

**City of Columbus
Special City Council Meeting
12.19.19**

The 12.19.19 meeting of the City of Columbus City Council was called to order at 3:12 p.m. by Mayor Preiner at the City Hall. Present were Council Members Janet Hegland, Jeff Duraine, Denny Peterson, and Shelly Logren; City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko, and Public Communications Coordinator Jessica Hughes.

Also in attendance were: none.

A. CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

1. Call to Order – Special Meeting – 3:12 P.M.

C. PRESENTATIONS

Appointment of Columbus Tax Assessor

Hegland presented a memo to the Council regarding the Columbus Tax Assessor position. The City's previous Tax Assessor, Ken Tolzmann, will not be renewing his contract, as he is retiring. Mursko has been working to fill the contract position. However, Tax Assessors are tough to find as it is not a very common job.

The current Assistant County Assessor in Cook County, Todd Smith, has interviewed for the position. He is also the Tax Assessor for the City of Grant. Smith has 40 years of experience with assessing. His plan is to retire from the Cook County position and move to the Twin Cities. The Personnel Committee was impressed by how personable and knowledgeable he is, and that he has a strong interest in educating the public. Smith also has experience working in Centerville and Lino Lakes.

The Personnel Committee also spoke with Alex Guggenberger who is building a team in Anoka County and will be implementing a new property tax assessing system. However, the Personnel Committee felt that because the County is in the process of implementing a new system, it may not be the best time to use their services at this time.

Motion by Peterson to offer the City Assessor position to Todd Smith for a contract price of \$24,000 for 2020 and 2021. Seconded by Duraine. Motion carried unanimously.

Human Resources Information

Mursko presented information on Human Resources concerns and explained some history about how they have come to be. The office first experienced issues with understaffing when the Deputy Treasurer left in late 2017. Shortly following that, in early 2018, the Planning Commission Secretary also left. The new Deputy Treasurer Bill Werner was hired in March of 2018. During the time when the Deputy Treasurer position was vacant the City had to hire a contract employee to assist in the office. This employee worked 12 hours each month. Werner's hours are set at 31 per week, which is a decrease of 7.5 hours from what the original Deputy

Treasurer worked. At this time Mursko is picking up the loss of those hours. Since Werner was hired, Rochelle Busch came on board as the City's new Planning Commission Secretary, and Jeff St. Martin was hired to assist with the Zoning Department. Since then Ben Gutknecht was hired in March of 2019. Most recently, St. Martin left his position in July of last year.

Mursko presented a chart of building department activity broken down by year. In 2017 the number of building permits essentially doubled from the previous year. The increase in permits also affects the Zoning Department, as they must also review each building permit. The number of applications through Planning and Zoning have also increased significantly since 2015.

Overall the City employs 8.75 full time employees. The office is at a tipping point in many areas, which does not leave much time for employees to be proactive on new initiatives. To help address the issue, Mursko is requesting that City Planning Technician Ben Gutknecht be moved to 40 hours per week, and early next year she will likely request to hire another employee.

Mayor Preiner asked if she believes moving Gutknecht to 40 hours will help alleviate the amount of work needing to be done? Mursko replied that it will certainly help with planning and zoning but noted that the building department will still be in need of additional help. Building Official Leon Ohman has much to handle, especially with larger projects coming to the City like Running Aces' hotel. It is her intention for the next employee that is hired to dedicate at least a portion of their salary to the building department.

In addition to the request to move Gutknecht to 40 hours, five City employees are eligible for step increases at this time; Ben Gutknecht, Tim Sawatzky, Bill Karth, Rochelle Busch, and Jessica Hughes. Mursko is recommending all employees who are eligible receive the increase as noted in her memo.

Duraine asked if it would be possible to put together a study of how other Cities organize their employees and how much they are paid. Mursko replied that right now she does not have the time to do so, and it is difficult to compare Columbus' City structure and salaries with other communities because very few have comparable characteristics. Duraine said that he is not in favor of hiring additional employees. Mayor Preiner noted that he has similar concerns about hiring additional employee, however he has noticed that the increase in applications and associated work is negatively affecting workflow in the office. Hegland agreed that it is difficult to find a City that is comparable, especially when you consider the amount of growth potential along Columbus' Freeway district. She added that the number of employees at the City directly correlates with the level of service that residents receive. Fewer employees will result in a lower level of service. Mursko added that there are ways to decrease the level of service to lessen the load for employees such as holding City Council meetings less frequently.

Hegland continued to say that she would be open to working with Duraine to put together a survey of other City's staff organization and salary data. She added that other items of consideration could be included such as how they fund road improvements and employee compensation methods. Duraine agreed to work on this with Hegland.

Logren asked what the purpose of the step increases are? Mursko explained that the state of Minnesota and most local governments use a step increase system so that the employee knows

years in advance how their salary will increase. Every City employee is eligible for a step increase once each year, except in their first year of employment where the employee is eligible for their first step increase after 6 months. In general, the step increase is expected each year. The only reason someone would not receive a step increase is if there are significant performance issues.

Motion by Duraine to approve the recommendation of the City Administrator to increase City Planning Technician Ben Gutknecht's hours from 32 per week to 40 per week. Seconded by Hegland. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Duraine to approve City Employee step increases based on performance as outlined in the City Administrator Memo (dated 12.16.19). Seconded by Peterson. Motion carried unanimously.

E. ANNOUNCEMENTS & REMINDERS

18. Calendar of Meetings.

The next City Council meeting is on 12.30.19 at 7:00 pm.

The City's Holiday Gathering (hosted by City Council members) is on 12:30.19 from 4:00 – 7:00 pm.

The next Planning Commission meeting is on 01.15.20 at 7:00 pm.

F. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Duraine to adjourn. Seconded by Hegland. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jessica Hughes, Public Communications Coordinator