

**SPECIAL MEETING  
LAKE HELEN CITY COMMISSION  
February 27, 2014  
3:00 PM**

**MINUTES**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Mayor Snowden called the February 27, 2014 Special Meeting of the Lake Helen City Commission to order at 3:05 pm.

**Present:**

Mayor Buddy Snowden  
Vice Mayor Ann Robbins  
Commissioner Rick Basso  
Commissioner Vernon Burton  
Commissioner Cameron Lane  
City Administrator KC Cichon  
City Attorney Jennifer Nix  
City Clerk Wendie Levings

Mayor Snowden recognized the City Manager, Joe Yarborough from South Daytona in the audience.

**INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance was led by Comm. Lane.

**COMMISSION DISCUSSION**

**A. Discussion relating to City Legal Representation**

Mayor Snowden indicated the discussion was born out of a letter of resignation by the City Attorney, Lonnie Groot. At the close of the last meeting the Commission agreed to revisit this matter at today's meeting.

Comm. Basso: in giving time to think about this, it has become clear that there are issues the City Manager has that comes to social protocol. I am not convinced he has malicious intent but requires some tact and diplomacy in some situations. He is quite adequate at

procedures and brought quality people into this organization. But it is clear that there are issues when it comes to dealing with colleagues. With that said, every employee comes with a tool box and baggage. What we need to recognize is how strong is the tool box and how much is the baggage. City Admin needs to deal with situations with tact and diplomacy or recognize he does not have that skill set and ask for help when situations arise... to seek help from us. I am not convinced that I am ready to throw the baby out with the bath water.

Admin. Cichon: In prior recent events I have made many attempts to rectify issues in relationship processes and procedures, and unfortunately, was not having much success. My hope was for some compromise on some issues. I would like to take advantage of Comm. Basso, moving forward, so that when I see those issues that may not go in a good direction I can have help with those issues.

Comm. Burton: I have been thinking about this and the analogy is my family were coal miners in West Virginia and my Grandfather told me they had canaries in the mines that would detect gas that the miners could not smell. For me, the first canary was when we had the town meeting at the AME church and I saw things I was concerned about in Admin. Cichon's behavior. We lost Ms. Wilson... another canary. I am at a point that I am feeling we are running out of canaries. We need to acknowledge that we need some change here. For us to lose our services from the City Attorney... my dealings with him have been respectful and professional. I am not sure of the status.. if there is a contract. Is he up for review (City Administrator)?

Mayor Snowden: When we hired K as Administrator there was not a contract. He came to be a part of the community. He felt this was a place he could call home. As an administrator position it is sort of an 'at will' position and one of any other employee.

Comm. Burton: I brought this up because of what may have happened with Don Findell when it would have taken a majority to remove him.. then there was a storm and his services were needed and there was a vote taken to have him remain. What point does this commission have the same obligation? I am not clear.

Mayor Snowden: Does the Attorney have anything to add?

Atty. Nix: We are obviously here not to take sides or to cause issues. I am here on behalf of the City Attorney's office. I wanted to make it clear that we are not making this a condition of staying, that KC resigns. I believe Lonnie may have been looking for him to correct what he said. We are not asking for the resignation for City Administrator. As far as the employee status we have not been asked to look into that as yet. In review of the City Charter it says the City Administrator is an employee of the city subject to the personnel policy manual, but we have not looked far into that. I hope that answers your question.

Comm. Lane: I spoke with KC yesterday for some time. I believe he has the best interest of the city at heart. It is an unusual situation that usually when you are looking to let someone go it is usually someone without the best interest of the city at heart. This is not the case here. There is a bit of inability to work out relationships... or whatever it was.. but every

relationship is two independent entities. Who is at fault is hard to tell. I spoke with Atty. Groot today also. There is a breakdown there of that relationship. I am hesitant to ask for a resignation. I would like to hear your thoughts, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Snowden: We all look for the right things to say and the wisdom. Mr. Yarborough did not come here to speak today but I know he had an association with Admin. Cichon. He has been around this field of work for a long time and I value his assistance.

Joe Yarborough 1672 S. Ridgewood Avenue, South Daytona, approached the podium. I did not come over here at the request of Kent Cichon. I did not come over prepared to address this issue. I could not tell you the details of this issue. I have been assigned for over a decade through the Florida County Managers Association as a mentor. Lake Helen is different city as South Daytona is. It takes a while to adjust personalities. Everyone of us, and I love the analogy, brings a toolbox. Some of them we have to work on and some just do not come that easy. In time you learn to use them. You learn because you are exposed to situations that make you use them. We all have to work on leadership we are not born with it. Being a manager is like a marriage you have to work at it all the time, you will have times you will break down, but you don't walk away. Mayor I have tremendous respect for you and I did come to the Mayor with the recommendation for Kent Cichon. I think he is very ethically moral and will do everything by the book and sometimes you miss those social skills...but you work on them. I have been doing this for 40 years and have had working relationships with Attorneys that have been excellent and some that have been difficult. But neither one of us tried to drive our council, neither one of us threatened to resign, we did not put our council in that position. Council would probably have said 'go work this out'. I would never think of telling you how to vote. I think you are taking this seriously and deliberating in a good manner. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to address.

