

SPECIAL COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS
PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE CITY COUNCIL
OF BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

The Council convened in Special Session in the Council Chambers, City Hall Building, at 6:30 p.m., Friday, February 20, 2015.

The Meeting was opened by Pledging Allegiance to the Flag followed by moment of silent prayer.

The Meeting was called to order by Mayor Tari Renner.

Mayor Renner requested that Mayor Pro Tem Karen Schmidt conduct the meeting.

Mayor Pro Tem Schmidt thanked those in attendance. She noted that tonight's meeting would address comments made by Mayor Renner on February 10, 2015 blog. There were those who believed the Mayor Renner's apology was sufficient, it was time to move forward. Tonight's meeting represents thoughts and concerns on how the Council presents itself as a Community. She believed that as the governing body they were required to address the situation. The goal was reaffirming community values of mutual respect and support for different points of view. She hoped that the meeting would bring closure. She believed that everyone had at one time spoken in haste, had been forgiven and learned from same.

Alderman Lower cited point of order. He questioned state statute and city code compliance. He believed that Robert Rules of Order (RRO) were followed when same was silent. Jeff Jurgens, Corporation Counsel, addressed the Council. He responded affirmatively.

Alderman Lower questioned tonight's meeting. He read from RRO. He believed same should be conducted in close session with no public comment. To not allow same would affect due process. Mr. Jurgens responded that RRO applied in certain instances. He had contacted the State's Attorney Office. There was no provision to conduct a closed session under the Open Meetings Act. City code allowed for Special Meetings. Under same, roll call and public comment were required.

Motion by Alderman Black, seconded by Alderman Hauman to proceed with the agenda as presented.

The Mayor directed the clerk to call the roll which resulted in the following:

Ayes: Aldermen Schmidt, Painter, Hauman, Sage, Black, and Fruin.

Nays: Aldermen Lower and Stearns.

Motion carried.

Mayor Pro Tem Schmidt directed the Chief Deputy Clerk to call the roll and the following members answered present:

Aldermen: Kevin Lower, David Sage, Diana Hauman, Judy Stearns, Scott Black, Joni Painter, Karen Schmidt, Jim Fruin, Mboka Mwilambwe and Mayor Tari Renner.

Chief Deputy Clerk Renee Gooderham, and Corporate Counsel Jeff Jurgens were also present.

Staff Absent: Tracey Covert, City Clerk.

Mayor Pro Tem Schmidt noted that fourteen (14) citizens had completed Public comment cards. Allowing for same to speak would be approximately forty – five (45) minutes.

Motion by Alderman Stearns, seconded by Alderman Mwilambwe to suspend the rules for Public Comment, allowing fourteen (14) citizens three (3) minutes apiece to speak for a total of forty – five (45) minutes.

Motion carried, (viva voce).

PUBLIC COMMENT: Mayor Pro Tem Schmidt opened the Public Comment section of the meeting. She added that there would not be a response from the City under the Public Comment portion of the meeting.

Elizabeth Gruber, 1313 Pinehurst Dr., addressed the Council. She believed that Mayor Renner's comments were a pattern of behavior.

Dan Metz, 608 E. Mulberry St., addressed the Council. He was disappointed with the Mayor's behavior. He believed politics required a thick skin. Mayor Renner should apologize publicly.

Robert Fazzini, 5 Caterbury Ct., addressed the Council. He had served as Alderman. He believed that Bond Rating Agencies would be monitoring this meeting. Censorship would affect the City's bond rating.

Lyn Johnson, 2019 E Jackson St., addressed the Council. She believed that criticism was part of politics. No one should attack family members. Mayor Renner should not have responded to same. She believed that the blogger should apologize.

Aaron LeNeve, 1009 S. Madison St., addressed the Council. He believed everyone had a constitutional right to speak as we wish.

Chris Graman, 2901 Keystone, addressed the Council. He read Mayor Renner's comments to Diane Benjamin's blog.

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Faye Kalapp, 405 S. Clayton St., addressed the Council. She believed the situation was sad. She requested better decorum and honoring the position.

Bruce Meeks, 1402 Wright St., addressed the Council. He believed the Mayor's actions have been unacceptable. Verbal assaults were not good. He requested Mayor Renner resignation.

Donna Boelyn, 2702 Fox Trot Trl., addressed the Council. She believed the Resolution did not address the issue. She noted that censorship was limited to behavior at meetings. Mayor Renner should be censored for his treatment of Aldermen.

John Brandt, 2004 Trotter Ln., addressed the Council. He questioned who has never made a mistake. He believed errors were opportunities to learn. It was time to move forward.

Alton Franklin, 508 Patterson Dr., addressed the Council. Children were taught to choose words carefully. This was an opportunity for growth and learning. He believed there should be consequences.

Jeff Smith, 12 Hodgehaven Circle, addressed the Council. He was appalled by the Mayor's comments.

Gary Lambert, 3018 E. Oakland Ave., addressed the Council. He believed that Diane Benjamin's blog was a source of information. He believed Mayor Renner's comments were not a one (1) time event.

Joe Walden, 302 Hillside Ln., addressed the Council. He read quotes on freedom of speech, accountability and responsibility. He believed that speaking when angry will be the best speech regretted.

Alderman Lower cited point of order. He questioned due process. Mr. Jurgens noted that the issue was limited to Mayor Renner's comments posted on Diane Benjamin's blog.

Mayor Renner addressed the Council. He was comfortable with not making comments at this time. Mayor Renner left the dais at 7:19 p.m.

Alderman Lower noted that Mayor Renner had waived his right to self-defense. Mayor Pro Tem Schmidt stated that Mayor Renner requested there be free and open discussion without his presence.

Mayor Pro Tem Schmidt requested that Chief Deputy Clerk Renee Gooderham read the Resolution.

