

**Evanston City Council
Closed Session Minutes
Aldermanic Library
Saturday, May 16, 2009**

PRESENT: Aldermen Wynne, Wilson, Holmes, Tendam, Grover, Rainey, Burrus, Fiske, Jean- Baptiste

GUESTS: Heidi Voorhees, president, The PAR Group; Mike Feeney and Walter Bobkiewicz, candidates for Evanston City Manager

PRESIDING: Mayor Elizabeth B. Tisdahl

START: 9:07 a.m.

Personnel

Heidi Voorhees, president of The PAR Group, announced that the final two candidates for City Manager would be interviewed that morning. She called in the first candidate, **Mike Feeney**.

Mayor Tisdahl welcomed Mr. Feeney and asked why he wanted to come to Evanston and to tell the Council a bit about himself.

Mike Feeney stated he was a native of Portland, ME and his first job was as an analyst in a suburb of Portland; next he worked in a suburb of Portsmouth, NH. For the past nine years he has worked in Connecticut, with four of those years in Stamford, a waterfront community similar to Evanston. His most recent job is with the City of Bridgeport, where he was the Chief Administrative Officer. He was recruited to raise the city's profile in the community and streamline operations. For the past 14 months he has served as the Chief Financial Officer. Mr. Feeney relayed that he had spoken with some colleagues and each had some connection with Evanston and spoke highly of the city.

Alderman Rainey asked him to talk a bit about the move from CAO to CFO. Mr. Feeney explained when a new mayor came into office in Bridgeport, the city had financial difficulties and the mayor thought his skills best used leading the city's financial rebound. He reported that for the 2009 budget year, Bridgeport was facing an \$18 million budget shortfall and that, presently, the gap was \$5 million.

Alderman Rainey asked him if he was happy in his present job and how many elected officials are there. He said that that he liked his present job, but would prefer the professional city manager/council form of government. He pointed out that would be the best use of his skills. Bridgeport has 20 elected officials.

Alderman Holmes asked Mr. Feeney to compare Evanston to Bridgeport. Mike Feeney noted that a lot of the issues that Evanston faces are similar to those everyone faces—such as the economy and pension funding. He stated that currently they are before the Connecticut legislature trying to reduce the city's funding liability and that Bridgeport had been granted a three-year reprieve.

Alderman Holmes pointed out that Evanston is a very diverse community and asked him to outline his experience managing with diversity. He reported that in Stamford the population was 75 percent Caucasian and 25 percent African American and in Bridgeport the numbers are 60 percent Caucasian and 30 percent African American and the remaining 10 percent are Latino. Mr. Feeney said that they have

many different programs in place, including a \$400 million Capital Improvement Program dealing with the schools.

With regard to construction contracts with the City of Bridgeport, seven percent are required to go to African-American firms and fifteen percent must go to other minorities. They have a program to create partnerships with local businesses and for those companies to be considered for projects first.

Alderman Burrus asked him to discuss his management style and how would he view aldermen going directly to department heads. He has an open management style and likes to brainstorm and have more ideas presented. When a department head comes with a question, rather than give a direct answer he asks the question back to make sure that the person is working toward solving the problem. Mr. Feeney believes that everything runs smoothly if there is one central point of contact.

Alderman Fiske asked him how he would make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council. He would offer options to the Council and ask what are the core services that government has to offer? Mr. Feeney pointed out that if certain core services are provided by a not-for-profit, do they need to duplicate those services at the city. He mentioned a dental health clinic was offered through the schools and in the community, so the City of Bridgeport did not need to duplicate the service. He mentioned the importance of public and private partnerships to transition service delivery away from government.

Alderman Wilson noted that Evanston has a number of open positions for city management. He wanted to know if he'd prefer to have those positions in place when he arrives or would he want to hire those staff members himself. Mr. Feeney stated that he would prefer to do the recruiting himself. Depending on how strong the Council felt senior management was would they be able to fill openings from within or need to look outside. He would use recruiters and place ads in industry publications.

