

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PORTAGE CITY COUNCIL OF MAY 31, 2012 – BEST PRACTICES ON FORMATION OF CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Mayor Peter Strazdas called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m. The following Councilmembers were present: Councilmembers Elizabeth Campbell, Jim Pearson, Patricia Randall and Edward Sackley, Mayor Pro Tem Claudette Reid and Mayor Peter Strazdas. Councilmember Terry Urban was absent with excuse. Also present were Facilitator David Wheatley, City Manager Maurice Evans and City Clerk James Hudson.

At the request of Mayor Strazdas, Mr. David Wheatley provided a review of Best Practices as discussed and established at the November 2011 City Council Retreat. He projected his mapping visually on the wall with the intent of aligning the Best Practices with current City Council thinking and being satisfied with the level of commitment to them. He asked the key questions which he uses in his reviews: what is working and why with a focus on what is working because usually that is a lot more than what is not working; where do we need to be so we look to the future; what do we need to do to be there and any corrective action in order to move forward; and, what do we need to stop doing or change in order to be successful.

He conveyed his understanding that the Best Practices are not being followed in a way as to accomplish the good work necessary for the benefit of Portage. He asked for input on his mapping display to determine areas that need to be highlighted or where focus should take place. He obtained commitment from all for the process, then provided direction and City Council began the discussion of each of the key questions.

Mayor Strazdas used the Budget Work Session as an example where City Council worked together with a large body of information. Discussion followed. Mayor Strazdas asked Mr. Wheatley to review the Rule of Six, and Mr. Wheatley indicated that Native Americans conjure six different views of why something is happening to avoid jumping to conclusions. He also reviewed the cone in a box with a viewing hole on top and one on the side. The top view is circular and the side view is triangular, so a combined view is necessary to determine what is in the box, so there is always an alternative perspective. Discussion followed regarding how to approach one another in private or in public with feedback, the importance of trust among the group and how to earn that trust through follow-through and mutual understanding.

Mayor Strazdas asked how to get to “restart?” Mr. Wheatley responded either dig back into the past or restart with some small steps and move forward. Discussion followed.

Councilmember Pearson revealed that he believes in transparency and honest, open debate, then “go on” and serve the citizens. Mr. Wheatley cautioned that different views might get in the way of expectations of one another. Discussion followed.

Councilmember Randall advocated focusing on policy, not on the behavior of individual people. Discussion followed.

Mr. Wheatley referred City Council to the six questions and how they were answered at the November 2011 Retreat with expectations of behavior, but that have not been followed and have gotten in the way of doing the good work. He challenged them to thin these out and get a more basic set that allows City Council to move forward today and get the work done and not be distracted. Discussion followed.

Mayor Strazdas summed up that some common elements in the discussion are the need to get to a restart, to focus on what is in the best interest of the citizens and to engage in a good, healthy debate on policy. Discussion followed.

Next, City Council discussed “No surprises” and “Say it in the meeting” from the mapping provided by Mr. Wheatley versus talking to the media, other Councilmembers or the general public. Mr. Wheatley noted that we need to over communicate when new people are involved. Discussion followed.

After a discussion of City Council comments at the end of the Regular City Council Meeting, there was a consensus to obtain a legal opinion regarding a proposal for City Councilmembers to use Citizen Comment time, leave the dais and speak from the podium when addressing an unrelated city issue, offer political support or speak about a contentious issue not city related keeping into account provisions of the City Charter, State Constitution and the U.S. Constitution that guarantee freedom of speech?

Notwithstanding the perception and after discussing whether elected officials should meet socially after a Regular City Council Meeting or not, there was a consensus to obtain a legal opinion from the City Attorney whether such gatherings be banned or not. Discussion followed and Mr. Wheatley summed up and asked for each to have a commitment and to be accountable. Discussion followed. Mr. Wheatley indicated each Councilmember should be asking for feedback because it is more likely that beneficial feedback will be forthcoming. Discussion followed.

ADJOURN: Mayor Strazdas adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

James R. Hudson, City Clerk