

EAST BETHEL CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

August 30, 2021

The East Bethel City Council met on August 30, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. for a Special City Council meeting at City Hall.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Steve Voss Tim Harrington Suzanne Erkel
Brian Mundle

Wanda McLaurin (joined the meeting at 7:49)

ALSO PRESENT: Jack Davis, City Administrator

1.0 Call to Order

The August 30, 2021, Special City Council meeting was called to order by Mayor Voss at 7:00 p.m.

2.0 Adopt Agenda

Harrington stated I'll make a motion to adopt tonight's agenda. Mundle stated I'll second. Voss asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Voss asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

3.0 City Council Vacant Seat Interviews and Appointment

Voss stated tonight's meeting is for the purpose of interviewing people for the vacant Councilmember seat. He indicated they would be going in alphabetical order. He invited each candidate to make an opening statement and respond to questions previously sent out to each candidate. He noted after the interviews, the Council will vote by ballot one candidate. He stated whichever candidate received the most votes would be the next Councilmember.

Davis stated in order to make an appointment, there had to be a majority vote of the quorum of Council. He stated after the first round of voting if there were not three votes for one candidate, there would be a motion made to approve the person who gets two votes, and it will be up to Council to vote on that Motion. He noted this was a temporary appointment to fill the term of Shelly Beck's position until the special election to be held on November 8, 2022.

Mr. Tanner Balfany, 19534 East Front Blvd, thanked the Council for taking time to hear his position. He stated he has been a part of East Bethel since 2007 as a resident and prior to that his grandmother/grandfather moved to the City in 1992 on Coon Lake. He stated he loved the City and has been on various Commissions in the City. He asked if anyone from Council had any questions for him.

Mundle asked why Mr. Balfany wanted to serve on the Council. Mr. Balfany responded he has served on a number of Commissions and when he first moved here one of the City easements was in front of his house and he reached out to the Public Works Director and that was when he was introduced to the Road Commission. He indicated he realized he had an interest in the City, where it was going and what was happening. He stated the City has helped nurture that flame in the meantime as he has watched the City go through a lot of ups and downs. He stated in the downtimes, he felt the City needed more leadership and that was the reason he ran for Mayor in 2012. He stated in the last ten years, he has watched the City grow through successful planning.

Harrington noted this position required a commitment of personal time including 15-night meetings per year. He asked if Mr. Balfany had the time to devote to meetings and special meetings. Mr.

Balfany responded he did, and this was something he had considered before expressing an interest in the vacancy. He indicated he had discussed this with his family, and everyone was in full support and if he was on the Council, they understood there would be a time commitment.

Voss stated a lot of what the Council did was problem solving and conflict management in trying to get resolution on items. He stated with Mr. Balfany being on the Planning Commission he would have seen some of this. He asked how Mr. Balfany looked at approaching conflict in the public sense. Mr. Balfany responded he would try and remember that there are more sides to the story, and he would attempt to understand each position and then weight out the differences and try to figure out what he would do if he was in the same situation and what would happen on the opposite side if he was in the opposite shoes. He indicated he would attempt to come up with a resolution that would serve everyone's needs if it was possible or make a hard decision if necessary if it only served one individual and what was in the best interest of the City at the time. He stated he would also follow what was legal as this was part of what the Council had to do.

Erkel asked if Mr. Balfany was familiar with the City's Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Balfany responded he was.

Erkel asked how the City's Comprehensive Plan aligned with Mr. Balfany's vision of the City. Mr. Balfany responded being a part of the Planning Commission for as long as he was, he felt he had a personal touch on the Plan as he was able to give his opinion at that time. He felt satisfied with the outcome at that time. He believed the Highway 65 corridor was a vital area for the City and believed it was important it was developed while still maintaining a rural feel beyond the highway. He believed the Comprehensive Plan was a good plan and he looked forward to helping on it.

Mundle asked if Mr. Balfany had attended or reviewed a City Council meeting in the last 2 years and was, he aware of the current issues the City was facing and what did he believed those issues were. Mr. Balfany responded he had been involved in both viewing and attending City Council meetings. He noted he had moved briefly out of the City for a year and that was the reason he left the Planning Commission, so there was a short period of time or viewing the meetings as he wasn't a resident. He noted now that he had moved back, he was becoming more familiar again with what the City was facing. He stated some of the main issues he knew about was some open Ordinance issues as well as the Broadband issues and the recent appointments. He stated there was also talk about expanding staff as well as budgeting issues.

Voss stated Mr. Balfany mentioned the budget and once this position was filled, whoever was appointed for the vacancy would be walking right into the time the budget was getting approved. He asked if Mr. Balfany had looked at where the current budget was for next year. Mr. Balfany stated he had not reviewed the budget fully, but that was something he would be spending more time looking at if he was appointed to the Council. He noted this position was not something he was considering because it has only just recently been open.

