

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

May 2, 2016

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

Mr. Miller called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. All members were present.

Discussion:

Mr. Miller called on Mr. Pallotta to discuss the microphones and ways they can be fixed and some of the prices. Mr. Pallotta stated that Audio-Technica was there today along with Mr. John Konich, Director of the IT Department, and members of the Natatorium, Courtney and Lori. Todd, one of the technicians, and Mary Nichols-Rhodes was there, as well as Dan Pelletier, a solutions expert from Audio-Technica. Mr. Pelletier said that the equipment and sound devices back in the equipment room are fine and working properly. He went through each of one of the microphones. The base of the microphones acts as a stabilizer and contains three contacts. These microphones are picked up and taken down every council night. The contacts are wiggled and become loose, causing feedback and distortion in the audio equipment. Mr. Pallotta stated that he sent the base of his microphone in to Audio-Technica today. Their wireless technician is going to take a look at the base and determine how much it would cost to do a tune-up on each one of the bases. He was hoping that he would receive that information this afternoon, but has not heard from him as of yet. He will give the information to Mr. Miller as soon as he receives it.

Mr. Pallotta stated that there were a lot of different things coming down the road that Mr. Pelletier couldn't specify time-wise, but the FCC is going to change their policy on wireless systems like these. Google is purchasing the rights to these airwaves. When that occurs, these microphones are going to become antiquated. In September, the FCC is going to meet with Google. It looks like it's a for-sure thing that Google is going to win this appeal, and that they are going to own the rights. Mr. Pelletier's suggestion is to make do with the current system and wait to see what happens with the FCC. If Google does purchase the rights to the airwaves, the equipment used now is not going to be permissible. It will either have to be upgraded or a different system will have to be purchased. One alternative would be something called a conference room. There would be 10 microphones available communication system. There would be one microphone per table and two people could easily use it. Mr. Pelletier stated that would be the least expensive solution, but the committee would have to investigate and see how much a system like that would cost. Council could upgrade to a wired system. There would be wires going across, but it would be a system that Google wouldn't have any control over, since they would only control wireless systems. Mr. Pallotta stated that he also inquired about the sound system recording and video. Mr. Konich mentioned that there is a camera in the ceiling of the room that would be capable of videotaping. The sound system is recording, so the audio could be used from that. Mr. Iona asked if the video camera is functioning. Mr. Pallotta stated that Mr. Konich said it is accessible, but there is no audio. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes thanked Mr. Pallotta for having Audio-Technica come in and making them aware of the possibility of losing frequency accessibility in September.

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Mr. Miller stated that he would like to discuss the survey next. Mr. Iona stated that he talked to three different people in reference to whether it is actually needed. Nobody wants to spend a lot of money to fix a system that's not really broke. Tonight, he had feedback on his microphone, which makes it fairly unprofessional. There is obviously a need for a new system. Mr. Iona spoke to Mayor Dave Kline, of Tallmadge. Mayor Kline stated that every microphone is recorded. They still have a clerk. There is a microphone at a podium to record when somebody addresses council. There is a room at the Tallmadge City Hall where these recordings are catalogued and stored. They do not videotape their meetings. Mr. Iona stated that he attended a Munroe Falls council meeting. Both Tallmadge and Munroe Falls have their own council meeting rooms, so the microphones are stationary. Munroe Falls has a Clerk of Council who records the minutes, but they do not have a tape recording system.

Mr. Iona stated that in Munroe Falls and Tallmadge, they basically have the same problem, which is how many people actually attend the Council meetings. It's negligible in all three communities. Mayor Kline thought that the Clerk's information and having the recordings logged and available was more than adequate. Munroe Falls would like to have a better system, but there's a constraint with the budget. Mr. Iona stated that his big concern is can the people who do attend council meetings hear what's going on. If there is a recorder, obviously, that helps tremendously. He came up with three basic questions to put on the survey. The first question would be, "Have you ever attended a city council meeting?" The second question would be, "Would you watch a live City Council meeting on local cable?" The City of Green has live cable. They play City Council meetings on their local cable channel. The third question is, "Would you listen to live City Council meeting on the City's AM radio station?" If a person says I've never attended, I don't want to watch it on TV and I'm sure not going to listen to an AM radio station, then just getting better microphones, so that members of council and the public can hear one another might be the answer.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she wanted to mention that the name of this committee as noted on the announcement she received is Ad Hoc for the Best Practices for City Council. If the name is being changed or altered, it needs to be made official. Her issue with using the word "transparency" is it makes it sound as if Council is not transparent and it is. The meetings are public and there are minutes. What this committee is trying to accomplish is trying to establish best practices. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the first thing she did was find out how much the current recording system cost. In April of 2011, the City paid \$11,120. That is more than \$2,000 a year paid for microphones that don't work. She spoke to Russ Balthis, the Law Director, and he is going to look to see if there is any warranty information. If the current microphones could just be fixed or tuned up, that might be a better thing. She agrees that everyone in the room should be able to hear.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated she contacted a person from the Akron Public Schools about broadcasting on Time Warner Cable. Senate Bill 17, several years ago, limited communities' access to public access television. She has not received an answer back. She thinks the Akron Public Schools have control of Channel 15 that they use. Her understanding is that there is a fee per broadcast for whatever is put on. There may not be a charge for a government agency, but that is still being investigated and she doesn't have the answer to that. She stated that, when she viewed the Cuyahoga Falls Board of Education site, she couldn't find the video anymore. She would like to know how many hits they get and how many people are viewing what they're putting up there.