Alderman Tendam asked if he were the next city manager, how would he get to know his senior staff. He mentioned that his management style is more as a coach than an expert. He likes to know that people are working toward solving problems and not waiting for answers or a certain direction. He believes in regular cabinet or department head meetings. He suggested tapping into local universities for management training as well as trying to institute team building.

Alderman Wynne asked how he would develop internal staff members. When he first came to the City of Bridgeport, they asked staff to evaluate how services are offered. He would coach them to establish what the goals are and how to achieve them.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked about his approach to customer service, how he would instill that philosophy into a large organization and provide an example of what he has done. Mr. Feeney cited a public/private partnership that was established with United Way to staff a 2-1-1 line for customer service.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked how he communicated to residents about his initiatives to improve customer service. He replied they did direct mailings and sent out refrigerator magnets with the 2-1-1 information. He said they also did bus wraps.

Alderman Grover asked him to speak about some of the challenges and opportunities he dealt with regarding economic development. Mr. Feeney noted that he tried to change the philosophy in Bridgeport of always looking for homeruns to instead look for singles and doubles, especially in today's economy. He cited the sale of a large parcel of land for redevelopment using TIF funding. They went before the legislature, but were unable to get support for the whole parcel. Again, he noted, going for the single or double, they were able to develop the waterfront portion. He said that transitioning the industrial land into commercial and retail use has been very positive.

Mayor Tisdahl wanted him to talk about labor unions and his experience negotiating labor contracts. He reported that the City of Bridgeport has 13 labor unions and pointed out that with the \$18 million shortfall, they couldn't have balanced the budget without the help and support of the unions. They opened up contracts and forced the issue at the table and tried to get them to make concessions. After all negotiations, the city had to lay off 220 employees, which is a huge number.

Alderman Holmes asked about his experience with green initiatives. Mr. Feeney commented that Bridgeport's current mayor is the most environmental mayor he has ever known. He stated that the city's fleet is going green and 50 cars have been replaced with hybrids (gas/electric). Additionally, they have received grants to buy natural gas cars and electric cars, as well as a fueling station. He noted that they have increased recycling participation, which means reduced tipping fees.

Alderman Burrus asked about his experience with historic preservation issues. He pointed out that the city has a lot of derelict vacant property and they try to work with preservation groups to rehab those buildings. If rehabbing can't be done, then the city will demo. He also mentioned that there is a minor league baseball park in Bridgeport.

Alderman Fiske asked if Bridgeport has gone after stimulus funds. Mr. Feeney stated that they put together a stimulus package worth \$1 billion with about half of that sum related to their infrastructure. They want to regionalize the water treatment plant and need to get two neighboring communities onboard.

Alderman Wilson asked if he had personal experience working with institutions of higher education and, if so, what collaborative efforts have been done. He cited multi-magnet schools, which have science and technology themes and regional charter schools. He spoke about using a nearby university for after-hour programs. Alderman Wilson asked if he ever got to be the front-line person when negotiating with the universities. When he first came to Bridgeport he attended some meetings, but the police work most closely with them now.

Alderman Tendam wanted an example of significant consensus building effort with the chamber of commerce or a citywide program. Mr. Feeney talked about the Master Plan Study, which was preceded by the creation of neighborhood revitalization zones and served as the "voice" for that area. He pointed out that there was state funding for that effort.

Alderman Wynne asked him to expand on his social service delivery experience. He cited community policing programs, specifically the creation of a Neighborhood Enforcement Team (NET). It was a group of ten people who dealt with quality-of-life issues and the team was hand picked by the police chief. They worked with the business community and walked the streets with them. He also cited clamping down on underage drinking. Alderman Wynne asked about the community's response. It has been very positive. Additionally, Bridgeport was the first community to purchase Segways; they increased bike patrols and started using mounted police (six horses) in the downtown. He pointed out that the horses are very effective at large events.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked how they were dealing with foreclosures. He stated that the city is one of the hardest hit in the state with more than 5,700 foreclosures (out of 34,000 parcels of housing stock).

