

Cuyahoga Falls City Council
Minutes of the Committee-of-the-Whole
February 25, 2019

Members: Ms. Nichols-Rhodes, Chair
Mr. Brillhart
Mr. Gorbach
Mr. Iona
Mr. Iula
Mr. James
Mr. Miller
Mr. Pallotta
Ms. Penta
Mrs. Pyke
Mr. Reilly

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. All members were present.

Discussion:

Mayor Walters spoke via teleconference to present Diana Colavecchio as Community Development Director. He thanked Sarah Leedham for serving in that role and doing a great job. He stated that Diana Colavecchio has a very long history of involvement in Cuyahoga Falls in many capacities. She is an ideal choice to lead the Community Development Department. Council has received her resume. She is a 28-year Cuyahoga Falls resident. She also has 14 years in private practice as an attorney, and was a small business owner in Cuyahoga Falls. She has served as a magistrate in the Mayor's court. While a business owner, she served on City Council for three terms as a Ward 5 councilperson. During that time, she served as Council President, chaired the Finance Committee and Planning & Zoning Committee, served on the Planning Commission, chaired the Community Development Committee, and was chosen by the previous Mayor to be on the Portage Crossings Developer Selection Committee. She has also served on the CRA Committee, the Tax Incentive Review Committee, Tree Board and the Bicentennial Committee. She's currently on the Cuyahoga Falls Historical Design and Review Board. She is member of the Lion's Club and is a Rotarian. She works on the Commission For Human Trafficking and is a member of the Cuyahoga Falls and the Stow Chamber of Commerce.

Mayor Walters stated that in her current position as Clerk of Court, she prepares budgets and oversees an approximately \$1.2-million budget and supervises 20 Deputy Clerks and an IT Director. She possesses a lot of experience in Cuyahoga Falls that is pertinent to this position. As an attorney and past magistrate, Diana has a keen sense of many legal matters in the Community Development Department, such as housing violations that end up in court, development agreements, CDBG issues, condemnation cases, TIFs and zoning interpretation. Her prior experience and city service management skills, budgeting experience, established business relationships and legal background makes her the clear choice to lead the Community Development Department. Mayor Walters respectfully asked Council for her confirmation.

Mrs. Pyke stated that she enjoyed the time that she and Ms. Colavecchio served on Council together. It was cut short when Ms. Colavecchio left her council position to become Clerk of Courts. She was elected Clerk of Court, and is now leaving that position to take the Community Development Director position. She asked Ms. Colavecchio why she feels that she is going to

Committee-of-the-Whole
February 25, 2019 – Page 2

remain in this position and if she will be running for any political positions while holding this position. Ms. Colavecchio stated that she fully intends to serve out the remainder of her career in the great city that she loves. It is a huge task to run this City's Development Department, and it has been an even larger task of late. If she is confirmed this evening, her first task will be to get a feel and a grasp of everything that is going on in the city. She is committed to continuing the good work that this Administration has started and serving out the remainder of the Mayor's term. Assuming he runs again, and she certainly hopes that he does, she will continue to work with him and his team throughout the remainder of an additional term. She has absolutely no intention of running for any further political office.

Mr. Iona asked Ms. Colavecchio what her vision was as Director. In the past, he has had questions and wanted reports, and he finally started getting them from Sarah Leedham after she became Interim Director. They have \$15 million invested in downtown between the parking decks and all the improvements, and there are still a lot of vacancies. As Community Development Director, he would think that that was going to be a priority.

Ms. Colavecchio stated that she has started giving these things thought. Without having a detail that goes along with all the projects in the city, she cannot give specifics on what her goals would be, but can speak in some generalities. Certainly, her biggest goal is to create a marketing plan that is intended to bring business here, including to the downtown area. What that involves, from her perspective, is to go out and seek not just businesses, but industries that haven't been thought of. For example, there's a film tax credit that Ohio offers. To her knowledge, the City hasn't sought out the film industry, but needs to start thinking about that. It might be time that they form a nonprofit film corporation to do that. She thinks it would be a thrill to have a film made here in Cuyahoga Falls, and, now that downtown is taking shape, it is a great location for that. She also thinks it's time to put together a very well thought out brochure that can be handed to prospective business owners, a brochure that has some eye appeal and that explains why they should bring their business here and why they might want to be a part of all those things that are exciting in what's happening here now.

