

Minutes of Special Meeting of February 18, 2009 (Commission Interviews)

COUNCILMEMBERS PRESENT: Feierbach, Dickenson, Lieberman Wozniak, Braunstein

COUNCILMEMBERS ABSENT: None

Staff Present: City Clerk Cook

Others Present: Dave Warden, Parks and Recreation Commissioner

Interview candidates for City Commissions

Phil Mathewson (Planning) stated that the existing road structure in Belmont does not make it easy to address traffic issues. There is not much transit available in Belmont. He noted that he is familiar with and follows current issues facing the City. He has more to contribute. He has the advantage of having served in other capacities, including Planning Commission and City Council. He presents a balanced viewpoint and exhibits little emotion when dealing with issues. He is careful with his homework. A balance of new people and those with institutional memory is important on city commissions. He noted that cell towers are not always aesthetic, but there is a need for more cell service. He does not feel they pose a health risk. The City is able to address aesthetics. Attendance at commission meetings is important as there is a need for continuity. He recommended that the City Council's subcommittee structure include a member of the Planning Commission. He supports having a public works commission. He also suggested having a member of the Public Works staff always in attendance at Planning Commission meetings. Regarding economic development, there should be more integration rather than just ad hoc discussions with developers. In response to a question regarding what makes a good commissioner, he noted that attendance at meetings, reading and understanding issues, asking questions, and probing of applicants are important qualities. He added that he has had some time off since he left the City Council, and he is ready to be involved again.

Councilmember Dickenson stated for the record that the chair of the Planning Commission called him and advised that Mr. Mathewson would be a solid candidate.

Vignesh Sukumar (Finance) stated that he met with Finance Director Fil and City Treasurer Violet to discuss the Finance Commission opportunity. Both were passionate and knowledgeable about what they do. He attended the February Commission meeting and got a good sense of how the commission functions. He is analytical and would find this assignment challenging. He would like to interact with other Commissions in a cross-functional sense. He has a computer science background and feels his non-financial background would be beneficial. He noted that he would need to understand the numbers, but is not shy about asking questions. He described his current job as project lead for data storage systems. He does not have responsibility for profit and loss statements. He is a fast learner and will quickly learn the differences between municipal and private financing. He described the volunteer museum work he currently performs, and noted that he applied for the Finance Commission to do something different. He is interested in finance and would like to increase his breadth of knowledge. He is interested in discussing long-term policies and solutions to economic issues surrounding cities and the State.

Lynnel Callagy (Finance, Incumbent) stated that a good finance commissioner reviews financial statements and provides analysis for the future. She enjoys digging deeply into the statements. She would like the City Council to send projects for Finance Commission review, such as the upcoming bond issue. The role of the Finance Commission has changed and is now more active, and it is doing more forecasting. There has been more interaction with the City Council. She expressed concerns regarding the increase in fees, and stated there is a need to find alternate ways to save residents money. Pay-as-you-go has been discussed by the Commission. She is unsure whether this is the right approach, and there may be a desire for some reserves to be held. She also expressed concern regarding spending the sewer fund reserves all in one year, given the current economic situation. She recommended that the Commission look at all projects for the long-term. Discussion ensued regarding the South Bayside System Authority facility, and she recommended consideration for a bonus for early completion.

Dianne Keogh (Parks and Recreation) described the various ways she's been involved in the City. She noted that it was she who proposed the new fence at Twin Pines Park. She was involved in Visioning, the Library Task Force, Park Boosters, the Garden Faire, Belmont's 75th Anniversary, the Manor Building Centennial Celebration, and the Green Advisory Committee (GAC). She had to discontinue attending the GAC meetings due to multiple surgeries, and did not return because she missed too much, but she still wants to be involved. She loves Belmont, and she commented that she could have moved elsewhere for less money but chose to stay. Trees and parks are important. She has no agenda, has an open mind, and she would approach issues as a resident. She cited the two new parks coming up, and stated that pocket parks are important. She likes the movies in the park but said they should be more kid-friendly. She commented regarding the longevity and the high quality of the Parks and Recreation Department staff. Discussion ensued regarding the School Force festival, and Ms. Keogh noted that it needs improvement. She thinks the City should be sponsoring it and getting the revenue. It needs more community involvement, and should feature local arts and crafts, not imported goods. She suggested surveying residents, and the City newsletter could be utilized for this. There is a need to use the park more, including more family activities. It brings the community together. She supports neighborhood connectivity. She clarified that she was seeking the open seat on the Commission, not someone else's seat.

Jordi Vasquez (Parks and Recreation Youth) stated that parks are important. He grew up playing in the parks and wants to preserve them and make them nicer. His interests include reading, gardening, and playing football. He described his involvement in collecting food for food drives and delivering it to the needy. He stated that graffiti should be abated. Other young people have told him they want a skatepark. He clarified that although he does not skateboard, he would support a park if others wanted one. When he was younger he wanted to be a policeman or a fireman, and now he wants to be a lawyer or FBI agent. He described details of his involvement with the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He has been told he is outspoken, and he can try to persuade people. He is persistent. He would ask friends to spread information from the Commission.

