

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

June 13, 2016

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

Mr. Miller called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. All members were present.

Discussion:

Mr. Miller stated that the original purpose of this committee was to fix the microphones, so the public, media and fellow council members could hear at the meetings. It was also to discuss ways to make Council meetings more accessible to the public and to analyze best practices for surrounding government bodies. He stated that he would like to thank Councilman Vic Pallota for his assistance in bringing Audio-Technica in to offer their suggestions. Because of his contact, Council's microphones were serviced for free by one of their technicians. FCC rules are going to constantly change, but one of the main issues was addressed and corrected. Mr. Miller stated that he would also like to thank Council President, Mary Ellen Pyke, for forming this committee. He stated that, in his opinion, the committee has done its due diligence. The survey certainly offered a new perspective. The majority of residents who have taken that survey have said they would like the audio and video of the meetings online. His belief, just from the survey responses and talking to the public, is that there really isn't an overwhelming push to spend additional City resources on retrofitting Council Chambers with new cameras or audio systems at this time; however, because of the discussions with the City-operated radio station, Mr. Konich and the Council Clerk, he believes that they should move forward with placing audio of Committee and Council meetings on the City's website for the public to access. He believes that it is Council's job, as public servants, to keep constituents informed. Posting the audio of the meetings will allow the residents to hear the meetings if they are not able to attend the regularly-scheduled meetings. This is a good first step in making the operations of City government more accessible and, in ways, more transparent to the residents of Cuyahoga Falls. The main issues the committee was formed to address have been addressed. Mr. Miller stated that the committee should recommend to City Council that the audio recordings of Council meetings be posted online.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she would like the results of that survey. Mr. Miller stated he would pull them up on his computer. Mr. Iona stated that he had a couple quick comments. His goal with the survey was that they would get 100 responses. The consensus was everybody thinks it is a wonderful idea, but very few people wanted to increase the budget. They want their streets fixed. They want potholes filled. They want the City services they have to be maintained at that high level. Council does not have a permanent site, and that's a real negative. Every other city that he spoke to, Reminderville to Medina to Green, has their Council Chambers. Cuyahoga Falls is the second largest city in Summit County and it does not have permanent City Council Chambers. When Council has its own chambers, there can be audio and video. It's not so expensive. With the current setup, people are coming and going. Different groups use the room. Mr. Iona stated that his feelings were twofold when this committee was formed: One, get better participation in terms of people in the audience being able to hear; the second was to see what the response to the survey was. He stated that the amount of money it will take to get the full audio-

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visual is going to be cost prohibitive; however, there is the radio station, 96.1. Mr. Miller stated that he was unable to access the data from the survey. He was able to say that there were 93 responses the last time he looked. Around 63 percent said that they would listen to audio or watch video. Around 15 percent said they didn't want it. The rest were undecided. A lot of the comments that he received focused on if there was an issue that was important to person, then they would definitely listen. The majority of the responses were positive. Mr. Nichols-Rhodes asked if the majority was from one area or spread throughout the City. Mr. Miller said that they were spread throughout the city. Mr. Iona asked Mr. Miller if he would send the survey results in an e-mail to everyone on Council. Mr. Miller said that he would.

Mrs. Pyke stated that, before the last election, she received a phone call from John Konich, Director of IT Services. At that time, Mr. Konich told her that the next council meeting would be on the radio. She told him that it was not up to him. He had received a phone call from Ms. Nichols-Rhodes wanting council to be broadcast on the radio. Mrs. Pyke stated that is why she put Ms. Nichols-Rhodes on this committee. She told Mr. Konich that if Ms. Nichols-Rhodes gets elected to Council, she will have a voice, but this is not a one-person decision. That is why she wouldn't have made that decision by herself. She stated she wanted to thank the committee for taking the time to do this. As a representative of Sutcliffe, she could see this as entertaining for the people down at Sutcliffe. She imagines they would get together on Tuesday night and listen to what was said at Council. When you listen to the backgrounds of the residents at Sutcliffe, very many of these individuals were professionals out there working in this community, who can't make it here, because they are in wheelchairs or amputees. They are individuals who, if you start talking about handicap ramps, they are going to fill Council chambers. Mrs. Pyke stated that when she missed a Council meeting following the death of her husband, she would have appreciated being able to listen to it. The last thing she would have expected was for the council clerk to dictate those exact words in the minutes. It's not feasible. This gives people the opportunity to hear the inflection in someone's voice, to hear the passion behind something that someone is saying. When she tells her constituents, "I brought your street up at City Council," hopefully, they believe her, but, if they want to hear what streets were brought up, they can hear it for themselves. Let the citizens have the choice to listen. Mrs. Pyke thanked the committee for all the work they have done.

