

**CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2012**

City Solicitor, Charles Younger called the work session to order. He announced that the purpose of the session is to conduct interviews for applicants to the Council President seat, vacated by Mayor Vaughn Spencer on January 2, 2012.

City Solicitor Younger stated that the interviews are open to the public and that applicants present for the interviews may remain seated in the audience during all interviews. He announced that those being interviewed will sit in the Council President's seat and will be asked questions by the City Council members present, beginning with Councilor Sterner. He stated that the interviews will be conducted in 20 minute blocks and applicants should try to keep their responses to the questions to three (3) minutes maximum. He stated that he would begin each interview by asking the applicant why he or she applied for the position.

Councilor Acosta announced that as an applicant he will refrain from asking applicants questions.

ATTENDANCE

City Councilor Acosta, District 1
Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz, District 2
City Councilor Sterner, District 3
Councilor Marmarou, District 4
Councilor Reed, District 5
Councilor Waltman, District 6
City Solicitor C. Younger
City Clerk L. Kelleher

INTERVIEWS

City Solicitor Younger asked Mr. Nieves to step forward and asked why he applied for the position.

Ricardo Nieves stated that he learned about the opening when he saw the advertisement in the Reading Eagle. He expressed the belief that his skills and

experiences match well with the responsibilities of the Council President. He noted the need for the Council President to provide balance in holding the Administration accountable.

Councilor Sterner asked the applicant what qualifications he has that make him more suitable for the position than the other applicants.

Mr. Nieves stated that his civic stewardship is his most valuable skill, as he currently serves on the City's EAC, the Smart Growth Alliance, and is the facilitator of the newly formed Northmont Community Group. He stated that he has helped to formulate legislation and walk legislation through the enactment process. He stated that he enjoys turning negative into positive and enjoys helping others.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz asked the applicant to define the difference between the Council President and the District Councilors.

Mr. Nieves expressed the belief that all seven (7) Councilors are equal. He noted that the appointment of a Council President is unchartered territory. He stated that the Council President would lead Council in holding the Administration accountable and lead the legislative process.

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant what citizens expect of the Council President.

Mr. Nieves stated that citizens expect the Council President to restore confidence in Reading's ability to conduct its affairs. He expressed the belief that he has the skill and experience to provide balance and develop a sustainable operating budget.

Councilor Reed asked the applicant how he envisions communications with the individual District Councilors, the full body of Council and the Administration.

Mr. Nieves stated that he will work with individual Councilors, the body of Council and Administration to get the job done. He expressed the belief that being Council President will be gratifying work but not easy work. He stated that he will communicate equally with everyone. He noted that although the position is viewed as part-time, it has full-time responsibilities. He also noted that this position is different from employment with a private company, as the position is elective in nature. He stated that he will use "My Truth, Your Truth, to find the Truth In-between" to deal with issues.

Councilor Acosta declined to ask a question of the applicant.

Councilor Waltman asked the applicant about his vision for Reading in 20 years.

Mr. Nieves stated that he would prefer to focus on the initial 90 days. He noted the need to work to change the "Reading is a poor city" mindset.

Councilor Waltman asked the applicant to name Reading's strongest asset.

Mr. Nieves stated that Reading's strongest asset is its architecture, rail system, park system and manufacturing system. He stated that Reading is a diamond in the rough and needs to be reinvented.

Ms. Reed asked the applicant if he will run to be elected as Council President if appointed through this process.

Mr. Nieves stated that prior to making that decision he would seek advice from the community, his family and his advisors. He stated that he would bring creativity to this position and use that creativity to explore all options.

Councilor Sterner inquired about the strongest skill that the applicant will bring to the body.

Mr. Nieves stated that he is very headstrong and passionate which some view as a negative and others view as a positive.

City Solicitor Younger asked Councilor Francis Acosta to step forward and asked why he applied for the position.

