

**Cuyahoga Falls City Council**  
**Minutes of the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency**

**April 25, 2016**

**Members:** Adam Miller, Chair  
Russ Iona  
Mary Nichols-Rhodes

Mr. Miller called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. All members were present.

**Discussion:**

Mr. Miller thanked Council President Mary Ellen Pyke for creating this committee and the Clerk of Council for taking the minutes of the meeting. He stated that, as Chairman, it is his hope that the committee can develop ways for City Council meetings to be more open, transparent and accessible to the public. It is a working committee, so the findings or suggestions of this committee will be very important, because the public will be engaged, and their needs and their wants will be put first. Not all residents can attend Council meetings. With the current sound system, it is sometimes difficult for those residents that do attend to hear.

Mr. Miller stated that the goal of this committee is reach out to other communities and to develop best practices for communication. Tonight, he would like to develop a timeframe for a report to be submitted to Council and also discuss specific tasks of the committee. New audio equipment is one issue that will be discussed, along with the issue of whether audio or video of Council meetings and Committee meetings should be placed online for residents to watch and listen to at their convenience. Mr. Miller stated that because communication is key, he would like the committee to develop a survey for the public. He asked each member to create their own survey, so that a draft can be developed at the next meeting. The committee will need to start gathering information on the resources that are available and will have to make sure that it develops a cost-effective plan.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked where the survey would be made available and what steps would be taken so that the survey results would not be skewed. Mr. Miller stated that his plan was to create an account through Survey Monkey, an online survey service that will gather all the data. In the alternative, a Google document could be created and submitted through the City website. Residents could fill out the survey and leave comments or suggestions. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if, in order to avoid people submitting more than one survey, residents will be asked to submit their name and address when they fill out the survey. Because it is an online survey available to anyone with access to a computer, it is important to make sure that only residents of Cuyahoga Falls are submitting their answers. Mr. Miller stated that was something that could be discussed. Mr. Iona stated that another issue is ascertaining the cost of the services provided, so that if the demand is there for audio and video, it is something that can be provided cost-wise.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that some idea of the costs should be known before the survey goes out. After doing an online search, she gathered names of 11 cities who videotape their Council meetings. They post their meetings on YouTube or on their website. She stated that in order to ascertain if it would be cost-effective to provide this service, the committee members should reach out to these communities to determine how many hits they get on their sites. Mr. Iona stated that

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the list could be divided up between the committee members, with each member taking two or three cities to contact and possibly attend one of their meetings. Mr. Miller stated that he spoke with Mayor Yates, of Twinsburg, and their IT administrator last week. He toured their Council chambers and took pictures to share with the committee members. Twinsburg City Council does audio and video and posts it to YouTube within 72 hours. They supplied the cost of several proposals they received. They have four cameras in the chambers. Everything is high definition. As far as hits on YouTube, they feel it is cost-effective, because it does engage the community. Their budget for that was \$50,000. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if that cost was just for equipment or included the ongoing costs to operate and maintain the system. Mr. Miller stated that was the cost of the equipment only, and that he does have a list of all the costs. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that there is labor involved beyond the equipment cost. In determining the total cost, some things that would have to be taken into consideration would be whether there would be a cameraperson present, at all times, who is going to maintain and repair the equipment and who is going to be responsible for posting it on the internet. Mr. Miller stated that he would also like to discuss the value of having mobile cameras and equipment, since Council chambers are not permanently set up and the equipment may be damaged from constantly moving it.

Mr. Iona stated that perhaps the survey could be distributed in the water bill; that way, all city residents would receive it. It could be something postcard size with a few basic questions. That way, it can be ascertained if having audio or video available is something the citizens of Cuyahoga Falls would want and whether it would be cost effective. The second part is to make it a better experience for those who attend Council meetings by having an effective microphone system so that everyone can hear and be heard. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that there should be a list of questions developed to ask the cities when they are contacted. One of the questions that might be asked is whether the Council Clerk's minutes are the official record. She stated she believes the recording should be an addition and not a replacement for the minutes taken by the Clerk. Mr. Iona stated that that was a good point.

Mr. Miller asked the members what they consider reasonable as far as a timeframe. He suggested that the recommendation be presented to Council before the August recess. Mr. Iona stated that if questions were submitted by the committee members by next week, they could be discussed and broken down into a certain amount of questions. A determination could then be made of the fastest and least expensive way to distribute the survey. Sending out the survey in the utility billing may be the easiest way to see what kind of response there is. Mr. Miller stated that in setting up the timeframe in order of importance, developing the survey is probably the most important; then distributing the survey and the resources. Everything else can be adjusted off of the survey. Mr. Iona asked if June 1<sup>st</sup> would be too optimistic to have had an opportunity to talk to the different communities and have the survey ready to be distributed. Mr. Miller and Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated they thought it could be done in that timeframe. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that some issues, such as public record retention policies, will have to be determined later. Another consideration would be that some citizens, knowing that the meeting will be broadcast, may be uncomfortable giving their name and address and saying something they don't think is going to be popular. Also, people may not attend and participate in meetings if they can access the meetings online or on the radio. Mr. Iona stated that they have to give their name and address now when they address Council.