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked about programs for youth, especially those not planning on college. He reported that they received the Mayor's Promise Award in 2006 for the recreational opportunities at the beachfront and in the parks. Through its partnership with the universities some scholarships are awarded. The city offers job training and holds career fairs.

Alderman Holmes asked what they do for youth who are “not engaged.” He reported they try to work with the schools and student government to find partnerships. They do hold career days, but he noted that Bridgeport does have a high dropout rate.

Mr. Feeney summarized that he was excited about this opportunity, that he has a lot of energy and his past experience could serve Evanston very well.

Ms. Voorhees called in the second candidate, **Walter Bobkiewicz**.

Mayor Tisdahl welcomed Mr. Bobkiewicz and asked why he wanted to come to Evanston and to tell the Council a bit about himself.

He stated that he looks at the setup of Evanston politics and values; he recalls his nine years in Long Beach (CA). It has a nine-member City Council elected by district and a popular elected mayor. He liked all of the key players in city government there, its population is one-half million, has a \$2.6 billion budget and 6,000 employees. After cutting his teeth there, he moved up to Marin County and served as City Manager for the City of Novato, which had a different pace and quality of life issues. For the last seven years he’s been in Santa Paula, which is in Southern California about 60 miles north of Los Angeles. He noted the city’s rich diversity and it was similar to Evanston in that way.

Mr. Bobkiewicz pointed out four pieces of his background that equip him well to be Evanston’s next City Manager. First, he is an innovative problem-solver. He stated the challenges the City is facing financially, with Northwestern University and community-wide are ones that “you can’t just throw money at.” He said it wouldn’t be practical to do that and they needed someone who could craft partnerships and come up with innovative ideas.

Second, is the town/gown issue with Northwestern University. During his time with Long Beach and Novato he had addressed that issue. He was the Education Liaison Officer for the city manager’s office in Long Beach. Additionally, he served as a trustee at Syracuse University and has the unique perspective of being a city manager serving on the board of trustees of a large private university.

Third, is his experience with diversity. He has dealt with social-economic and ethnic diversity and cited Long Beach as one of the most diverse communities in the U.S. It’s a majority-minority community with African American, Asian and Latino. He noted that Santa Paula is 70 percent Hispanic. To him, diversity was more than that—it’s the culture, arts, sense of community—all of the things valued here in Evanston.

Fourth, from his 20 years of experience he can bring engagement. He thinks it is important for the city manager to engage everyone and key to this is being a good listener. Mr. Bobkiewicz noted that he listens and connects with City Council, staff and the community and has kept a blog for four years. He stated that it is his job as city manager to implement the vision of the City Council. He believed that through his experiences he could help Council get things done in Evanston.

Alderman Grover asked him to show how he would connect with the Mayor and City Council and would he be the primary contact for staff or would he want them to go directly to department heads. He said that the second part would be up to the Council. He would be careful of their time and it could be more practical for him to be the central contact rather than Council members having to track down people. He communicates in every possible way and meets with Council once a week. He likes to check in on Monday mornings because Council is out and about over the weekend and he can find out what people have on their mind. Mr. Bobkiewicz usually texts present Council members on Mondays. He uses text messages, emails, phone calls and personal meetings to connect with the mayor and council.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked about his management style, approach to staff development and how he would achieve a diverse workforce. He responded that their workforce is about half Latino. He believes it's important to have representation throughout the organization and provides training to move people up to supervisors and supervisors to middle managers. He stated his management style is fairly simple—he holds department heads accountable to implement the goals of the City Council. He doesn't micromanage and tries to meet with all department heads every two weeks.

Alderman Wynne asked him to describe his approach to customer service. Mr. Bobkiewicz referred to customer service as “the mother’s milk of local government.” He talked about having managers meet at one of the public counters. They talked about citizen complaints and certain situations could be handled better. He spoke of one-stop shopping, where people could get service related to a specific project or task at one location rather than several stops.