Councilor Acosta stated that while going through the 2011 election and primary process, he gained an understanding of the needs of the City and of the City's citizens. He expressed the belief that public trust needs to be rebuilt and the need for the new Council President to continue to do the work started by the former Council President. He stated that although he is the newest member on City Council, he is able to successfully work with all parties and respects all members of Council. He expressed the belief that he can bring successful change to the success of the Administration and Council.

Councilor Sterner asked the applicant what qualifications he has that make him more suitable for the position than the other applicants.

Councilor Acosta stated besides the requirements of the Charter, he understands the need to be a leader, use his past experience as a community leader, a bank professional and his ability to work well with everyone. He noted that the body of Council is a powerful group as it is composed of people with different skill sets and experience. He stated that Council would benefit from what he would bring to the table.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz asked the applicant to explain the role and responsibilities of the Council President.

Councilor Acosta stated that no member of Council does this job for the money. He expressed the belief that the Council President needs to do more listening than talking and he related that to his experience as a pastor in a local church. He noted the need for the Council President to listen to the District Councilors and provide guidance on a variety of issues. He noted the need for the Council President to also work successfully with the Administration.

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant to speak about a time when he successfully had a leadership role and how people responded to his leadership style.

Councilor Acosta explained his experience coming to America from Puerto Rico, not knowing the language or customs. He stated that he and his wife, who did speak English and understand the customs, made an agreement to become successful and develop a plan to achieve success. He stated that he and his wife continue to be on target with their plan for success.

Councilor Reed asked the applicant how he envisions communications with the individual District Councilors, the full body of Council and the Administration.

Councilor Acosta stated that as a bank manager and a pastor, he communicates for a living. He noted the need for Council to communicate to work through various issues and legislation. He stated that it is his intention to not make backroom deals, but to form consensus publically. He also noted the need to use this same approach with the Mayor, although at times the two may be on different pages. He noted the need for Council to hold additional meetings to discuss various district issues that cannot be covered at the regular Monday Council sessions. He stressed the need for open communication channels.

Councilor Waltman asked the applicant what he has learned from his Council experience and what improvements need to occur.

Councilor Acosta stated that while serving on Council he has learned how to handle various strong personalities and find ways to successfully communicate with all parties. He stated that he needs to continue to learn how to improve his handling of various games that sometimes occur.

Councilor Waltman noted when reviewing the budget meeting minutes on the website he noticed that the applicant was late to approximately six (6) budget sessions and left one (1) budget session early. He asked the applicant about his intent to be punctual.

Councilor Acosta stated that he, like other members of Council, who have full-time employment occasionally causes one to arrive to Council sessions 10-15 minutes late. He stated that the day he left the budget meeting early, he, as chair of the Berks County Housing Authority, needed to attend a Housing Authority meeting where a critical vote was to occur. He stated that he delegated his Finance Chair responsibilities to Councilor Reed, as is common practice. He stated that he returned to the Budget session, after the Berks County Housing Authority meeting concluded but when he returned to the Penn Room he found that the budget meeting had been adjourned. He stressed that the diversity and experience of Council members makes it strong. He stated that when Council President Spencer selected Committees and chairs of Committees he selected the strongest candidates. He also stressed the importance of delegating the duties of Committee chairs when a Councilor's schedule is disrupted by unavoidable circumstances.

Councilor Reed inquired if the applicant would run for the Council President seat in the next municipal election.

Councilor Acosta stated that he would run for the seat in the next election cycle. He also stated that he and his wife are both elected officials and have discussed the need for both of them to review and modify their current commitments so they can fulfill the needs of their elected duties. He noted that the reorganization of the Berks County Housing Authority is in January 2012 and he will not be seeking another term as chair of the Housing Authority. He also stated that he will be reassessing all his non-Council obligations and making adjustments.

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant to speak about a time when he successfully had a leadership role and how people responded to his leadership style.