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She checked with John Konich to find out if he can find out how many hits or views the Council minutes are receiving and if there is interest out there. He is getting that information for her. Lori Visner, from the Natatorium, gave her the paperwork for the microphones, but there is no information on the warranty for them. Brian Hoffman, Finance Director, confirmed that the money came out of the Capital Projects Fund. She stated that something to keep in mind is that there isn't anything specifically dedicated in the budget for whatever solution is decided on.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the Cuyahoga Falls News-Press sometimes put portions of the Council meetings on their Facebook page and website. She sent an e-mail to Phil Keren, of the News-Press, to see if they know how many hits they received. Because the meetings posted are ones that are of interest, that might not accurately reflect how many people would watch a regular meeting. Finally, Ms. Nichols-Rhodes checked with Zach Jones, Utility Billing, about the cost of putting an insert in the utility bills. Eric Czetli, Service Director, spoke to her tonight and said they could put them in. There would have to have lead time of a few weeks, because they have to get it together, print it and put it in. Because the City bills over an entire month, it would take a whole month for everyone to get it. They could collect the survey, whether people mail them or bring them in when they pay their utility bill. So, that is a doable thing, but the cost is not known quite yet. Mr. Miller asked if that was to put the whole survey in the mailing or a link. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated the survey would be a third of a page, the size of the envelope. It could be both sides. The major cost would be the postage it would cost to send it. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she like Mr. Iona's questions, but would change them to say "live broadcast" or "tape broadcast," because it might be audio or visual. Cost is a factor. If 90 percent of the people say they would like it, and then it is found that it is going to cost \$50,000, they may rather have five more blocks of a street resurfaced. That has to be weighed out, because that certainly would come into play when people make their decision.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated there are several cities that she has not heard back from. She did have communication with someone in Clayton, Ohio, which is near Dayton. It only has a population of 13,000 people. They have been recording since 2008. They have a high school student perform the actual recording, and they pay him \$15 an hour. The minimum is two-hours pay. The clerk performs the conversion of the tape using Freemake Video Converter, which is downloaded for free, and she loads the video onto their website. They weren't sure how much they paid for it to begin with. In Grove City, the clerk told her that they stream live and they also then post the recordings on the City's website for viewing later. She gave a whole breakdown of the costs. Their one-time cost for video processing was \$6,757. The cameras and the installation was \$21,600. That is \$30,000 right there. There is an ongoing cost, depending on how many meetings per year you have. So, if there are 50 meetings a year, it is \$1,095 a year. It is a significant cost. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated she spoke with the Hudson Clerk of Council. They have videotaped for some time, but they still have a Hudson Cable Channel, because they were grandfathered in when Senate Bill 17 took effect. Their cost is not huge. They feel they have a really good system. Theirs works out well, but their labor is their person who runs their cable station. That is part of his job. In Macedonia, the Clerk of Council said she would have to do some hunting and pecking for the numbers but they have recorded since 1999.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated there were several that didn't get back to her. In New Franklin, they have been recording their meetings since they were a township. Originally, the employees would

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record the meeting and it was delivered to Time Warner, but the public access channel no longer provides this service, so they now have an independent contractor. He makes them available to the webmaster for placing on their website for public viewing. He charges \$300 a month for the service. Norton has invited the committee to come out and look at the equipment that they use. About six years ago, there was a petition initiative to change the charter in Norton. By law, they are required to record every meeting, including committees. It has to be in its entirety and it has to be reshown a couple times a week or a couple times a month. The monthly fee is \$1,900. When the charter amendment was passed, no one considered the cost associated with it. They have one camera. More than one time, they have had trouble with the equipment. They had to stop the council meeting, because, by law, it had to be recorded beginning to end. In Youngstown, they have audio equipment. Once the minutes are produced by the Clerk and approved by council, the audio recording is eliminated. They are not the only city that does that. In Youngstown, there also is a group called Happenings, and someone from there comes and videotapes the meetings and posts it, but it has nothing to do with the City. Mr. Miller asked if any of those communities use their recordings as the official minutes as opposed to the minutes taken by the clerk. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes said no. Hudson does a summary and keeps the video recordings as their permanent record. Everyone else uses the written minutes as their official minutes. She stated that written minutes are more professional. Mr. Miller agreed. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the person she spoke to in Hudson told her he was able to see who is viewing their recordings online. On average, it might be 25 or 30 a month.