RESOLUTION NO. 2015 - 6

A RESOLUTION EXPRESSING DISAPPROVAL OF MAYOR RENNER'S RECENT COMMENTS AND SETTING FORTH THE HIGH VALUE THE CITY COUNCIL PLACES ON CIVIL PUBLIC DISCOURSE

WHEREAS, it is a core value of the City Council that all citizens, visitors and others who come in contact with the City employees and officials be treated with the utmost respect and integrity; and

WHEREAS, the elected leaders of the City, including specifically through the leadership of the Mayor, must set the example and tone for demonstrating respect and integrity; and

WHEREAS, it is the City Council's expectation that the officials and employees of the City will consistently behave in a professional manner, show deference to those who disagree and encourage public dialogue; and

WHEREAS, on February 10, 2015, Bloomington Mayor Tari Renner posted comments which violated the values of the City Council, and which demonstrated a lack of judgment and professionalism; and

WHEREAS, while Mayor Tari Renner has apologized for his comments, the City Council finds that it is necessary to reinforce that this type of behavior is not tolerable within the City; and

WHEREAS, by this resolution, the City Council desires to address Mayor Renner's comments and reinforce our commitment to civil public discourse.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE City Council of the City of Bloomington, McLean County, Illinois, as follows:

Section 1. The above stated recitals are incorporated herein by reference.

Section 2. The City Council of the City of Bloomington hereby reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that all those coming into contact with the City be treated with respect and integrity and that a civil public dialogue is encouraged. The City Council further calls on Mayor Tari Renner to reaffirm his commitment to lead the City's employees and officials in furthering this culture of inclusion through positive example.

Section 3. This Resolution shall be in full force and effect immediately after its passage and approval.

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APPROVED by the City Council of the City of Bloomington, McLean County, Bloomington, Illinois, February 20, 2015, by a vote of Nine (9) to Zero (0).

ATTEST:

Tracey Covert, City Clerk

Karen Schmidt, Mayor Pro Tem

Motion by Alderman Sage, seconded by Alderman Mwilambwe to accept the Resolution as read.

The Mayor Pro Tem Schmidt directed the clerk to call the roll which resulted in the following:

Ayes: Aldermen Schmidt, Painter, Lower, Hauman, Sage, Black, Stearns, Mwilambwe and Fruin.

Nays: None.

Motion carried.

Mayor Pro Tem Schmidt stated that City code was silent on Aldermen comments time limits. She noted that RRO had a limit of ten (10) minutes. She requested limiting comments to five (5) minutes.

Motion by Alderman Hauman, seconded by Alderman Black to limit Alderman comments to five (5) minutes apiece.

Ayes: Aldermen Schmidt, Painter, Lower, Hauman, Sage, Black, Mwilambwe and Fruin.

Nays: Alderman Stearns.

Motion carried.

Alderman Lower noted concerns over the proceedings. More time was required to make sure the issue was resolved properly and fairly.

Alderman Sage stated that there was no excuse for Mayor Renner's comments. He had heard the following comments: 1.) any official action taken would damage the City's image and 2.) Council has more important things to do. He believed the loss of trust and credibility with citizens was significant. It was expected that the elected officials set the standard for public discourse. They were expected to be tolerant and fair. He believed citizens expected that future actions match tonight's pledge.

Alderman Mwilambwe stated his preference to provide praise in public and constructive feedback in private. He noted his disappointment in that the disagreement between two (2) individuals had gotten this far. He recognized elected officials had freedom of speech. He believed same had a responsibility to choose words carefully. He acknowledged that Mayor Renner's comments were hurtful. By virtue of being elected officials they set the tone for acceptable behavior. Council was required to hold themselves to higher standards when communicating.

Alderman Stearns did not believe that the procedure followed RRO. Council did not have the truth or facts. Evidence had not been presented. She acknowledged that parents will defend their children. She did not believe that Mayor Renner's son was attacked on the blog. She did not believe that Mayor Renner had apologized.

Alderman Painter stated Mayor Renner's remarks were indefensible. She noted that Mayor Renner had agreed to accept the consequences. She believed that the city and Mayor Renner had paid the price. There needed to be civility, common courtesy and respect.

Alderman Schmidt noted the various comments Council had received. She questioned why tonight mattered. She believed that government was founded on civil discourse. Leaders were open to criticism. She believed that there was no situation which deserved the response given by Mayor Renner. This was an opportunity to reaffirm a commitment to respect and civility.

Alderman Black believed that the Internet was not a nice place. He believed there should a pause before commenting. He was disappointment with the Mayor's comments. It was unfortunate that the conversation had focused on same. There were a lot of accomplishments in the last two (2) years. He believed it was important to reset the public dialogue and to move forward.

Alderman Hauman believed that Mayor Renner's passion was an asset and liability. She believed that he had learned and was humbled. The Resolution outlines expectations and was a reminder that Council was the role models for civil discourse. She noted Mayor Renner's accomplishments: pension policy, transparency, and encouraging business to relocate. She cited her disappointment with Mayor Renner's actions. It was time to move forward.

Alderman Fruin believed the damage was done. Mayor Renner's comments were inexcusable. He believed disrespect was increasing. This was creating a situation of people not wanting to serve. He believed it was time to move forward. He believed the challenge was to determine unlimited and disrespectful freedom of speech. He believed core values were required.

Mayor Renner returned at 7:57 p.m.

Mayor Renner addressed the Council. He accepted the Council's decision. He was taking full responsibility for his comments. He thanked those who had made comments tonight. He apologized to anyone who was hurt by same.

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Motion by Alderman Schmidt, seconded by Alderman Hauman, that the meeting be adjourned. Time: 8:09 p.m.

Motion carried, (viva voce).

Renee Gooderham
Chief Deputy Clerk