.
- John Bebee requested to start a Facebook page for the Local Government Review to get community input on the next agenda to get a vote. In order to obtain more public engagement, we should have a table at community events. DC stated that he and Vince have already been to service groups. DC suggested we have a banner made. **Action Item:** John Bebee will get a price for a banner.

Public Comment: Caroline Buckner asked where do you go when you have an issue with a department and no resolution. The mayor has shut these complaints down. When the mayor is concerned it will be taken up in a public forum, the city attorney gets involved and retaliation occurs. Additionally, a police call was responded to, but the

investigation was turned over to the county. Lastly, in the case with Mr. Germany, was there coercion going on involving our Chief of Police. This seems retaliatory.

- DC Orr is writing a synopsis MCA 2-2-144 Subpart 5 Subsection 8
Public Comment: Karen Dinkins stated public concerns go to the mayor and then it stops if she believes it will make her look bad. Karen was incredibly pleased at the last meeting when the Ethics committee was discussed as this committee could have oversight.
- John made a point of inquiry. He would like to know a list of city officials, their titles, and their wages along with every committee or commission and those names. DC mentioned this can mostly be found on the city website. **Action Item:** Karen Dinkins will make the request to LeAnn for all the information John has asked for. John believes there should be a defined complaint process with extremely specific information related to a response and the details that need to be included.
Public Comment: Caroline Buckner stated the retaliation in the city has gone too far.
- DC Orr what form and function of government can we put together to resolve these issues when the government feels they are above the law.

8. Bylaws

- DC said we are using the template given. **Action Item:** DC asked that all members bring comments related to the template for the next meeting.

9. Charter Review

- DC Orr stated we should do the same thing with the Charter Review. **Action Item:** DC asked that all members bring comments related to the template for the next meeting.
Public Comment: No public comment.

General Comments from the commission and future agenda items:

- Hugh Taylor stated there is a conflict in the minutes as to who is going to give the report to the city council. Discussion determined the December minutes were only in the interim until final approval was given by the mayor to have this committee report done by DC Orr.
- Vincent Backen would like an item on the agenda on how to address issues such as ethics, transparency with water rates and possibly making low income a class of people. He wants this discussed every time until it is resolved.
- Hugh Taylor mentioned you could get a whiteboard and document the issues as they come up. Vincent stated a facilitator could be brought in.
- John Bebee asked how far everyone was in the training.

Motion to adjourn by Vincent Backen. Second by John Bebee. **Motion passed.** The meeting adjourned at 7:36 pm.