Alderman Tendam asked him to talk about how he would develop in-house staff for promotion. He cited the example of a wastewater treatment plant being built and he made the Public Works Director the project manager. Next he looked for who among the deputy managers could step up to fill the PW director’s position. They have management training for all of the #2s in the departments. He also spoke about providing a safety net of support to new managers.

Alderman Wilson asked about his work with labor unions and to cite a success story. He stated that in both Novato and Santa Paula he was very involved with labor negotiations, including police and fire. He believes in being straight with people and taking a “we’re all in this together” approach to budget problems and workplace issues. He tries to have a collaborative relationship.

Alderman Fiske noted that Evanston has some department head vacancies and how would he prefer to handle that? Mr. Bobkiewicz stated he would prefer to fill those vacancies himself and has filled all department head positions at his current job.

Alderman Burrus explained that they plan to hire an Economic Development Director and asked what he would expect that person to do and talk about his experience with economic development. He asserted that if they hire him, he would be the chief economic development person. He believed the director needed to understand the importance of working with existing businesses and business associations. The person should look at Council’s goals and what could be done to implement those goals.

He reported on an exciting economic development project where a former packing plant is being converted to a wind turbine assembly facility. Utilizing TIF funding, the city is trying to buy the building. The turbines have a steep sale price and Santa Paula is going before the state legislature to change the law so the city can get the sales tax. He also sees this as an opportunity for job creation and training.

Alderman Holmes asked how he would evaluate policies with regard to green initiatives. He understood that Evanston has a sustainability policy and wondered how much staff has bought into it. Did staff and City Council understand that little things can make a big difference? He preferred that people understand the thinking behind the policy. There are many things that can be done through purchasing and explained that being “green” is a mindset. He believed that Evanston could be a model community in that regard.

Alderman Rainey asked him about negotiating the development agreement for 2,150 affordable housing units. His material also said he managed the development process for 22 other housing projects to create more than 300 housing units, with 100 of those units as affordable housing. She wanted him to explain more about these projects. Mr. Bobkiewicz replied that these are private, multi-family housing projects with market-rate units and a certain percentage set aside as affordable housing. As city manager, he negotiated the development agreement on three of the large projects.

Alderman Rainey asked how involved is he in every level of day-to-day activity. He responded that he would look to Council to see what they want him to do—which projects would require the hands-on involvement of the City Manager.

Alderman Rainey commented that she felt the City Manager should be able to answer a question from a Council member even if the response could be referred to a department head. She believed that the new manager would need to know (and be able to speak about) everything that is going on. He explained that he works with his staff to come prepared to respond to Council's questions at meetings. He noted that he has quizzed staff so that everyone will be able to answer questions.

Mayor Tisdahl asked what he thought about Evanston's fiscal health and to tell them about stimulus dollars for his community. He reported that they had received nearly \$10 million to repair a creek as a means of flood control. He has a lobbyist in Washington and he visits there once a year and sets priorities with their congressional representative.

He noted that Evanston does have some fiscal problems and cited the police and fire pension issue. He also pointed out that using one-time funding to help balance the budget sends a red flag up. He commented that they as a Council need to align their priorities with the City's resources. He observed that per capita expenditures (per resident) in Evanston are higher than other comparable communities. He wasn't suggesting they should lay people off or cut services, but rather than just raising taxes to make sure how they spend money is in line with what the ten of you think is needed in the community.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste noted that since he has limited ways to tax residents in Santa Paula, how has he creatively balanced the budget? Mr. Bobkiewicz replied that he asked the Council what was their priority and they wanted to continue funding for police and fire. Trying to raise the utility tax and contract out some city services failed, so he asked the Council again about priorities and they suggested discontinuing funds for adult education. He reported that \$500,000 was saved but that was one piece of the puzzle. He noted that Community Development staff only work on projects that developers are paying for and the office is closed one day per week.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked how the economic downturn impacted his community. He stated that they saw a 20 percent reduction in their property tax income and a 10 percent loss in sales tax revenues. He eliminated 18 percent of staff through early retirement packages and layoffs of mostly middle managers.