Councilor Acosta stated that as a leader at his church he learned that people have needs that require an attentive ear, as you cannot properly advise and support people unless you hear their needs and issues. He noted that by listening to the needs and problems

of his congregation he was able to properly assist them in finding solutions. He stated that he and his wife believe their skill in assisting their congregation caused the congregation to grow.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz asked the candidate to describe what the City's greatest challenge and his greatest strength would be as Council President.

Councilor Acosta stated that the City's finances are the biggest challenge. He stated that as he learns more about the City he has gained experience dealing with tough situations both on Council and in banking. He noted the many problems uncovered during the Act 47 process. He also stressed the need to assist in implementing financial solutions to help the City's recovery. He stated that the perception that Reading is the poorest City creates a unique opportunity to improve people's perception of Reading and creates a "win-win" situation. He expressed the belief that having the right vision will improve the City's position within five (5) to ten (10) years.

Councilor Sterner thanked Councilor Acosta for applying and for serving the City.

Councilor Acosta stated that he is proud to serve as a Councilor and noted the difficulty of this process. He thanked Council for having the opportunity of interviewing for this position.

City Solicitor Younger called Keith Stamm forward and asked him why he applied for the position.

Mr. Stamm stated that he applied after seeing the advertisement in the newspaper. He stated that he saw an opportunity to serve as there wasn't clear Council consensus about the person to fill the position. He stated that his experience as President of the Reading School Board in 2007 provides him with the experience of serving as Council President.

Councilor Sterner asked the applicant what qualifications he has that make him more suitable for the position than the other applicants.

Mr. Stamm stated that he has experience with the many city issues, due to his experience with the Reading School Board and Vo-Tech Board. He stated that as President of the School Board, he had to name members to various committees and then maintain a good working relationship with the board members.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz asked the applicant to explain the role and

responsibilities of the Council President.

Mr. Stamm stated that the Council President oversees the Councilors and to hear their issues and viewpoints. He noted the need for strong interaction between the President and the District Councilors. He noted his success achieving good communication between Reading School Board members during his term as President.

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant what citizens expect from the Council President.

Mr. Stamm stated that citizens expect the Council President to work well with the Mayor and move the City forward. He also noted the need to work well with the District Councilors as issues arise.

Councilor Reed asked the applicant how he envisions communications with the individual District Councilors, the full body of Council and the Administration.

Mr. Stamm stressed the need for an open door policy and the need to convey all information to the District Councilors. He noted the need for good communication to flow between Council and the Administration.

Councilor Acosta declined the opportunity to ask a question.

Councilor Waltman asked the applicant to describe Reading.

Mr. Stamm stated that Reading is a diamond in the rough. He stated that Reading's assets, such as the city schools, need better promotion.

Councilor Waltman inquired how the applicant would move the City forward.

Mr. Stamm noted the need to develop ideas to cure the City's problems.

Councilor Reed asked the applicant if he would be running for the position in 2013.

Mr. Stamm stated that he believes he would seek election to the office, if he believes he effectively handled the duties of the position after being appointed as President.

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant to speak about a time when he successfully had a leadership role and how people responded to his leadership style.

Mr. Stamm stated that while serving on the School Board he resolved the stalemate between members of the Vo-tech Board regarding enlarging the school. He noted that the task was difficult but rewarding.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz asked the candidate to explain the most difficult role of the Council President and what assets he brings to resolve that issue.

Mr. Stamm stated that the most difficult task is making sure everyone gets along and building a team mentality between the Administration and Council. He stated that he decided to leave the Reading School Board as he believed his talents could be best used in other ways.

City Solicitor Younger called Gary Wegman forward and asked him why he applied for the Council President position.

Dr. Wegman distributed his resume. He stated that he believes that the City is at a critical crossroad due to the loss of an experienced Council President. He thanked Council for opening the process to outside applicants. He noted the difficulty in getting people to step up to fill this position. He stated that if appointed he can hit the ground running to fulfill the Council President position.

Councilor Sterner asked the applicant how he will deal with the body of Council and the Administration.

Dr. Wegman expressed the belief that the Council President is the mouth piece for the body; however, the Council President is equal to the District Councilors as he only has one vote. He stated that the Council President needs to keep his ear to the ground to stay aware of city-wide issues.

Councilor Sterner stated that the previous Council President attended many Board, Authority and Commission meetings. He inquired how the applicant would approach this need.

Dr. Wegman stated that the previous Council President left big shoes to fill. He expressed the belief that the portfolio of Board, Authority and Commission meetings should be divided and shared among all Council members.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz asked the candidate to describe what the City's greatest challenge and his greatest strength would be as Council President.

Dr. Wegman stated that becoming Council President is like adopting a new family. He stated that he would devote the required energy to the position. He noted the need for the City and Council to put their best foot forward to present the best appearance. He stated that he has been observing the role and work of Council for a long time and is ready to provide a fresh look.

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant to speak about a time when he successfully had a leadership role and how people responded to his leadership style.

Dr. Wegman stated that his largest challenge to date was opening a dental practice fresh out of dental school without first joining an existing practice, as is customary. He noted the difficulties to make a business survive in the current economy. He noted that his practice does not participate in any dental insurance plans and patients need to pay cash. He expressed the belief that his success in providing excellent customer service has enabled his business to weather the current economic storm.

Councilor Reed asked the applicant how he would communicate with Council and the Administration.

Mr. Wegman spoke about his communication skills in the state and national dental association and his involvement in various leadership positions within these organizations. He noted the importance of engaging in open communication with City Council members via email or telephone. He stated that Council and the Administration will need to define the desired communications policy.

Councilor Waltman asked the applicant to speak about the City's two (2) best assets.

Dr. Wegman stated that the City's forefathers laid out a magnificent traffic grid which prevents traffic tie-ups within the City. He noted the ease of traveling through the City and how most suburban people fail to recognize this asset. He also stated that the the City's architecture, parks and individual attractions such as the Pagoda and Firetower need improved marketing so Reading presents itself in a positive manner.

Councilor Waltman asked the applicant to describe how he would work with the Administration and Council and his view of the downtown economic development plan.

Dr. Wegman stated that Council needs to set the proper legislative tone to promote economic development in the downtown. He also noted the need for the Administration and Council to work well together.

Councilor Reed inquired if the applicant would run for the position in the next municipal election in 2013.

Dr. Wegman stated that his true interest is with the Reading School Board and education. He stated that while he was unsuccessful in his last bid for School Board, he is ready to devote the time reserved for School Board activities to Council activities. He stated that he will not seek election as Council President but will again attempt a run for School Board.

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant how the duties of Council President differ from those of a District Councilor.

Dr. Wegman stated that the Council President signs legislation enacted at regular business meetings and acts as the voice of Council. However, he noted the importance of having the most experienced person speak about specific issues. He noted that the seven (7) members of Council are equals.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz asked the applicant to explain the role of the Council President in working with the Mayor and setting the agendas.

Dr. Wegman noted the need for cooperation between the Council President, City Council and the Mayor. He expressed the belief that there was a severe lack of productive cooperation and communication between the bodies over the last 16 years. He expressed the belief that the current Mayor understands both sides of the communication needs.

City Solicitor Younger asked Councilor Waltman to step forward and explain why he applied for the position.

Councilor Waltman expressed the belief that he has the necessary experience and leadership skills to lead the body. He stated that his dynamic leadership style will help to build a strong Council, individually and as a body. He also expressed the belief that he has the ability to build a collaborative relationship with the Administration.

Councilor Sterner asked the applicant what qualification he has to fulfill the Council President role.