Comm. Robbins: I decided I would hear what everyone else had to say. I think a lot of this is the fault of the five of us sitting here. When KC was hired, I believe it was a six month probationary period. We feel down that at the end of six months we did not say we need to review this person. Things have happened and I think it made KC gun shy as what are his responsibilities. I had all hopes that he was going to be a manager type person that would take the bull by the horn and we have seen some great things happen under his administration. We are seeing paving. He is taking a strong look at our budget. To me this is what has caused this problem. If we don't take a hard look at our expenses and the money is all gone where are we? I do not like to see conflict. I would like to see this worked out. Don Findell submitted a resignation letter and he came back. Nancy Wilson submitted several resignation letters before she quit. Lonnie Groot has submitted a resignation letter and here we sit, discussing it.

Mayor Snowden: Vice-Mayor you are right that we fell down not only in policy review.... In the overall sense of things there are things that have to occur in a timely fashion.

There was discussion regarding employee evaluations.

Comm. Basso: indicated he did not see a choice and that the City Admin. needed to explain how we keep this from happening again and how we move forward.

Mayor Snowden: stated he wanted KC to succeed as City Administrator but believed there was a disconnect with interpersonal personalities. He indicated that KC would need to make the change. The Mayor spoke about the meetings between the Atty. and the Admin. and indicated he was willing to go in the direction of the Commission.

Atty. Nix: Reiterated that it was the Attorney's resignation and he did not call for the Administrators resignation. While I was not present I have been told there have been unwarranted statements made that may give a little insight as to where Mr. Groot is coming from. KC would at least need to correct some of the things he said and I think that is what he was looking for.

Alan Cooke 792 Oaktree Lane, Lake Helen I was the deciding vote on Don and I had to think about the City of Lake Helen. I have been in business for 50 years and when I started I was headstrong and as the years went by I learned from all the employees that I had. It made my business successful because I listened to my people. As an ex-Commissioner and I respect you and I respect Lonnie. We are talking about a very knowledgeable law firm. We need to look at what is best for the City of Lake Helen.

Admin. Cichon: To reinforce... I did provide an apology to Mr. Groot verbally and in writing in my own words and not ones he created for me. I asked him to stay with the City of Lake Helen. I have pledge to the Commission and Mayor that I would accept the lawyers ways and means and processes and procedures and work with them. There are a lot of things in our lives that we have no control over and we have to learn to live and work with them. Personally and professionally we should come to terms to what is best for the parties and citizens. In the areas with Lonnie I failed. There is a lot more that we agree on than we don't. I hope that Lonnie would stay with the city.

There was discussion regarding the apology letter.

Comm. Basso: To me at the end of the day we have a recurring event involving the City Administrator... and the crux of the problem and he needs to explain to us how he is going to keep this from happening again. Until I hear something from you that you recognize the problem and tell us what you are going to do.

Admin. Cichon: It falls on me to realize where there is an issue and to recognize it before it goes to far. After hearing from the Commission.. it has opened my eyes as to do that. I would like to meet with Comm. Basso to get more feedback. I look to taking every opportunity to 'sharpen my saw' when it comes to this issue. I pledge to do everything in my ability to get to where I need to be.

Mayor Snowden: Do you feel confident you can help to put this back together?

Admin. Cichon: I will do my part in a compromise that is what I was seeking. I failed on that attempt to reach that compromise. Again, move forward with what is put before me and accept it willingly. My purpose for being here in Lake Helen is to do what is best for this community and this commission. That has not changed.

Mayor Snowden: I believe that from the way you present yourself, that you are very concerned about the city... We have another City Commission meeting in two weeks. I do not like to see things unsettled. We have been given a pledge and no one likes to see the baby tossed out with the bath water. Perhaps we could have come together as a team to address problems. None of us needs this stress.

Comm. Basso: I heard your passion and sincerity but I did not hear a solution. Before the next meeting comes I would certainly like to hear a plan.

Mayor Snowden: Comm. Basso wants to see a plan and I agree that is a good starting point.

Admin. Cichon: I would forth as part of the plan is for me to attend seminar in conflict resolution which may give me that knowledge.

Comm. Basso: I think that is a great start. I will do everything I can to help you. I am a phone call away. We recognize when we have weaknesses and we bring people in to help us. Recognize your weakness and put in a plan of action to rectify it.

Comm. Burton: We do not have to vote on anything today.

Mayor Snowden: I get a consensus from the Commission that we place confidence in the City Administrator.. I want you to carry forward and not have these impact responsibilities to the city until the next meeting in two weeks. I would like to see some creative well laid out plans and if the Commission agrees with that we can move in that direction.

Comm. Basso: One step further that if you do not provide us with something we will ask for your resignation. We will need to carefully monitor that plan to move forward with positive steps. Sometimes you recognize you fail and then learn from that and move forward. If I recognize and at the end of the two weeks you still do not get it then it will be clear to me to make my decision.

Atty. Nix: I want to mention... because Lonnie Groot is not here... as far as the verbal apology you reportedly offered to him, I have no idea what was said; but as far as the written apology, I was told it was not signed. I do not know if that is why it was not acceptable. You may not have agreed with the verbiage in the email... I doubt the City Attorney's office has changed its point of view at all.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Snowden adjourned the February 27, 2014 Special Meeting of the Lake Helen City Commission at 4:45 pm.