

MINUTES OF THE RULES COMMITTEE
Monday, November 4, 2013
6:00 p.m.
Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center
Council Chambers

Present: Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl, Ald. Peter Braithwaite, Coleen Burrus, Judy Fiske, Jane Grover, Delores Holmes, Ann Rainey, Mark Tendam, Donald Wilson and Melissa Wynne

Presiding: Ald. Peter Braithwaite

Staff Present: Wally Bobkiewicz, City Manager; Grant Farrar, City Attorney; Kevin Lookis, Water Plant Superintendent; and Mark Muenzer, Director, Community Development

Guest: Sue Calder, League of Women Voters and Bill Smith, Evanston Now

CALL TO ORDER/DECLARATION OF QUORUM:

Ald. Braithwaite declared a quorum and called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

CITIZEN COMMENT:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF OCTOBER 7, 2013:

Ald. Grover asked that the second sentence, starting on page 2, be removed as it does not make sense. With that amendment she moved approval of the October 7, 2013 minutes. Ald. Tendam seconded. The minutes were approved.

APPROVAL OF THE 2014 CITY COUNCIL MEETING CALENDAR:

Ald. Wynne moved approval of the 2014 City Council meeting calendar. Mayor Tisdahl seconded. Ald. Braithwaite reminded the public that Council meetings take place on the second and fourth Monday of each month. Also please note the new 6:00 pm start time for the Administration and Public Works meetings. The 2015 City Council meeting calendar was approved.

DISSOLUTION OF EVANSTON TOWNSHIP: RESPONSE TO LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS:

City Manager Wally Bobkiewicz reported that the City is looking at how to integrate the Township into the City if the agency is dissolved. State law requires that the City continue the services. Evonda Thomas-Smith is working with the Township staff, especially in the areas of health. Ald. Rainey requested that is Council provided with regulations/guidelines for administering emergency services dollars. She also requested that Human Services have some input on those rules. Ald. Grover asked for clarification of how the City will resume or take over the access to the proprietary software that the Assessor's office uses, as well as whatever software is for the administration of General Assistance.

City Manager Bobkiewicz replied that under statute, if the Township is dissolved, the City will assume the services. He does not anticipate any difficulty in working with Cook County. He and Mayor Tisdahl met with Commissioner Suffredin, and will work closely with him as needed to insure access continues without any difficulty. He assured everyone that the City will continue the General Assistance and Emergency Assistance programs at the same level, and will look to enhance those levels. He is also looking to incorporate other work that the City does, and is proposing that two community meetings are held with City staff that's involved with the departments of Health, Community & Economic

Development and Parks, Recreation & Community Services over the next couple of months to share these general ideas and get additional feedback. So if the Township is dissolved in March, the City can have the community's best thoughts as to how the City can leverage those services.

Ald. Holmes expressed some concerns in terms of weeding those programs out to other departments without some base for them. She is glad the City Manager will be looking at it and asked that the Committee continue to be updated as to how it will work. City Manager Bobkiewicz replied that it is not his intention to divide the services that are currently provided by the Township. He recommends that the services that are known as General Assistance and Emergency Assistance be incorporated into the Department of Health. The purpose of the meetings is to get feedback from the community.

Ald. Braithwaite inquired about the community meetings scheduled with residents and the timeline between those meetings and the conversations with the City staff. City Manager Bobkiewicz proposed that the meetings are used for the staff and community to communicate simultaneously. He would like to have two meetings before the end of 2013. At the very least, he would like to have one community meeting and then come back and report anything that is contrary to these recommendations or significantly different, prior to the election.

Ald. Rainey asked if these meeting could be considered campaigning since it is before the election? City Manager Bobkiewicz said he would happily take the Council's direction. Based upon the memo, it is important to have a conversation with the community at some point. If the Council feels it is more appropriate to do after the election, he's okay with that. He has not discussed this with the City's attorney. He would be happy to delay the meetings if the general feeling is that they would be construed as campaigning. Ald. Grover said the last time the Township Dissolution was on the ballot, it also had the school tax expansion issue and the electrical aggregation issue, and committee meetings were held beforehand. The goal was to provide clear information about the rollout and what was being proposed. She assumes that the same rules would apply as long as the City were to provide information in the community meetings about what the plan would be. Ald. Rainey expressed concern about the questions people may ask at the meetings and wants to make sure they are prepared to respond. She asked they hear from Grant Farrar after he has had time to think this through so they careful. She added that to avoid being accused of campaigning in any way, the City should have discussions with Human Services, the committee as a whole, or with the Rules Committee about how to move forward. She would prefer they not go to the public at this time. She feels that it would be very difficult knowing how some people would respond, and that the City would not end up electioneering. She does not see why workshops among themselves could be construed as campaigning because they would be for their own edification and developing a plan of how they are going to move forward.

Ald. Braithwaite said that he is concerned about the services, and hopes that part of the community exercise would mean that the City would listen to those who are actually served by the Township services.

Ald. Burriss said she also has concerns about the electioneering part. During the last election with the school district issue, she had board members come to her ward meeting to share information but it became more of a push for one side of the issue. She could see how that may happen in the same type of forum.

City Manager Bobkiewicz said all of the comments would be taken to heart. He certainly does not want to do any electioneering. He recalls participating in some of the meetings about the advisory referendum and it was sometimes difficult. The electrical aggregation issue was pretty straightforward.

He would like to have another discussion at Human Services or the Rules Committee meeting after the first of the year, maybe to repeat what was talked about this evening, and if there are questions or comments, they can do something like that. He will work with Corporation Counsel and come up with a revised plan on community outreach as they move forward.

Ald. Holmes stated that the response from the League of Women Voters, once received, will offer some guidance in terms of ideas and informing the community. She suggested that it might be a good idea to hear from them.

Mr. Bobkiewicz moved on to answer the question regarding personnel. He said he has met with the Township staff and they understand the dynamics at work here. They understand those services will continue and it is very likely that they will continue in those positions. There are also services that are more administrative in nature and it is understood that if the Township is dissolved those positions may go away. He is committed to working with each member of the Township staff and that if the dissolution is passed that there is a transition period that makes sense for them to do everything they can. If the positions are no longer needed to provide these services, then other positions will be found for them with the City of Evanston. If that is not a possibility then an appropriate severance will be established for them. There is a need to hire one additional staff member in the Township to help with General Assistance. He and Director Thomas-Smith are moving forward to fill that position. They don't anticipate any other staffing adjustments for the Township.

Ald. Braithwaite asked the City Manager if he had a sense of the number of clients served by the Township. The City Manager Bobkiewicz stated there are multiple systems used to count the clients, and those systems are not in conjunction with one another, and it has been that way for a number of years. He is not confident that the Township Board has received an accurate number. This will continue to be worked on. He believes the number is much higher than what has been reported. The questions that have been asked of the Township have not always made it back to the staff that actually provides the service, and he thinks that in asking those questions of the staff that actually provide the service, he has received very different kinds of answers. There has been some loss in translation on the requests over time from the Township Board. He doesn't think that it's anyone's fault, but he and Director Thomas-Smith quickly learned that there is a discrepancy. The two of them are working diligently to clean up the discrepancy, mostly in the General Assistance area and the way that this is captured.

Ald. Braithwaite said that he has seen numbers as low as 139 and as high as 500 in the last report. City Manager Bobkiewicz said it depends on the question being asked. For example, if you want to know how many people received an assistance check in October, it was in the 130 range, When he asked how long have these people been on, and how many people have been served over the course of a year, that's the number that he is still trying to secure. They have been led to believe that the number has been around 130, and that's the number of people who have been served over a period of time. That may be a monthly number, but it's not an annual number. He has been able to look at how long people have been on. He had a concern that he would find a lot of people who have been on GA for a long time but the numbers he has seen to date indicate that 95% have been on a year or less, and it's a small number that has been on longer than that. The question becomes, when someone comes back and forth. He believes there is a lot of back and forth and he is not sure how that is properly measured. The individuals who work for the Township on providing this information, desperately want to provide accurate information.

Ald. Rainey said that the number that she is interested in is the average monthly number of clients receiving housing and personal checks, because over the years that is the number that the City bases

the budget number for housing and personal assistance. There is no other number. There are numbers about how much it costs to run Work Opportunity, but the number that they base client payment on is the average monthly number. It is very important for the City Manager to provide real detail on this information because it is very important. The only reason the Township exists is to provide assistance to people who can receive it through no other service. City Manager Bobkiewicz replied that the sense is that the monthly number is the one that the Council has heard, but he questions how many individuals this represents. He would like to know how many individuals are helped by the Township over six months or a year.

Ald. Rainey said they know how many are receiving a personal check and/or a housing check every month. Whether or not these persons are qualified – that is detail she does not have. She asked what other services the Township provides to people who are not Township clients, meaning an individual not receiving General Assistance. How are those persons accounted for and what services do they receive? She does not consider a General Assistance client a person who receives assistance one month out of the year.

Ald. Holmes said that they constantly talk about the Township and the General Assistance and people get confused. The General Assistance clients, in terms of the people, are certified and taken in as a client. Those numbers do usually go from 139 to 199. The other people do need to be counted because they receive services offered by the Township through tax dollars. Whether it is someone who receives a one-time rental check or assistance with food, etc., and those people need to be counted and this causes the fluctuation of numbers.

Ald. Rainey said she is concerned that services are being provided by the Township to those who are not General Assistance clients, other than the Emergency Assistance, housing, etc.

City Manager Bobkiewicz stated they are continuing to work through all of these issues. He has been struck by the dedication of those who work for the Township, and how frustrated they have been over a long period of time by this disconnect. They are attempting to track everything; they want to provide information to the Council, but there has been some loss in the translation between the work that they do and the information that is received. One of his priorities is to work with them and sort through all of this so that everyone can move forward.