Alderman Wynne asked about his experiences with higher education. He reiterated that he served the Education Liaison Officer when he worked for Long Beach and noted there are not the same town/gown issues in his current location. In Novato and Santa Paula, he worked mostly on housing issues for faculty. During his past two years as a trustee at Syracuse University, he has had a different perspective of town/gown issues. He felt that Evanston needs to re-set its relationship with Northwestern. He relayed how fellow trustees said that cities always want money from universities and suggested the City look for ways to form partnerships with NU.

Alderman Tendam stated that Evanston is unique from other suburbs and that includes a crime rate that is higher than most of its neighbors. Did he have experience dealing with crime, especially with youth and spillover from another community? Mr. Bobkiewicz reported that the year he was hired as city manager in Santa Paula there were 13 murders, all gang related, in a city of 30,000 people. He said it was a spillover from another country as much as it was a spillover from another community. He stated it wasn't a money issue, but a leadership issue and he had to make a difficult change (replace police chief). Next, their resources were realigned to combat violent crime. The new police chief designated two officers for the county-wide gang task force. They work with the schools and have a grant to fund a school resource officer at their middle school.

Alderman Wilson wanted to know more about his experience with social service delivery. He mentioned working with daycare and senior services; in Novato there was a Police Review Board and that morphed into a Human Relations Commission with sensitivity to gay and lesbian issues. In Santa Paula they hope to have a teen center, but funding has been a problem.

Alderman Fiske asked him to speak about historic preservation, especially with respect to economic development. He announced that his fiancée works for the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington D.C. (she can work in the Trust's Chicago or San Francisco office). He pointed out that Long Beach had a number of historic districts. In Santa Paula, he was very involved in the renovation of the train depot and installation of a sprinkler system in an historic theater.

Alderman Burrus wanted to follow up on the green initiatives in his city. He has focused on doing things as a way to save money, such as energy conservation measures.

Alderman Holmes asked him to talk about managing in a diverse environment. He mentioned a mural program in the downtown and around the community that is run by volunteers, who are generally retired. He has tried to infuse new people into this and other programs to keep them going. The city has served as a catalyst to bring people in to keep some of these traditions going. He stated Council was smart to take up the issue of affordable housing and support it to keep the community diverse.

Alderman Holmes asked him about maintaining diversity on the city's staff. He thought that staff ought to reflect the community and not only entry-level people but also throughout the organization. They have people who speak Spanish in all key public contact areas.

Alderman Jean-Baptiste asked about the crime situation now? He replied it is much improved because he now has a police chief who holds his officers accountable. The police are connected to the community and know their beats and know where parolees are staying.

Mayor Tisdahl stated they're out of time. Did he have any questions? Mr. Bobkiewicz wanted to leave with a few points: teamwork and customer service are very important; as a new Council, they need a strong City Manager. He loves what he does and he'd be honored to serve as Evanston's city manager.

Council Discussion

Ms. Voorhees stated that Council needs to decide who they want back on June 5-6 and what will happen on those two days. She favored bringing back three candidates and Mayor Tisdahl agreed. Ms. Voorhees said that Friday morning the candidates would meet with department heads; Council would get feedback and then meet with each person that afternoon. She mentioned a "meet & greet" that had been proposed for Saturday morning. Council debated whether or not to have a public meeting with the candidates.

Alderman Rainey moved that they not invite the public in and have the candidates make a presentation. Seconded by Alderman Jean-Baptiste. Voice vote. Motion carried (two nays).

Alderman Grover moved that they bring back Christian Sigman, Walter Bobkiewicz and Craig Malin. Seconded by Alderman Rainey. Voice vote. Motion carried, no nays.

Council discussed who would visit each site and when. Ms. Voorhees asked if she could email them about the travel schedule and all agreed.

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 12:25 p.m. by Mayor Tisdahl.

Respectfully submitted,
Mayre Press, Deputy City Clerk