

City of Reading City Council
Special Meeting
May 19, 2020

Council Vice President Cepeda-Freytiz called the special meeting to order and announced that the purpose of this meeting is to consider the removal of an authority board member.

ATTENDANCE

Councilor Daubert, District 1 - virtually
Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz, District 2
Councilor Butler, District 4
Councilor Reed, District 5
Councilor Cepeda-Freytiz, District 6
Council Solicitor M. Gombar
City Clerk L. Kelleher
Assist. City Solicitor Igor Litvinov

PUBLIC COMMENT

Council Vice President Cepeda-Freytiz stated that there is one (1) citizen registered to address Council. Councilor Reed read the public speaking rules adopted by ordinance.

Ernest Schlegel, of Pear Street, stated that he speaks this evening to Council and Mr. Kelly regarding the email message he sent on or around May 10th recognizing the inherent error he made. He stated that the root of the message was the administration's interference into Redevelopment Authority matters at the land bank steering committee meeting also on or around May 10th but noted his intent to only address his unintentional and unfortunate mistake with his remarks. He explained that the phrase in the message "step and fetch" was meant to describe the situation at the steering committee meeting whereby Mr. Kelly relayed a directive from the mayor which the mayor was unwilling to deliver himself.

Mr. Schlegel stated that he had no idea that the "step and fetch" phrase had racial connotations until he researched the phrase. He explained that by using those three words he was only stating that Mr. Kelly was acting in the mayor's stead. He explained the use of the word fetch locally – to deliver, transport, etc. He also noted his recollection of a vaudeville comedian named Step'n and Fetchit who had a long and successful history in the movie industry. He again noted that until he looked the phrase up he had no idea that the phrase was racial in nature and he apologized to Mr. Kelly, people of color and all public servants for his use of that phrase. He noted his understanding of why Mr. Kelly would find that phrase offensive and noted his own experiences dealing with similar slights as he is also in a recognized minority class as a gay man.

Mr. Schlegel expressed his sorrow to the entire community, noting his deep regret for the use of those words. He noted that as humans we all have, occasionally, used phraseology that unintentionally offended or hurt someone. He asked Council to consider his remorse and asked for forgiveness.

Two citizens stated that they were unaware of this meeting and requested the ability to make public comment. No one on Council objected.

Evelyn Morrison expressed the belief that Mr. Schlegel's use of racially loaded words was not a single occurrence and she expressed the belief that Mr. Schlegel behaved in a similar way during the Charter Review Commission's work a few years ago. She stated that Mr. Schlegel's actions derailed the Charter Review Commission's work by claiming that the Commission had a deadline to submit its work and by using racially offensive language in emails and at meetings. She stated that the Charter Review Commission has no deadline and Mr. Schlegel intentionally disrupted the work of the Commission. She expressed the belief that his behavior can no longer be tolerated.

Note: Charter Section 1203 Review of Charter requires the Charter Review Commission to make proposed recommendations within six months of its appointment.

§ 1203. Review of Charter. [Amended at the November 2014 General Election]

At least every five years, but no sooner than every three years, City Council and the Mayor shall appoint a Charter Review Commission composed of 11 members. To avoid conflict of interest, no elected City official or employee shall serve on the Charter Review Commission. Nothing herein shall preclude such officials from attending or participating in the actions of the Commission. Seven members of this Commission shall be appointed by City Council and four members shall be appointed by the Mayor. All appointees shall be current residents and registered voters of the City. The Charter Review Commission shall review the current Charter, submit a report to the City Council, the Mayor, and the citizens of the City, within six months of its appointment, and recommend any proposed amendments to the Charter. City Council and the Mayor, by ordinance, shall place all proposed amendments on the ballot no later than the next municipal election. City Council shall provide appropriations for the reasonable expenses incurred by the Charter Review Commission.

Shelia Perez stated that the harassment and bias she endured from Mr. Schlegel caused her to block him on her Facebook account. She noted her agreement with the statement made by Ms. Morrison.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Council Vice President Cepeda-Freytiz called Council's attention to the agenda for this meeting, and she inquired if anyone objected to the legislation listed. No one objected.

The agenda for this meeting was approved by acclimation.

RESOLUTION

Resolution 90 - 2022 – removing Ernest Schlegel from the Reading Redevelopment Authority board for cause, effective immediately

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz moved, seconded by Councilor Reed, to adopt Resolution 90-2022.

There was no discussion.

Resolution 90-2022 was adopted by the following vote:

Yeas – Butler, Cepeda-Freytiz, Daubert, Goodman-Hinnershitz, Reed - 5

Nays: None 0

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz moved, seconded by Councilor Butler, to adjourn the special meeting of Council.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk