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CITY COUNCIL PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

**September 12, 2022
10:00 a.m.**

Location: Lynwood Roberts Room, 1st floor, City Hall

In attendance: Council Members Terrance Freeman (Chair), Ron Salem, Aaron Bowman, Michael Boylan, Ju’Coby Pittman

Also: Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Diane Moser – Employee Services Department; Jeff Clements – Council Research Division; Merriane Lahmeur – Legislative Services Division; Steve Cassada – Information Support Services; Peggy Sidman – Council Secretary/Director; Kim Taylor – Council Auditor

Meeting Convened: 10:00 a.m.

Chairman Freeman convened the meeting and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

Discussion of Council Staff Changes

Council Secretary/Director Peggy Sidman referenced the upcoming report on the council staff study performed by a Jacksonville University graduate organizational management class. A preliminary finding of that study was a recommendation that the City Council should fill the existing position of Chief of Public Information. The position would oversee the council’s meeting room technology, web page management, public records and public information responses, public notice posting, etc. Ms. Sidman recommended the City’s Capital Improvement Plan Administrator Teresa Eichner to fill the position, saying that she has an extensive background in public relations and long experience with capital improvements that will serve the council well with computer and audio-visual equipment needs.

Ms. Eichner addressed the committee on her qualifications and her career in public relations with several PR firms, with the local chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police, and subsequently with the City in the Mayor’s Office as legislative liaison to the City Council and currently in the Finance and Administration Department managing the City’s capital improvement project budgeting. She said she has experience with a number of the areas required for this recommended position. Her experience with capital improvements

will be helpful as the Council continues to make improvements in the Council Chamber and its meeting rooms. She said she wants the Council web site be very accurate, transparent and user-friendly to serve the public's and the City staff's needs.

Council Member Salem commended Ms. Sidman for bringing this recommendation to the Council and asked when the position was last filled. Ms. Sidman said it was in the early 2000s when the incumbent, a former executive council assistant, left the Council staff and the position was left vacant. In response to a question from Mr. Salem about how many vacant positions the Council currently has, she stated that there is an Administrative Assistant position planned to be filled, a Legislative Assistant in the Legislative Services Division, and 2 Research Assistant positions. Two new employees have been hired to start on September 19th, one in Legislative Services and the other in Administrative Services. She said that funds budgeted for the 2 vacant Research positions will be used to pay for the new public information position. Mr. Salem said there's a great need to provide assistance to the Council President to prepare for the workload of meetings, speeches, appointments, etc.

Council Member Bowman noted that at the time of her hiring Ms. Sidman was charged to look at council structure and staffing during her first 100 days and asked how this new position fits in with that review. Ms. Sidman said the position's job specifications reflect existing Ordinance Code language, which could be changed via Code amendment if needed. It is her understanding that the JU study will likely recommend other changes in addition to the one relating filling this position. In response to a question from Mr. Bowman about whether there is a formal relationship between the Council and the mayor's administration regarding public relations functions, Ms. Sidman said she did not have any knowledge about the history of that function. Mr. Bowman said the City should speak with one voice on most issues and there should be a relationship between the council and the administration in that regard. He noted that the Council might have 19 different opinions or voices on some issues, so dealing with competing viewpoints and who gets what staff assistance will require consideration. He believes the Council needs to be better about speaking with one voice to the public.

Council Member Bowman asked if Ms. Eichner has a college degree or formal training in public relations. Ms. Eichner said she did not but has many years of practical experience including 12 years with the McCormick Agency, advancing from an entry level position to a Senior Vice President. In response to a question from Mr. Bowman about whether the position specifications require a college degree, Ms. Sidman said that none of the council's division chief positions have a specific college degree requirement, so no Ordinance Code waiver is needed for this hire.

Council Member Boylan agreed with Mr. Bowman's statement that the City government needs to speak with one voice and said that requires coordination between the council and the administration. He asked about maintenance of the Council's website; it seems like some of what's there is old and outdated and that needs to be cleaned up. Mr. Boylan asked Ms. Eichner about her previous management experience. She said she had managed 15 employees at one of her previous PR firms, fewer at another firm and when managing her own consulting business, then was a manager with the City in the Finance and Administration Department. She said the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) has 2 audiences – the City Council and the public – and needs to be formatted slightly differently for those two audiences both pre- and post-adoption. Mr. Boylan said the Special Committee on Critical Quality of Life Issues had to do a lot of the work of reaching out to the public by itself because there wasn't another resource to provide assistance. It will be important to balance the needs of 19 individuals with the needs of the council as a whole and its committees. The Council will need to determine what is appropriate for the PR manager to do for individual council members.

In response to a question from Council Member Pittman about how she anticipates working with 19 council members on their individual needs and deal with what could be an overwhelming workload, Ms.

Eichner recounted that when she worked in the Mayor's office she met with all 19 council members to ask for their top priorities and then spent the next couple of years working on those 19 priorities. Hard work and late nights are part of the job. She learned the CIP process from top to bottom in just a few months and then took over management of the program. In response to another question from Ms. Pittman about her willingness to get further education in the public information/communication field, she replied that she was absolutely interested and anxious to do so.

President Freeman said this position addresses several areas of need for the Council and he thinks Ms. Eichner will be great in the position given her professionalism and her years of varied experience. Being Council President brings a lot of hidden responsibilities and work required to be successful and additional staff assistance will be very helpful. The council needs to be more successful at getting its message out to the public as the Mayor does with his staff.

Council Member Salem said the Council President is ultimately the spokesperson for the Council in an official capacity. He believes Jacksonville does very well in emergency situations (hurricanes, floods, etc.) and the Council President or Vice President is in the room when the Mayor is being the spokesperson for everyone. Sometimes the Council will differ from the Mayor on an issue, and the Council needs to have its own say at such times.

Council Member Boylan asked how the decision was made to fill this position and how this candidate chosen. Ms. Sidman said the decision grew out of the Jacksonville University study of the council staff which hasn't been officially released yet and was an obvious first need. She looked for someone who was familiar with both the council members and the capital equipment the council has as well as the City procurement contracting process. She looked for a servant leader who is policy driven, and Ms. Eichner has those qualities. The council has a relatively small staff so personality and "fit" are important. In response to a question from Mr. Boylan about whether the job was posted, Ms. Sidman cited Sec. 116.909 of the Ordinance Code which says that appointed positions of the City of Jacksonville which are confirmed by the City Council may be filled by persons currently working for the City of Jacksonville without the necessity of posting for or advertising the position.

Motion (Pittman/2nd Salem): approve appointment of Teresa Eichner as the Chief of Public Information as a one-cycle emergency, with the appointment resolution to be introduced at tomorrow's council meeting on an Addendum to the Agenda – **approved 5-0**.

Ms. Sidman asked for clarification that the committee intended for the position salary to be negotiated by the Council President within the existing salary range for division chief positions; the committee confirmed that was their intention.

Public Comment

Carnell Oliver said Ms. Eichner has always been cooperative and helpful in getting him information and he likes her appointment. The Council needs additional staff to do all the work that needs to be done. Federal and state governments are turning to more and more automation and open-source policy making. Jacksonville needs to be more on the cutting edge of technology. Other places do a better job than Jacksonville. He recommended putting CIP projects on council members' websites for better public information.

Meeting adjourned: 10:42 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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