

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

May 23, 2016

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

Mr. Miller called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. All members were present.

The minutes from the April 25, 2016 meeting were approved as written.

Discussion:

Mr. Miller stated that he wanted to thank Councilman Vic Pallotta for getting one of Audio-Technica's technicians to service the microphones at no cost. He then asked Mr. Iona to update the committee. Mr. Iona stated that, last week, he was in Washington, D.C. at an empowerment conference for Northern Ohio mayors, city council people, et cetera. Her stated he talked to 25 different people and posed the same question, "What do you do for council?" He got consistent answers: One, hardly anybody comes to the council meetings; two, a lot of them have either a public access cable channel or a public access radio channel. 96.1 is Cuyahoga Falls' channel. He then asked them if broadcasting the meetings made a big difference in getting people to attend council meetings. The answer was no; however, what they all seem to agree on is the people who watch it on the public access channel contact their council members with inquiries. So, it does appear that people are actually watching the meetings or listening to them on the radio. Getting more people to council meetings might be a losing battle, unless there's something that they have an interest in, but, in terms of making it available on the radio or a cable channel on TV, it seems like people actually do pay attention to that.

Mr. Miller asked Ms. Nichols Rhodes if she had an update in terms of the utility billing. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that for a third of a sheet to go out, it would cost .0225 cents per. There are roughly 24,000 households. She used the figure of 25,000, so it would \$562.50 to include it in the utility bills over a period of a month. She stated that she has asked people about it. Sadly, people are not all that interested or excited. People want to know what it is going to cost and said they would rather have other city services. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she thinks they should preface their survey with the information that Cuyahoga Falls City Council meetings are held on the first Monday of every month at 6:30 p.m. There are no meetings in August. All meetings are open to the public. Announcement of meetings are posted at the City website and in the Cuyahoga Falls New-Press. Minutes are taken at every meeting and posted on the website. She stated that Council is transparent. They have public meetings and minutes are taken and posted. She checked with John Konich, Director of Information Technology, and the webpage with the minutes has been accessed 251 times over the last 12 months. That doesn't necessarily mean they opened the minutes. It does not delineate whether it was one person or twenty. People are looking at the minutes, which is a good thing. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated she wondered if they were fixing a problem that doesn't exist, especially since it will cost money. Because this is a city-wide thing, it just doesn't affect Council. It could affect commissions and boards and other meetings. Also,

Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Best Practices
May 23, 2016 – Page 2

because this really is a city-wide issue and there is no urgency, maybe it should be made part of budgeting in November and they can look toward doing something next year. Mr. Iona stated that those were good points. When he mentioned the idea of having it on cable or having it on the radio, people responded by saying that's what they pay Council for. Mr. Miller stated that he has heard that, as well.

Mr. Miller stated that he met with Mr. Konich and looked at the video from the camera in the room. It wasn't the greatest video, so they probably can't use that. Mr. Konich did mention they would be more than happy to work with them as far as getting a survey out there on the radio and the City website. Mr. Miller stated his recommendation would be to use a survey through Google Docs, because it is free. He started a Survey Monkey account, but, again, it costs money. They do not have the money to pay for the survey. He has already put together a Google Docs survey. They can upload it to the City website this week. They can put out notices this week and maybe something in the Cuyahoga Falls News-Press under the Community Notes section. As council members, they can also let people know about the survey through their e-mail lists. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she feels like they're leaving out a huge segment of the community who are not online. Mr. Iona stated that he liked the fact that Google Docs was free. He suggested they incorporate Ms. Nichols-Rhodes' questions into the survey and see what response they receive. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes said she would agree to that as long as the names and addresses are included and they put a finite period of time to receive the responses. She asked Mr. Miller if those responses come out electronically. Mr. Miller stated it was electronic and that he would share those with everyone. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes suggested a response time of 30 days. Mr. Miller suggested three weeks. Mr. Iona stated that, after 30 days, people are not going to participate. They have to strike while the iron is hot. If they are interested, they will do it within the first two or three weeks.