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Ms. Nichols-Rhodes inquired as to how they would go about looking at costs so it could be included in the survey. Mr. Miller stated that a good template would be the City of Twinsburg, because they have it outlined. Their Council chambers are larger, with cameras mounted on the walls. Mr. Iona stated that would be a good starting point if we want state-of-the art equipment, and, then, depending on need, adjust down. Mr. Miller stated that Twinsburg spent \$50,000 on the system they have currently. Their IT administrator sits in a booth in the back of chambers and handles the cameras throughout the meeting. He then uploads that on that night on the city's YouTube channel. He is an employee working after hours. He does edit the videos at the beginning and the end. There may not be a need to go that far. There are some city councils that set up an iPad on a tripod, hit play before the meeting starts and that's it. Mr. Iona asked if the City of Cuyahoga Falls has a YouTube Channel. Mr. Miller stated there is a YouTube channel.

Mr. Iona suggested that they talk to Tallmadge, Stow, Munroe Falls, Hudson and Macedonia to get a sampling of what other city councils in the area are doing, and volunteered to contact Tallmadge, Munroe Falls and Medina. Mr. Miller stated that he set up a meeting with Matt Riehl and Mike Razor from Stow City Council. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated she will contact Hudson and Painesville. Mr. Iona stated that the Clerk of Council would be the best person to contact in each of those communities. Mr. Miller stated that the IT administrator from Twinsburg has offered to speak to the committee. Mr. Iona stated that it would be a good idea to have him come in as soon as next week and get his opinion. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if they could find out how many hours the IT administrator for Twinsburg spends on council meetings. Mr. Miller stated that another issue would be whether it would be a worthwhile expenditure, given the Council chambers are used for other activities and equipment might be damaged. The other issue is the microphones. Mr. Iona stated he knows someone from Audio Technica. He suggested that each committee member reach out to different businesses and find out what technology is available. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes suggested that they involve the City's IT Director, John Konich, in order to price equipment. She suggested they find out the cost of the current equipment and how old it is.

Mr. Miller opened the discussion to the audience for comments. Mrs. Pyke stated that it is exciting to see the enthusiasm of the committee members, and she is hoping to see big things to come of the committee. She stated that they can't lose sight of the people that don't have access to a computer. There might be residents that might love to be able to listen in or see what is happening on Council, but their mobility is so limited, they cannot attend. There is a need to reach out to those individuals. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the radio station 96.1 is available, so that could be an option for those without access to a computer or who have mobility issues.

Mr. Richard Milford, of 1740 11<sup>th</sup> Street, stated that Time Warner and other cable services have public access channels. That could be an alternative for residents who cannot physically attend Council meetings or do not have access to a computer. Most people have access to a TV and could watch the meetings that way. He stated it may be a good idea to start out with audio and add the video later as a way to save on cost. Mrs. Pyke stated that 90 percent of communication is hand gestures and how one portrays what they are saying, and it might be important for the public to actually hear what is being said. Mr. Milford stated that, if nothing else, broadcasting the meetings would provide the people who complain about not being informed about City government a way to access it on cable or the website, which may eliminate a lot of the complaints. Mr. Iona stated

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that was a great point and would hopefully solve a lot of issues. Residents can read about it in the Falls News and also view it online or listen on the radio.

Mrs. Pyke stated that this could be something that is used in the schools. Fifth graders have Civics class. It would be a great opportunity for the students to be able to view a Council meeting and to dissect that meeting in the classroom. She stated that the School Board is taped. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she will reach out to the School Board to find out how they record their meetings and how many hits they receive. She stated that they have a broadcasting program and radio station for the students that could perhaps be utilized. Mr. Iona stated that the students broadcast the State of Cuyahoga Falls with Mayor Walters at the Chamber of Commerce meeting and do a phenomenal job.

Mr. Miller stated that, before the next committee meeting, the members will reach out to the different communities and discuss best practices with them, reach out to the high school students, Mr. Konich and utilities billing in order to develop different ideas, so a resolution can be moved forward and presented to Council. Mr. Iona stated that the most important thing will be to develop yes-or-no questions on the survey that are not leading and easy to fill out. Also, for those that don't have access to e-mail or other means to submit their surveys, perhaps they could offer to pick up their surveys. Mr. Miller stated that they could also have hard copies at Council meetings.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that there should be a time limit on when the responses will be accepted; that way, the survey results could be revealed at a specified time or day. Mr. Iona stated that if the surveys were mailed out by June 1<sup>st</sup>, the residents could have them back by July 12<sup>th</sup>. That will give them six weeks, so that there will be time to review them before Council breaks in August. At that point, the committee members will have spoken to other communities, ascertained the cost and determined where they stand. Mr. Miller stated the next Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency meeting will be May 9th, at 7 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.