Mr. Iona suggested that perhaps the name for the committee should be Special Council Committee on Communications, or something along those lines. There are two different things that the committee is addressing. One is better communication for during the meetings and the other one is getting the public involved either by audio, visual or written. He stated that the first order of business should be to make sure that those who attend the meetings can hear what is going on. The current system is not a really good system, but if it's going to cost \$100,000, the money is not in the budget. If it's a nominal amount, then that might be something to look at. He stated he thinks it is a great idea to get everybody involved across the city, but since there are just a few people coming to meetings now, maybe just a web-based situation could be used or something in Falls News-Press to try to minimize the cost. Mr. Iona stated that the first order of business is to find out what the cost will be to improve the current system. The biggest problem is the equipment is being stored and moved every Monday. There is no solution for that problem without having a dedicated council room. There may be a guarantee or a warranty on the current equipment that could be implemented to trade up a little bit, which would certainly help.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that John Konich asked the gentleman from Audio-Technica about the microphones that you clip on that have a transistor. He said they cost about \$100 each, but there is additional equipment that you have to buy. Some of it would tie into the current receivers. She agreed with Mr. Iona that the first thing that needs to be done is to improve the sound so the audience can hear. Mr. Iona stated if someone is a taxpayer and there is a meeting he wants to attend, he expects Council to be professional. If he can't hear, it looks bad. Mr. Pallotta stated that the gentleman from Audio-Technica, said that there's nothing wrong with the current microphones. There is distortion in the base, but they are going to check on that. Eventually, a decision will

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have to be made on what type of wireless system or wired system Council will have to use. No matter what system is used, the current microphones will work with that system, so there would be savings there. If Council decided to go to a different system, the representative from Audio-Technica said that Tim Schwartz, with United Sound, would probably take these microphones back and they can receive type of recompense toward the new equipment. That would have to be done between the Administration and United Sound. Mr. Pallotta stated he liked the idea of using United Sound, because it is good vendor and a Cuyahoga Falls company. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that though the microphones are not amplifying, they are recording. She suggested that a recording of this meeting could be sent to all of council to listen to, so that the quality of the recording could be heard.

Mr. Miller stated that because of the utility billing schedule, the survey should be ready to distribute by the next meeting, which would be May 23rd. Mr. Iona stated that it has to be designed, printed and paid for. Mr. Miller suggested that they develop that over the next week and have it ready to go by the next meeting. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that Mr. Czetli said it would be another day or so before he would have the cost of including it in the utility billing. Mr. Iona stated that, being on the Finance Committee, he doesn't recall there being money budgeted for something like that. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that would mean Council would have to approve, so they will need to have exact amounts. Mr. Iona stated that the cost will probably sway the other council members. The key component is how much money it is going to cost to upgrade the system, making it user friendly for the audience, and, two, if they want to do something a little bit more with Council meetings in terms of recording them and making them more accessible, et cetera.

Mr. Miller stated that another option, as far as a survey, is a Google document. He is creating a survey through that, having the requirement of their name and their address. It would not be analytical, as far as the percentages. It could be put on the City website and maybe the News-Press could push it out. It would be through the internet. They could get a link and ask all these questions and it wouldn't cost anything. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that her concern with that is the people who don't use a computer. There are people who physically can't come here, and they might not be using a computer. An important segment of the population is being left out when only the internet is used. Mr. Iona suggested that maybe they could do both, in terms of having Google access and putting some questions in the Falls News where that person could cut that out, call in the answers, mail the answers, fax the answers, or e-mail. That way, it would minimize the cost. Mr. Iona stated that if they put something in the Falls News-Press, plus Google, and it's free, they are doing their due diligence watching the taxpayers' money. People that don't use computers usually read the paper. People that don't read the paper, usually use computers. That way, they will be reaching two different demographics age-wise. Mr. Miller stated that they can develop that by the next meeting.

