



CITY OF WAUWATOSA
7725 WEST NORTH AVENUE
WAUWATOSA, WISCONSIN 53213
Telephone: (414) 479-8917
Fax: (414) 479-8989
Web Site: www.wauwatosa.net

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Tuesday, September 15, 2009
Committee Room #1

PRESENT: Aids. Berdan, Birschel, Dennik, Ewerdt, Hanson, Herzog, Jay, McBride, Meaux, Nickevich (7:15 p.m.), Organ, Walsh, Wilke - 13

ABSENT: Aids. Donegan, Krol, Stepaniak

ALSO PRESENT: A. Kesner, City Attorney

Ald. Ewerdt as chair called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Charter ordinance to reduce the size of the Common Council

Mr. Kesner explained that the issue at hand is a Charter Ordinance Amendment to reduce the size of the Common Council to 10 members. The Legislation, Licensing, and Communications (LLC) Committee determined the Committee of the Whole would be the best venue for this discussion. During this meeting, the public can give input and the Council members can discuss and make a determination to send the issue forward either to the Common Council or back to the LLC Committee.

No one present in favor:

Present in opposition: Joe Ptasek, 7814 Livingston Avenue
Bernard Grimm, 7325 Blanchard Street
Ralph McCarthy, 1665 N. 117th Street
Dick Bachman, 2229 N. 115th Street

Mr. Ptasek, former alderman, was concerned that residents might not know about this hearing because it wasn't noticed in a public way. With regard to reducing the size of the Council he commented that without public input the Council is changing his representation. He believes the change would be negative. He noted that alderpersons are part time, they are not expected to devote full time to the job. If one person can't be at a meeting, the other person can still represent the district. He stressed that it is not the number of people that affects efficiency, it's the people themselves. There can be five people and they can be just as inefficient as a larger number of people. The residents should be able to say yes or no on this issue. Perhaps a referendum would get more people to weigh in on the issue.

Mr. Grimm, former alderman, commented that it was a shame that this attempt to reduce the size of the Council was being made when it will not reduce taxes or save salaries. He asked if there would be any associated cost for mailings or clerical support if the reduction is made. He thought the current alderpersons should listen to the experienced people who have served on the Council for many years.

Mr. McCarthy, former alderman, noted that he served as an alderman for 21 years. He asked what the objective was. He didn't recall getting an answer to a number of his questions when he went to the Community Development meeting. He asked if the cost savings is worth the negative changes. He mentioned that he and Mr. Bachman worked as a team. As he looked at the empty Council members seats at this meeting, he commented that years ago he would have been embarrassed at the lack of attendance. He predicted that if the reduction is made you will only have representation for one side of the issues that come before Council. He agreed with Mr. Ptasek that if

the meeting had been announced there would have been more people present. He thought the reduction is very dangerous. There are no residents asking for the change, but he wanted to voice his concerns.

Mr. Bachman, former alderman, noted that three years ago there were a few people that showed up in favor, but now there are more here that are against the proposal. He commented that he was an alderman for 21 years. Over the years he has gotten involved in the total city. This proposal will not save any money. He added that when he was an alderman 95% attendance was the norm for both committees and Council. It costs the city less than one dollar per household for the aldermen's service. People need to be represented especially if one of the aldermen can't be there. Also, with one alderman per district both sides of the issue will not be represented.

Ald. Birschel noted that several very good points were brought out at the Legislation, Licensing and Communications Committee meeting. One was that a smaller number of people may have a tendency to vote as a block. Reducing the size of the Council will not necessarily reduce the length of the discussion. The Council is a diverse group with different jobs and life skills.

Ald. Walsh spoke against the proposal. There would be a short term monetary gain of about \$33,000 in salaries, but why tamper with success. Communities are desperate for civic involvement. With this proposal there would be increased inefficiency and the possibility of having a lower bond rating.

Ald. McBride commented that he was unaware that the sky was falling as seemed to be the tone of the discussion. He stressed that the proposal is not about money because it will not cut taxes. It is about increased efficiency, accountability and competition. He felt that Council members should have to justify their positions. He recalled that when he was campaigning he told people that he wanted to reduce the size of the Council. The people in the district voted for him because they liked that idea. Ald. Organ had that experience as well. There needs to be competition. There needs to be accountability. Many people don't know that they have two aldermen. If there is a vacancy it will be filled.

Moved by Ald. McBride, seconded by Ald. Dennik to send the matter of the Charter Ordinance to reduce the size of the Common Council back to the Legislation, Licensing & Communications Committee for discussion. Vote on the motion was: Ayes: 6, Noes: 7 (Birschel, Berdan, Organ, Ewerdt, Walsh, Hanson, Meaux)

Ald. Herzog noted that when they had public hearing on this issue a few years ago. There were many people for and many against. West Allis has 10 aldermen. If the city switches to 10 districts there will be less work not more.

Ald. Birschel pointed out that with two aldermen working together per district the people of Wauwatosa get wonderful representation.

Mr. Kesner stressed that if this went back to committee for a vote, it would set back the election schedule. The main problem is the redistricting from 8 to 10 districts.

Ald. Berdan felt there were valid claims on both sides, but she didn't think the current system is broken. There are a good number of people on each committee. The Council can trust that unanimous recommendations coming from the committees are well thought out.

Ald. Organ was asked if she would be in favor of reducing the size of the Council while she was campaigning and she was leaning that way; however, since she has been on the Council she has come to appreciate the size of the committees. Most of the work is done there. She noted that excellent service is always provided by redundant representation. When there are serious issues and residents want to contact their alderman, there is one or the other they can talk to.

Ald. Ewerdt commented that he has had a similar experience. He knew very little about government when he first became a Council member and people in his district were surprised that there were two aldermen per district. He noted that a few years ago during the pension scandals with the county there was talk about reducing the size of county boards and commissions, but he has always appreciated the two person system. He didn't see a need to change.

Ald. Nikcevich explained that she has pushed the proposal because it was brought up during the Comprehensive Plan meetings and the Horton/URS study. She thought that the Council President would provide backup for and aldermanic absences. She voted in support of sending the issue back to the LLC Committee.

Moved by Ald. Birschel, seconded by Ald. Hanson to recommend placing on file the matter of a Charter Ordinance to reduce the size of the Common Council. Ayes: 12, Noes: 1 (McBride)

Mr. Kesner instructed that this item will go to the Council as a report placing on file.

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Susan Van Hoven, Deputy City Clerk
City of Wauwautosa

svh