Mr. Miller stated that when he spoke with Mr. Konich, he said that the audio is actually pretty good. They could upload that quickly to the City website and to the radio station website and play it on the radio station. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated she would like to hear it. Mr. Iona stated that if they have the radio station and audio, maybe they could do it live, so that people that can attend would be able to hear it. Mr. Miller stated they could do it live, but that would be an added cost, because they would have to have someone do it. Most of the communities that do this have people they pay who record it, upload it and edit the videos with the City logo, etc. That is something they don't have, so would they want to bring that added cost. Mr. Iona stated that he spoke with the superintendent of Woodridge Schools, Walter Davis. Mr. Davis said that might be a journalism kind of thing, and maybe the journalism kids can come in and do it for hours or community service. They could think about reaching out to the school districts and asking them to bring in the government class or political science class, maybe once or twice a year, to sit through it. Mr. Iona said he thinks most school districts would be open to it. By exposing them to how government works, they may get a future councilman or mayor, governor or president. Mr. Miller asked if June 13 sounds like a reasonable timeframe. Mr. Iona and Ms. Nichols-Rhodes agreed. Mr. Iona asked Mr. Steve Wiandt, of the Cuyahoga Falls News-Press, if it would be possible to post something about the survey in the paper under Community Notes within that timeframe. Mr. Wiandt said yes. Mr. Miller asked if there were any comments from the public.

Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Best Practices
May 23, 2016 – Page 3

Mr. Lou Schott, 144 Grant Avenue, stated that he has been interested, for quite some time now, in what the committee has been talking about. He applauds, loudly, what they're doing, because he thinks there's all kinds of interconnects that will become more and more important as the new technology that's coming in begins to be integrated. Mr. Iona asked Mr. Schott, what he thinks, as a citizen, in reference to the pushback about the expense if they say it will cost several thousand dollars to film it or to videotape it to make it more accessible. Mr. Schott stated he thought that it is an important question. He doesn't know the answer to that question in this community, but they could go to Hudson and ask them what they're doing. They are already doing it. What does it cost is an open question. He said that Council is on the right track by continuing to ask questions and better questions. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that Hudson does video, but they still have a station. Several years ago, when Senate Bill 17 passed, they were grandfathered in. The chance of the City having a public access station is slim and none. Mr. Schott stated he was not sure what Ms. Nichols-Rhodes was saying. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that Hudson has their own public access channel. They were grandfathered in at a point in time when those were done away with or phased out. They do videotape their meetings, but they have a station manager. Mr. Schott stated that the City has a radio station, but not a video station. He suggested that it's probably within the realm of the next five years that there will be a channel feed to be able to watch the whole video. It can be done on the school district right now. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she thought the Board of Education used to videotape their meetings, but she went to the Board of Education site and couldn't find the video. Mr. Miller stated it was just audio. Mr. Schott stated there are a lot of people that are taking video shots of various parts of the meetings and putting it on the website

Mr. Pallotta asked what cost Twinsburg is incurring right now with their system. Mr. Miller stated that the equipment cost \$50,000. It was somewhere around \$7,000 for the year. They also pay an employee, their IT administrator. He is at every meeting. They have four different cameras. He switches each camera and then he edits the video afterwards. The cost was somewhere around \$7,000 a year and then the costs of upgrades. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that, in Grove City, their cameras and install was \$21,647, plus a video-processing system, which was \$6,000, so, basically, a little more than \$28,000. They have an ongoing cost of \$1,095 a year. The other communities that had this system, it was \$1,900 a year, because most of these are a system that tapes and uploads and broadcasts. Mr. Pallotta asked if there was an operating cost, on a month-to-month basis, for Grove City. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that some do. In some of the communities, the clerk does the actual physical setting it up and then uploading it. One community had a high school person who did it, but they paid them and it got costly. Another community uses their IT person, but that was overtime or there were staffing issues there. In Norton, the cost is \$1,900 a month. So, none of them are cheap.