Ald. Braithwaite said while he sat on Human Services one of the Township staff members talked about the services and the numbers that are impacted, since they don't have an accurate number on how many residents are being served they may want to take a close look at the two staff members that are being proposed and is that enough. City Manager Bobkiewicz indicated that there is no question in his mind that a second person is necessary to process the people that are coming in. This will be an ongoing process and they are committed to providing the best service possible.

City Manager Bobkiewicz added that the report provided is an overview of the plan as requested by the League of Women Voters. He will consult with Mr. Farrar to determine what would be a good course for the community dialogue between now and the middle of March, and it will be brought back to the Committee. Ald. Rainey said the overall report was excellent.

Ald. Braithwaite emphasized the fact that he is very concerned about this taking place without the community meetings. He understands the concern about campaigning, but City staff isn't going to campaign for anything. It is important to be transparent to all of the residents, and these meetings will accomplish that. He does not want residents and viewers of the meeting to say the community meetings won't happen.

Ald. Holmes suggested they wait until they hear back from the League of Women Voters, which she feels will be a few weeks. If they are going to do community meetings and if the City does informational meetings, there will be a difference in the type of meetings that will be held. She feels as though the City has a responsibility to provide the community with information. Ald. Braithwaite agreed and added that he is advocating for the residents who are served by the Township services and they deserve to have a voice.

Ald. Rainey said the only reason she brought the issue up was because every piece of information that the City gives out would be based on the fact that if the referendum is passed. They wouldn't give out any information that is neutral. It will all be about if you pass this, then here is what will be done. Her hope is that the Corporation Counsel can come up with a way they can do this.

Ald. Braithwaite said that if the goal of what the City is trying to do is to streamline and be more efficient, he doesn't see what is wrong with having a meeting to talk about that and get feedback from the clients who would be affected.

City Manager Bobkiewicz said that it may be as simple as having a Town Hall meeting on the Township services as they currently exist. He will confer with Mr. Farrar, and he plans to reach out to the League of Women Voters Board and come back with a report.

DONATION POLICY FOR UTILITY BILLS AND WHEEL TAX APPLICATIONS

City Manager Bobkiewicz said this item was referred to the Rules Committee a couple of months ago, along with the following questions: What would it take to create a policy? Is it possible/feasible? ICMA Local Government Fellow, Jonathan Williams-Kinsel was assigned to take on this task.

Mr. Williams-Kinsel noted that attached to the memorandum was a sample utility bill. In the bottom right corner, a donation box has been inserted where a selection can be made as to which entity the resident wants to make a contribution to. There will be the capability to divide the donation and put it into an account and pay the bill at the same time. As far as a formal policy, the solicitation of funds will be limited to City of Evanston entities only, - i.e., police, fire, trees, Community Picnic, etc. Residents will also have the option of choosing how many times a year they want to make the donation.

Ald. Fiske asked if the donations are tax deductible. If so, that should be added to the statement. Mr. Williams-Kinsel said they will have the capability of providing a receipt if requested, but he will look into it a little further.

Ald. Braithwaite asked if this feature will be available if you pay online and what is the process. Mr. Williams-Kinsel said that this feature would be available online.

Ald. Rainey asked about auto-pay. She wanted to know how to make a donation if people use this feature and if there will be additional choices as far as the charities.

City Manager Bobkiewicz explained that the attachment was just a mock up, and if the committee wants to move forward with the policy, it will be sent to the full Council and then back to the Rules Committee with a schedule of organizations. He said that the City would solicit support of organizations.

Kevin Lookis explained that the online piece will appear the same way as the paper bill. Residents will be able to select the amount, add it in and the total will be calculated automatically. Regarding the

auto-pay, residents will be required to go in, cancel the amount of pay for that cycle and re-do it with the new amount.

City Manager Bobkiewicz said that Luke Stowe is very good about allowing departments to have internet-based payments. There will be a link added to the City's website that explains the process regarding auto-pay.

Ald. Rainey moved to accept approval of the donation policy for the utilities bill and wheel tax application. Ald. Grover seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

City Manager Bobkiewicz said he will come back to the Rules Committee with the plan for 2014.

RULE ON READING COMMENTS INTO THE RECORD:

Ald. Rainey said she feels it is unnecessary to read comments of someone who is not at the meetings. If the person is not here, the document provided can be attached to the record and publicly note who the writer is and their address and move on. Or it would be ok if the person wants to send an emissary. Ald. Holmes stated this doesn't happen that often, it is not abused and it is the citizen's right to perhaps do this once a year. City Clerk Rodney Greene noted that in the past City Council members have read letters into the minutes, so he doesn't see why the Clerk can't do the same. Placing a stipulation on this will not cause an increase in the amount of input from the residents, whether they are here or not.

It was moved and seconded to revise the City rules on submittal of written public comment. The motion passed 6-4. Ald. Fiske, Braithwaite, Holmes and Mayor Tisdahl voted nay.

NEW BUSINESS:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned 6:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Darlene Francellno

A video of this meeting is available at www.cityofevanston.org/government/agendas-minutes/agendas-minutes--rules-committee.