

MINUTES
CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
CITY HALL - COMMUNITY ROOM
JUNE 12, 2023 - 6:00PM

The study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Barnett at 6:03pm

Council Members Present: Barnett, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Knol, Massey and Newlin

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, City Clerk Smith, Assistant City Manager Valentine, Director Brown and City Attorney Joppich

AMENDMENT TO RULES OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND GUIDELINES OF CONDUCT

Gary Mekjian, City Manager, explained that the amendment that was previously discussed with City Council at their goals setting session was to allow for remote participation from vendors at study session meetings only under certain circumstances. At that time, Council discussed the options and provided some direction for the city attorney to make such an amendment.

Steve Joppich, City Attorney, reviewed the new section title "Presentation" that was proposed to be added to the Rules and Guidelines of Conduct. He stated that provided to Council was a proposed amendment as requested by Council at the goals session that would include remote attendance by presenters at City Council study session due to long distance travel or in a bona fide emergency circumstance as determined by the City Manager. After discussion with staff, alternate language is also being provided that is a bit broader and allows for remote attendance by presenters where in person attendance is impractical for reasons determined acceptable by the City Manager.

Council inquired why the Mayor would not also make the determination whether the reasons were acceptable for remote attendance. City Manager Mekjian and Attorney Joppich confirmed that while the City Manager consults the Mayor, there could be last minute requests or times the Mayor is unavailable.

Council suggested also considering travel expenses when negotiating contracts with vendors.

Discussion was held on both options. Some members of Council preferred that this option is used sparingly and not used for convenience and others did not want to only limit this option to extreme emergencies.

City Attorney Joppich suggested including language for unexpected circumstances so the suggested wording would read ". . . *except presenters may make remote study session presentations by a secure remote audio and video communication connection established by the City to avoid incurring costs and expenses for the presenter's long-distance travel to the City or in a bona fide emergency **or unexpected** circumstances, as determined in the City Manager's discretion, . . .*"

City Manager Mekjian confirmed that the intent was to use remote attendance as the exception when needed and not as a rule or for convenience.

The consensus of Council was to go with the language outlined in (b) under Presentations with the additional wording as proposed by the City Attorney.

CITY CLERK SUCCESSION PLAN

City Clerk Smith informed City Council that she would be retiring as of January 21, 2024 but planned to use accrued time to leave in December, 2023. She stated that several years ago, department directors were asked to put together a succession plan for key positions in their office, which she had done at that time and included a plan for her position. She reviewed the succession plan that requested Council consideration of promoting the Deputy City Clerk to City Clerk and posting the position internally for a period of one week, which was standard practice for Human Resources and then holding interviews at the City Council study session on July 10, 2023. If it were Council's intent to move forward with promoting the Deputy Clerk to the City Clerk position following the interview process, this would be scheduled for action at the next regular meeting with an appointment date of January 22, 2024 upon her retirement. Clerk Smith added that if the Deputy Clerk was appointed to City Clerk, this would create other key openings in the office and the succession plan and timeline would assist the department in filling those positions prior to heading into a major election year.

Council inquired about posting the position externally for transparency and to allow for other candidates and also inquired when the new Clerk would be sworn in to avoid a gap period where there was no City Clerk officially appointed.

Mayor Barnett explained the reasoning behind the succession plans put in place for certain positions and that those internal candidates are generally trained and ready to step into that next position.

City Clerk Smith stated that the official oath of office could take place at a time that would avoid such a gap and that the oath is typically administered by one of the District Court Judges.

Council consensus was to move forward with the succession plan and timeline as outlined by City Clerk Smith in her memo to Council.

DISCUSSION ON EARLY VOTING OPTIONS

City Clerk Smith explained that with the passing of Proposal 2 last November, 2022 early voting was now required for all state and federal elections. Early voting is required for a minimum of nine days prior to an Election and at least for 8 hours per day starting with the second Saturday before an election and ending on the Sunday before Election Day. The legislation also outlined various options for municipalities to offer early voting that included a municipality providing for early voting on their own, partnering with neighboring communities or partnering with the county. She informed Council that Oakland County has decided to offer early voting county-wide with regional voting sites and has extended this partnership to all municipalities. The county plan includes 18 different regional voting sites, with Farmington and Farmington Hills being proposed as one area. Clerk Smith stated that after meeting with the county, many of her initial concerns or questions were answered and she wanted to share that information with City Council as they are the legislative body that would be required to authorize any agreement as well as authorize early voting for all elections, including local and special elections.

City Clerk Smith explained that the county plan would include the county providing for all equipment, scheduling and training of election inspectors, pre-testing of all equipment and ballots and daily supervision on-site if wanted. She added that municipalities could have as much or as little control over the daily supervision as they wanted. This plan would also provide for consistency for voters in Oakland County and the city could maintain control over daily operations. The site would be located in Farmington Hills and the proposed locations would be the Costick Activities Center or the HAWK. She reviewed both options and pros and cons of both locations and emphasized that one main city responsibility would be to have a dedicated city facility for those 9 days as outlined.

City Council inquired about the cost between the options. Clerk Smith stated that she does not yet have information on costs for items that may be required such as ballot on demand so she would not be able to provide exact figures; however, the county would be providing for all of the equipment and supplies if the city entered into that partnership.

Clerk Smith added that the county is seeking a verbal commitment by the end of the month so that they can request the appropriate funding and formal agreements would follow for Council consideration in August.

The consensus of Council was to move forward with a verbal commitment to enter into an agreement with the Oakland County for early voting.

ADJOURNMENT

The study session meeting adjourned at 7:24pm

Respectfully submitted,



Pamela B. Smith, City Clerk