Mr. Iona stated they have two problems. The first problem was having better communications. Council is moving in the right direction on that. Since Councilor Pallotta has gotten the microphones fixed, it has helped a lot. At the Planning & Zoning Commission, it is easier to hear because the chairs are up closer. If they're not going to have a lot of people in a meeting, it probably would not be a bad idea to move the chairs up a little bit, so that when people do come in, it encourages them to sit up front. If it's not a big event, those last four rows aren't needed. The second problem is if people want to see the councilors, if they want to hear them, there's no

Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Best Practices
May 23, 2016 – Page 4

other way but to come to the meeting. The big stumbling block is the cost. Mr. Iona said that he thinks they should proceed in terms of doing the Google survey. Before any big money is spent, see how the Goggle survey goes, have another meeting and discuss in which direction to head. There is a lot of money spent on a lot of different things, but being informed is really important. Every citizen has the right to be informed. Not every citizen can make it here. Some work late, some have soccer, some have families, but if there was a way to hear it later on, they might listen. Mr. Pallotta asked if there was a charge to broadcast on the 96.1 station. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes said she doesn't think so. They manage it over at the high school, but it actually belongs to the City. Mr. Pallotta then asked if it cost anything to put the survey online or in the paper. Mr. Miller said there was no cost to put it online. Mr. Wiandt said it costs nothing to put it in the Community Notes section of the newspaper. Mr. Miller stated that Mr. Konich was very receptive to the idea of broadcasting on the radio and downloading it to the City website and said that it was very simple to do. Mr. Iona stated that the radio station is well done and very professional.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked Mr. Miller to read the questions he has written. Mr. Miller stated the questions he had were: Name, address, "Do you feel well informed regarding the operations of City government," "Would you like to see audio or video of our council and committee meetings posted on the City website" and "How often do you visit the City website." Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if they should have a comment area after the question, "Do you attend meetings?" Mr. Miller and Mr. Iona both agreed there should be a comment area. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes asked if they should ask would they like it or would they use it. She suggested the question, "If Council meetings were recorded, would you watch or listen to them," and then have them estimate how many times a year. That is open ended enough that if, down the road, there is a cost, you can ask, "Would you be happy to watch or listen if it cost anything?" It would be gauging the interest. Mr. Iona and Mr. Miller said that would be a good question to start. Mr. Miller stated another question could be, "How often do you visit the City's website?" Ms. Nichols-Rhodes suggested they preface it to say do they know that the City has a website; then maybe they'll say, no, they don't, but now they do. She stated that she thought two questions on the survey were enough. Mr. Miller stated that two was good and then a comment area. Mr. Iona stated they will have to include their name, address and e-mail. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes suggested that they should state that the survey is for informational purposes, so that, in six months, people aren't asking why they aren't recording. Mr. Schott added that it is important to give people feedback about the survey. Mr. Iona said that could be easily put on the City's website.

Mr. Iona stated that now that they have their questions, in the next three weeks, they can see what kind of response there is; then present it to Council. Mr. Miller asked if June 13 was a good deadline. Mr. Iona and Ms. Nichols-Rhodes agreed. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes thanked Mr. Pallotta again for having the microphones fixed so they work properly. She suggested they make sure they're cushioned when they are moved, so the wires do not become loose again. Mr. Iona stated that these microphones are used for any kind of city meeting, so they are moved more than once a week. Mr. Pallotta stated that it was definitely not an ideal situation or conducive to what they are doing. When speaking about what other communities do, they all have set chambers, so their microphones are stationary. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes suggested they talk to Mr. Konich or the Natatorium staff to figure out something.

Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Best Practices
May 23, 2016 – Page 5

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes as if Mr. Miller was able to have people log on so that it's one person per survey. Mr. Miller said he was going to look into that. He asked Mr. Schott if, in order to do that, they have to have a Google account. Mr. Schott said yes. Mr. Miller said it was an issue if they don't have a Google account. Mr. Schott said that was true, but, on the other hand, 50 percent of people have e-mail, and there are many others who have a Google account, even though they use AOL, or whatever. Mr. Miller stated that he wasn't going to make logging in a requirement, since many people do not have a Google account. Mr. Miller stated they will have the results of the survey by the next meeting on June 13, at 7:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.