Rich Bortoli (Parks and Recreation, Incumbent) cited the two new parks at Semeria and Davey Glen as recent accomplishments. He described his involvement in having Belmont achieve Tree City USA designation. He is involved with the Senior Advisory Committee, as well as the Charles Armstrong park issues. He outlined recent senior mobility discussions, including the potential for using private vans for transportation. Discussion ensued regarding shuttles. In response to a question regarding what he has learned throughout his years on the Commission, he commented that new people need a chance to present ideas. There is a good mix of old and new on the Commission. Institutional knowledge is valuable, and new people bring fresh ideas. If the group is working well, there is no need to break it up. Because there is a vacancy on the Commission, there will be one new person. The Commission includes people who were not reappointed, and then they reapplied. He has a passion for youth sports, and understands financial issues. The new player use fee is helpful. He noted that when the Art and Wine Festival has not been as successful as when the City ran it. The Chamber of Commerce is trying to make it a fundraiser, and the City tried to make it fun.

Robert Mayer (Planning, Incumbent) stated that traffic is too big an issue for the Planning Commission to try to solve. It is controversial, and widening Ralston Avenue would only bring more traffic. Parking requirements are governed by regulations. Economic development needs to draw people. He is concerned about pushing parking into neighborhoods, and does not recommend limiting parking too much. In response to a question regarding what makes a good commissioner, he noted that it should be someone concerned with Belmont and who understands regulations and has vision. The person should be fair and balanced. He noted that some of the Commissioners may be too rigid, as he respects property rights. Some regulations may be too strict. The Commission should have more flexibility in their design review. He does not support the Downtown Specific Plan as it currently exists. Neighborhood compatibility is not critical, and he supports originality and creativity. He came to the Commission as a neighborhood activist and has since learned the regulations. He is able to put issues into real context. He commented that the City has a good planning staff and the Commission could not do its job without them. He respects the Brown Act, but noted that it prohibits the ability to collaborate behind the scenes. He noted that dialog is important, and the Commission should not be afraid to disagree on issues. The group works by consensus and there is not often a sharp division. Sometimes he votes on a particular matter even if he does not agree with the entire project.

Susan Wright (Parks and Recreation) stated that the old Art and Wine Festival meandered too much around the park. The School Force festival is popular. She talked about festivals in other cities. She commented that lifestyle is important, and parks should be improved. She has an ability to be proactive, and the key is to communicate and outreach with people on issues. In response to a question regarding what makes a good commissioner, she stated that all stakeholders need to be considered, and the Commission needs to think through the whole picture and air out all issues. She chose Belmont for commute purposes, but is now a parent with roots. People need help accessing information and facilities. She has a baby in a stroller, and walkability is important. There is a need to creatively solve walking issues, as not all areas in Belmont can have sidewalks. She provided input to the Parks and Recreation staff on the activity guide. She commented that the website needs work. She would bring a perspective of being a young parent. She described her work at Sunset

Magazine, and noted that she has contacts with people in the environmental field.

Jason Born (Parks and Recreation) stated that to be a good Commissioner, one should work with the community and the Commission. There should be communication with park users, and the Commission should report back to the City Council and bring solutions. The goals of the City Council should be aligned with park users. Public/private partnerships are important, especially in the current economic climate. More outreach should be done regarding festivals. He connected with sports groups and youth during his City Council campaign. He described his experience in improving a playground while living in San Francisco. He noted that none of the current Parks and Recreation Commissioners has young children. There is potential for something to be done with Barrett. In response to a question regarding what he learned during his campaign, he stated that he ran a good campaign and created a core base with sports people. He would like to fulfill his goal of helping by being appointed to the Parks and Recreation Commission. Belmont is a close-knit community with no grave issues. People are involved but not a lot know what is going on. The newspapers do not cover Belmont well. He recommended connecting with the Belmont Mother's Club. He is not soured by his election results, and is now trying to serve the community in another capacity. He responded that he has not made a decision regarding the upcoming Council race in November. He noted that Parks and Recreation is not the general path to the City Council.

Councilmember Dickenson expressed concern regarding a potential vacancy should Mr. Born run for City Council. He noted that there are attendance issues with other commissioners.

Kevin Sullivan (Parks and Recreation, Incumbent) stated that he feels he has been in a test position since appointed just a few months prior. He is committed to the position. He brings project management and former student government experience, and is an open space resource. He would like to participate in upcoming trail improvements. He has recruited volunteers to help. There are areas besides trails to bring community engagement. There is a need to focus on all users of the trails. He talked about other activities and festivals. He mentioned the upcoming Earth Day event, and noted that Barrett will be a good venue for this. Teens are an under-served group, and he wants to explore a skatepark. There is a need for individual and alternative sports activities beyond field sports. The Waterdog Lake area could be improved, as could Barrett. There is a need for connectivity between the Library, Barrett, and Twin Pines Park. He has learned patience during his time on the Commission, and it is important to listen to all sides of an issue, especially those not your own. There is a need to find ways to market Parks and Recreation, including use of the Mother's Club. The movies have been good, and there is a need for connection once people come to an event, and to get feedback. He plans to stay in Belmont and wants to stay active and involved.

ADJOURNMENT at this time, being 9:30 P.M.

Terri Cook
City Clerk

Meeting Tape Recorded but not Videotaped
Audio Recording 719

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