

Council of the Whole Committee Meeting Report
Monday, April 15, 2024

The Council of the Whole Committee met on Monday, April 15, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Dixon, Gordon, Wilkerson, Thompson, Ehora, Glenn, and Neeper.

Others present: Dana Addis, Clerk, Tony Geiger, Law Dir., Randy Bartels, Auditor.

President Dixon called the meeting to order. He opened the meeting to discuss the Charter Review. He explained that Council can either review the Charter by creating a review Committee or by reviewing the Charter in Council of the Whole. Dixon recommended keeping the Charter review in the Council of the Whole Committee which would expedite the process. Discussion was held regarding public participation in the Council of the Whole Committee meetings. Dixon recommended the members review the Charter and highlight the items they would like to discuss at future meetings.

The next item of discussion is the residence requirements of public officials. Councilor Ehora referred to the issues surrounding residency in the prior Mayoral election. Tony Geiger advised there were 9 or 10 objective criteria to demonstrate where someone lived but the question was whether the change should be done by Ordinance or by Charter change, which would be the safest way. He explained since the Committee is already looking at the Charter there will be time to make those changes. Ehora reminded the Committee that while reviewing the Charter, it is important to be mindful of the residency issue and also the issue of election timing for Council President. She explained her issue is that only certain wards can safely run for Council President without losing their seat. Councilor Gordon expressed the need to change both the Council President and Mayor election. Geiger advised by Charter, the election timing is set to fall on the odd number of years so they would have to change the election timing to the even number of years. The Committee held discussion regarding various possibilities for changing the election timing. Geiger confirmed Charter changes need to go to the voters.

The next item of discussion is outside hiring of Lima Police Dept. and Lima Fire Department. President Dixon gave a brief synopsis of why outside hiring is being discussed. He referred to the blue handout that gave examples of various municipalities and their Chief hiring processes. Councilor Ehora referenced the cities that most likely represent the City of Lima do not allow outside hiring. She expressed the importance of modeling a City that is most like Lima. She further expressed her concern with who controls the hiring. Gordon expressed there is potential for hiring a good candidate when opening it up to outside of the City. Thompson inquired about the pros and cons for both approaches. Glenn referenced his experience working at the prison and the hiring process of the Warden. Neeper expressed that he is on the fence and discussed the pros and cons. President Dixon referenced the first page of the handout which addressed the authority given to the Civil Service and Council to adopt a new rule surrounding the outside hiring.

Fire Chief Heffner referenced the DROP plan which puts individuals in a position that they must retire which will prevent the “Chief” from being long term positions. He clarified what the DROP plan is. He explained the City of Lima has a different dynamic than bigger cities. He referenced other municipalities are harvesting our employees because we have amazing talent with great experience. He explained they are working on building a bigger pool by opening up the Chief’s exam to the Battalion Chief position. He doesn’t believe outside hiring is a good fit for the City of Lima because he looks at Lima as being a stepping stone. He expressed the need to include an interview process rather than just taking a test. Neeper referenced lateral transfers and someone who has great experience, only being able

to transfer at the ground level. Wilkerson expressed his vision is Lima people helping Lima people they may have known their whole life. He further expressed the importance of identifying with those living in this City. Ehora referenced the importance of employees employed in safety services being from the City. Heffner referenced the Fire Department has a great culture which doesn't happen overnight. Dixon referenced the current process for hiring LFD Chief. Heffner explained currently only a Deputy Chief can take the exam for Chief. He referenced previous conversations that were held with the previous HR Dir. regarding opening up the testing to Battalion Chiefs. Dixon requested Heffner provide any information from those conversations to the Council Clerk.

Jordan Pugsley spoke out against outside hiring of a Fire Chief. He expressed the importance of having a Chief that knows the relationships and personalities. He explained opening the position to the outside can create a revolving door as they would be using the position as a stepping stone. Dixon inquired what Pugsley's position is on opening the test to Battalion Chiefs. Pugsley explained they love the idea. Neeper referenced the importance of keeping the comradery in the department. George Davis explained they have been working on modifying the selection process within the Fire Department which is important to nail down. He provided clarification as to the different levels of Chief, Deputy Chief and Battalion Chief. He expressed the importance of choosing executives internally and believes they should come up with something that satisfies the Civil Service Board and does best for the citizens of Lima. He advised the Union has recommended to include the Battalion Chief in the Chief selection process. President Dixon asked Deb Vobbe, Civil Service Board and Chief Heffner to work together to create a proposal to provide to the Council of the Whole Committee in the next 30 days. He further asked Vobbe to provide Council with the current process of hiring the Chief position for both LFD and LPD so it can be compared to the new process proposal. Neeper expressed the importance of the Police Dept. being in attendance. Dixon expressed the importance of being a working Committee. He thanked Chief Heffner and the members of the Fire Department who attending the meeting tonight. Deb Vobbe explained the outside hiring could be set up any way Council decided including creating a panel review.

Gordon moved to adjourn, seconded by Thompson. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie Dixon, Council President