Mr. William Maki, 1555 6th Street, suggested Council think about the physical layout and run their tables down the middle of the room, face each other and put all the chairs on the outside. Normally, their voices would carry. Lavalier microphones could be used. There would need to be about 20 of them. Someone would have to bring them and hand them out and make sure the batteries are fresh every meeting. They are a lot easier to run around with than fixed assets. Mr. Maki stated

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that he hates Time Warner Cable, and requested that be noted in the minutes. He stated that AT&T has a local government channel. There is a system called U-Stream that can go on the internet. There is no need to have a lot of gear, just a laptop with a built-in camera facing the group and a microphone plugged into it. It goes live on the internet. Mr. Maki stated that in another group he belongs to, they are in a circle and have a microphone system right in the middle that records everyone's voice. The secretary then uses the recording to produce the official minutes. Under Roberts Rules of Order, it is only in the minutes. Once those minutes are voted on, those are the official minutes. Mr. Maki stated he was a trustee of the library. Something could be posted in the computer room of the library, and people using the computers there could complete the survey online. That would be another avenue for people who don't have a computer at home. They can take advantage of their library assets down there.

Mr. Milford, 1740 11th Street, stated that he agreed with Mr. Iona, in that the first issue would be to improve the sound in the council room so that everyone can hear. When residents go to the trouble to attend Council meetings, they should be able to hear what is being said. They would not be here if they didn't want to know what was being said. Reaching out with broadcasting is a good idea, but it may cost too much. That may have to be accomplished in phases. The survey might reveal whether it makes sense to go those extra steps. Mr. Milford stated that, first of all, he would like to know what it would cost to improve the sound system. The lavalier microphone idea is a good idea in that speakers would be free to walk around. If there is a display that is being shown, the microphone goes with you, so everyone would be heard. He stated he would like to know what the possibility would be of having a system like that and what it would cost, so that a decision can be made as to how to proceed further. Mr. Pallotta stated that the lavalier microphones are \$100 for the microphone and \$400 for the battery pack. It would cost less than replacing the current system. That information will be part of the report from Audio-Technica.

Mayor Walters stated that he understands the need for transparency and the need for people to have access to Council meetings. Summit County Council has their meetings the same night as Cuyahoga Falls. He asked members of Council if they are able to name five pieces of legislation that County Council has passed in the last month; then, thinking along the same lines of the level of interest, would they be in favor of County Council spending money to televise their meetings. It's an individual question, but, by the same token, County Council has everything contained in minutes, just as the Cuyahoga Falls City Council does. He stated he doesn't know whether or not Council thinks that is sufficient. Mr. Iona stated that in reference to County Council and City Council, it's the same issue. He has been to County Council meetings and there might be two or three or four people. The people that attend County Council meetings have something specific they're interested in or they're a reporter. If we have minutes, the minutes are accurate and the people that are here can hear it, it may be an overreach in terms of talking about the audio and the visual and the expense. The first priority is to make the current system better. Number two would be to if there's interest. If there is no interest, it does not warrant a lot of money and a lot of time. A simple, free survey may give the answer we need.

Mr. Miller said they should develop the paper survey idea and see the costs for the next meeting. He will develop the Google Docs survey. Mr. Iona asked Mr. Phil Keren, of the Cuyahoga Falls

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News-Press, if those questions could be something that is put in the paper. Mr. Keren stated that an important distinction should be made with the paper. They can certainly run announcement articles about the fact that Council is doing a survey, but a form or an insert in the paper is not going to be free of charge. That would be a paid ad with the paper. Mr. Iona asked if they could get some publicity from the paper about the survey. Mr. Keren said yes. Mrs. Pyke asked Mayor Walters if they know how much it cost to have the Cuyahoga Falls Community News inserted in the Falls News-Press. Mayor Walters said he would get the number. Mrs. Pyke stated they could look into putting the survey into the Falls News-Press as a separate sheet of paper. Mr. Miller encouraged Council members to continue to have dialogue with residents to try to see where they are at on this issue. In his experience, most residents come to him with questions about something that has already been passed. He said he wished there was more attention being brought to the ordinances before they are passed. That is why it is important to him to make sure there are open lines of communication. Mr. Miller stated that going through the newspaper and the City website would be a good option for the survey. He will be meeting with the IT Director of Hudson later this week. He encouraged Council members to continue to reach out to communities and learn the best practices and for input on the way they do things.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the News-Press posts the agenda on their Facebook page. She stated that perhaps they should be thinking more about how they can let people know what's going to happen at Council meetings ahead of time. Mr. Miller stated that he came across quite a few people that didn't know that Council meetings are actually open to the public. That is something that can be mentioned in the survey. They could develop some ideas on how to get the word out. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she will have more responses to some of the outstanding questions that she has out to different places at the next meeting. Mr. Miller announced their next meeting will be Monday, May 23rd, at 7 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.