Mr. Jim Lettofsky, Sutcliffe Apartments, stated that he has attended a couple meetings of the ad hoc committee, and he thinks they're about the wrong thing. Mr. Lettofsky cited a few examples of the ordinances that were brought out in the previous weeks' committee meeting. He stated that the public having an idea of what's going on is a lot more important than having it on radio. Mrs. Pyke stated that she wanted to stress the fact that all the ordinances Mr. Lettofsky mentioned were discussed in detail at last weeks' Committee meeting. If someone wanted to come to a Council meeting and were unable to attend the previous weeks' Committee meeting, they could listen to the Committee meeting on the radio, and then come to the Council meeting and know what it's all about. Mr. Lettofsky stated that Council is doing a fantastic job, but, as far as understanding what they're doing, he thinks it leaves a lot to be desired.

Ms. Dani Werntz, from the Howard Hanna Stow office, stated that she attended the Stow City Council meeting. Councilman Mike Rasor's wife was videotaping the committee meeting. When she asked what she was doing, Mrs. Rasor stated that they film their committee meetings and post them on the City of Stow's Facebook page, so that people in the community can see what is going

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on during the meetings. Council could set up a Facebook page for free, promote it in the Falls-Press, and residents could view the videos. That is something that could be done immediately and has no cost. She stated that was something she wanted to share with Council. Mr. Lou Schott, 144 Grant Avenue, stated that he wanted to applaud all of the previous people who have commented, because he thinks they all add to the value of the conversation that needs to take place, both today and during the next 10 years. This kind of conversation needs to be ongoing. He asked Mr. Iona if, earlier, when referring to Council not having a site, he meant a website. Mr. Iona stated that he was referring to a permanent Council Chambers. Mr. Schott asked if a website for Council was out of the scope of the conversation.

Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the City of Cuyahoga Falls website contains a link with Council information. She stated that she would also like to thank everyone for their participation. To capture the opinion of everyone, or a larger portion of people who don't use the internet, would cost a minimum of \$600 to put the question in the utility billing. Because the money is not budgeted for it, the survey was done just to get a feel for it. She stated that if Council does move forward, it would be prudent to get a bigger, more valid survey result. That is all for the future. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that she would like to remind everybody that Council minutes are posted online, if anybody might want to read those. She stated that she appreciates that the Committee got this discussion going. She has also had the same experience as Mr. Iona in that when people inquired as to the cost, they would prefer their street be resurfaced. At this point in time, she thinks this is a good compromise of something that isn't going to cost any additional money.

Mr. Iona stated that if the committee is all in agreement after hearing the recording, he would make a motion that they move forward to have City Council meetings broadcast on the radio, be it live or delayed, depending if there's any cost involved. That's not the be all, end all, but that's a step. There is going to be a cost to have somebody come in and film. Getting volunteers to do it, is a great theory, but it is hard to get volunteers. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the motion should be that they present their recommendation to council. Mr. Miller stated that in talking with the clerk of council, it is a fairly-simple process to upload the audio. They could connect it to the minutes. Ms. Nichols-Rhodes stated that the other thing that has to be decided is how long the recordings will be kept. In most communities, once the written minutes are posted, the recording goes away. A decision will have to be made about what to do about where these recordings are going to be stored, how access to these recordings are going to be handled if someone requests it later, or whether they leave them posted forever and forever on the website. The other thing is the recording should be in its entirety and not edited. Mr. Iona stated that, by the next meeting, they would be in a position to make the motion to bring it forward to council. He stated that, as Ms. Nichols-Rhodes mentioned before, this is the beginning. This committee is not going to solve all the problem on communication or transparency, but it's a start. Step one is to get it broadcast live as long as the three of them are in consensus that it sounds good.

Mr. Pallotta stated that although they are not going to solve all the problems, within a three to six-month period, the FCC is going to be changing everything. They may have to form an ad hoc committee again to figure out how Council is going to cope with new communication, whether it be wired communication or wireless communication. Mrs. Pyke stated that, as Council members,

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they need to make sure that they are budgeting for it. This committee has addressed the fact that they're going to be looking at this in the future. Whether it's a three-year capital for Council or Council Chambers need to be moved to a permanent site, so that the acoustics are better, this needs to be budgeted for and they need to know how much it's going to cost. The purse strings are the Finance Director, the Administration and Council. At some point, they will have to spend some money to make sure that Council can be heard by the public.

Mr. Iona stated that he would like to thank everybody from the public for showing up to tonight's meeting. There were some good opinions, and they welcome all their comments. Mr. Miller stated that he will get the survey responses and the audio recording to them this week. They will check the storage space and the Sunshine Laws regarding how long the recordings have to remain on the website. They will schedule their next meeting for June 27th, at 7:00 p.m., to finalize the different topics.

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.