Councilor Waltman stated that his experience as Vice President of Council provides him with the skills to successfully lead Council. He also noted his vast professional

experience in corporate management, along with his capacity in legal, communications and financial areas. He also noted his experience in providing aide to the body of Council. He stated that he understands the need to empower individual Councilors.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz asked the applicant to explain the difference between the Council President and the District Councilors.

Councilor Waltman stated that the Council President is equal to the District Councilors. He expressed the belief that the Council President needs to empower the District Councilors and encourage them to vote on issues based on their independent assessment of the issue at hand. He stated that throughout his career he has always empowered people so the overall organization is improved. He stressed the need for the Council President to help strengthen the body of Council and improve their organization. He stated that the Council President also sets the meeting agendas

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant to express his thoughts on the current form of government and his thoughts on returning to the Commission form of government.

Councilor Waltman expressed the belief that the structure of government is not the problem. He stated that the crucial component for any structure to succeed is good communication between those involved. He noted the need for Council and the Administration to define their collective vision so a productive working environment is created. He stated that any form of government can work with the right leadership in place. He also noted the need to build a collective agenda that moves the organization forward.

Councilor Reed inquired how the applicant would communicate with the body of Council, the individual Councilors and the Administration.

Councilor Waltman distributed his written plan defining his plan to lead Council to success. He stated that the key component of his communications plan is to provide Council with a weekly written update on current issues and to hold additional meetings, apart from the normal Monday sessions, to discuss Councilors' needs and observations to build a productive organization. He stated that he will make himself available in City Hall every Saturday to meet with the body and others. He noted the need for a City Council newsletter that will inform citizens city wide on Council's activities. He stated that this template can be refined for use by the individual Council Districts. He stated that under his plan Council's functionality would improve.

Councilor Reed asked the applicant if he would run in the 2013 municipal election for the Council President seat.

Councilor Waltman stated that he would consider running for the office. However, he noted that as he has served in an elected capacity for 12 years, he believes in the need to groom new talent to step in. He stated that he brings no pre-conceived agendas, no affiliations and no ego. He expressed the belief that citizens see him as the most capable applicant.

Councilor Marmarou asked the applicant to provide an example of how he handled a difficult City situation and how he worked to resolve the situation.

Councilor Waltman stated that early in his career on Council he assisted in addressing the initiative to in-source the EMS service, amend the CDBG budget to fund Codes and Community Policing. He noted that Council has leaned on him to resolve annual budget issues and create consensus between the Administration and Council. He also noted the other issues handled over the past 12 years.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired how the candidate would make sure he was punctual for the start of meetings.

Councilor Waltman noted that during the past 12 years he cannot remember a time when he was late for a meeting when he was responsible to lead as chair. He stated that every Councilor is at times late when life issues interfere. He expressed the belief that he is well prepared for the responsibility the position requires.

Councilor Sterner inquired how the applicant would provide information about the Boards, Authorities and Commissions back to Council.

Councilor Waltman stated that he does not plan on attending as many Boards, Authorities and Commissions meetings as Council President Spencer did but will instead focus the required time and energy to improving Council's structure, strategic planning and communications. He stated that he sees the need to succeed in communications and planning with the Administration. He stated that the plan he distributed works to empower Councilors, improve communications and refine the committee structure to include a committee that would look at regionalization, economic development, and the City's parks and assets.

Councilor Sterner thanked all candidates who interviewed this evening.

Councilor Goodman-Hinnershitz noted her appreciation of the open process used to make an appointment to this position. She noted the broad capabilities of those who applied and suggested that those who are not appointed consider serving in another capacity.

Councilor Reed agreed and noted the great qualifications of those who applied and interviewed. She stated that Council has taken this process seriously, honoring the responsibility of making the appointment.

Councilor Marmarou expressed the belief that all applicants are duly qualified.

City Solicitor Younger announced that Council will be holding a special meeting on Friday, January 6th at 5 pm in Council Chambers to make the required appointment. He stated that the interview session is adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by,
Linda Kelleher, CMC
City Clerk