Ms. Colavecchio stated that a marketing strategy could include changing the perception of some things that might have been negative. For example, there was a time the Cuyahoga River was the river that caught on fire. Maybe some people still remember that, and that's shaping their image of the city. They intended to make the river a beautiful place for business here, as well. Doing a little research on that, she discovered that only one percent of the rivers in Ohio have been designated as wild and scenic rivers. That's a designation the City could pursue to help improve the image of the river. It's something she is certainly interested in doing, because the City wants that river to be the draw for kayakers and be the draw to bring more recreation to the river. Downtown is definitely a priority. She also sees the need for the image of Cuyahoga Falls as a city that's inclusive and is welcoming and needs to be more of a partner with not only the businesses that are here, but the community of citizens that are here already. That includes the City's schools. She definitely sees the need to make the City's housing stock match its vision for what a city that cares about all its residents should be. When she drives around the City, she is often reminded of the first sentence of the Charles Dickens' novel, "A Tale of Two Cities." The east side of the City looks like the worst of times, and the west side of the city looks like the best of times. There has been a lot of flourishing development on the west side of the city. It's time to start devoting more attention to the east side. They can take funds like CDBG funds and leverage them. They can get the Land Bank involved. They can use grant money from other sources, like lead-paint-based

Committee-of-the-Whole
February 25, 2019 – Page 2

grants and Habitat for Humanity, and start acquiring properties on the east side and making it a priority to build affordable homes for the people who live there and who want to move here to be in the City's schools. They have to start talking to the schools, because they're going to be building new schools and they need to be in a room to have that conversation with them. If they can't create an environment and a community here to attract people because of the schools, they need to be discussing why that is and how they can help shape and change the vision of the City's schools. Right now, the City's schools are struggling, and they can't just think about what's best for Cuyahoga Falls if they're not including what's best for Cuyahoga Falls in terms of lifting up the school system, too.

Ms. Colavecchio stated that those are some of the things that are on her mind right now: Marketing, imaging, homes, schools and being a partner on a more intimate level as far as a director. Her style of management and leadership comes down to one word: Collaboration. She likes to get people in the room, talk about resources and be resourceful. She certainly doesn't know everything there is to know about development, and she certainly doesn't know everything about Cuyahoga Falls and the people who help run it, but, in the coming weeks and months, they can count on her reaching out to all of them and talking to them one-on-one about some of their ideas, as well.

Mr. James stated that he was tickled pink that Ms. Colavecchio is with them. He always enjoyed being on the rail with her. She is great fit for Cuyahoga Falls as Community Development Director, and he is happy that she pursued that and that the Mayor gave her the opportunity to take it.

Mr. Gorbach stated that he was impressed, but not surprised, that Ms. Colavecchio had the answer to Mr. Iona's question before she had even taken the job. Ms. Colavecchio has demonstrated that she is extremely thoughtful and listens more than talks. She has shown, throughout her career in public service, her collaborative management style. Cuyahoga Falls is lucky to have her, and he is glad to have her proven commitment to Cuyahoga Falls. Mr. Gorbach stated he was very excited to have Ms. Colavecchio aboard and looks forward to working with her.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes welcomed Ms. Colavecchio. She stated that Ms. Colavecchio's intelligence is impressive, and she sees her as a great fit as Community Development Director.

Mr. Reilly stated that he was thrilled, as well, to have Ms. Colavecchio as Community Development Director, but would also like to say he is happy to hear three things he hasn't heard a lot since being on Council, and that's the east side of Cuyahoga Falls, the Land Bank and Habitat for Humanity. He is glad she is coming up with some new ideas. He also thanked Ms. Leedham for serving in the interim, and stated that he has enjoyed working with her during his tenure as Chairman of the Community Development Committee.

Mr. James moved to approve the Mayor's appointments, second by Mr. Gorbach. Roll Call: Mr. Brillhart, yes; Mr. Gorbach, yes; Mr. Iona, yes; Mr. Iula, yes; Mr. James, yes; Mr. Miller, yes; Ms. Nichols-Rhodes, yes; Mr. Pallotta, yes; Ms. Penta, yes; Mrs. Pyke, no; Mr. Reilly, yes. Motion passed (10-1).

Ms. Colavecchio thanked Council and stated that she looks forward to working with all of them.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