Harrington asked Mr. Balfany's thoughts on promoting business development and the expansion of housing developments. Mr. Balfany stated he knows the Viking Preserve was just filling up. He noted he came from a family in the framing and building trades so it was great to see new development happening, but this City did have a rural feel and he would like to see the Highway 65 corridor develop with solid, foundational businesses that are going to be in the City for a long time, but he realized that in order to have that, there was a need for the higher density homes and those people who were looking for that liked the access off the highway and served the individual businesses that the rest of the City would enjoy. He noted there was no perfect system and all they could hope for was to balance everything which would require in order to have the luxuries of commercial

businesses, they needed to have the balance of the higher density homes to keep the businesses afloat.

Erkel asked if Mr. Balfany had any particular goals or objectives he would like to accomplish. Mr. Balfany responded his goals are to help develop a place where he would feel happy, and his family could continue to grow. He noted when his grandparents moved to the City, over time his family had become somewhat established in the City and if he could have something to do with that and look back and know he helped develop a place where people enjoyed living this would be one of the goals he wanted to accomplish.

Mundle stated some issues, matters, and situations that come up before Council can be stressful, full of adversity, and/or confrontational. He asked if Mr. Balfany had the ability to handle those types of situations. Mr. Balfany responded he felt he did. He believed during his time on the Planning Commission there was some contentious issues that had come up. He stated he tried to look at all sides, be a good delegate and keep balance in his understanding of the situation.

Mr. Balfany thanked the Council for their consideration and indicated it meant a lot to him to be considered for this vacancy.

Mr. Dan Dobbs, 4474 200th Lane, stated he has been a resident of East Bethel since the age of 12. He asked Council what questions they had for him.

Voss asked why Mr. Dobbs wanted the position. Mr. Dobbs responded it appeared things were in disarray at times, and he wanted to help things go forward for the City. He stated the City was a beautiful place to live. He indicated he had worked for the City for over 20 years, and he believed he could help. He noted he did not have any experience with this but wanted to help. He stated he was a straightforward person.

Mundle thanked Mr. Dobbs for putting "his hat in the ring." Mr. Dobbs stated he liked seeing progress on Highway 65.

Harrington asked what his thoughts on business development and expansion of the City was. Mr. Dobbs responded the City needed more businesses and could use a big box store, but he didn't think that would happen. He believed they needed to promote business and he believed the businesses would come, but it might take a while. He liked that Kwik Trip was coming to the City.

Mundle asked if he had attended or viewed City Council meetings in the past two years and was, he aware and what does he think the current issues were. Mr. Dobbs responded he watched a couple of meetings and he worked at the City up until last year when he retired. He stated he saw things from the back end how things were going. He noted there were a couple of issues that were difficult for the City that he hoped he could help with. He believed he had a handle on everything. He stated he also watched social media and there were issues, but he believed the City could overcome everything. He stated he had the time to serve on the Council also.

Erkel asked if Mr. Dobbs had any specific goals or objectives. Mr. Dobbs responded he did not have any goals other than to help the City get better and to grow.

Voss asked what other civic activities he had been involved with. Mr. Dobbs responded he was involved in Tribute to the Troops, the Patriot Guard, and the Booster Day Car Show.

Erkel thanked Mr. Dobbs for his service to the City.

Mr. Dobbs thanked Council for letting him come up and speak.

Wanda McLaurin, 23380 London Street NE, stated she was unique to the City as she chose to be in the City. She stated the only thing they had as a requirement when they moved from the East Coast was that they had to be an hour from a major airport. She indicated East Bethel offered her what they were looking for including a rural community that had property and water access. She noted she had worked with three major companies with three very diverse careers. She stated she was able to retire in early 2000. She stated she worked part-time at the Green Barn and was involved in the City including being on the Planning Commission and was also involved with the Chamber, she did the golf committee. She felt if someone lived in a City, they needed to know about it and if there was something they could offer the City, then they should step up and do it. She stated she had been involved in the CST, the EDA, and now the Planning Commission. She thanked Council for this opportunity.

Voss asked what Ms. McLaurin saw the development on Highway 65 with respect to the country feel and what will/may happen. He asked how she saw managing that conflict over the years. Ms. McLaurin stated that was one of the biggest issues in the City right now – the rural versus commerce or business. She stated if they wanted to stay rural then they had to have the dividing line, which the City had done with Highway 65. She believed the Comp plan did a good job of defining the business corridor. She stated coming from the larger city there were some amenities needed in East Bethel, but until they get enough “boots on the ground”, the larger companies/amenities would not be looking at East Bethel. She indicated they also had the issue of only having water and sewer in one quadrant. She stated larger places did not want to deal with septic tanks and wells. She indicated this was one thing they would need to figure out is where they were going next.

Mundle asked if Ms. McLaurin if she had attended or viewed a City Council meeting in the last 2 years and was, she aware of the current issues the City was facing and what did she believed those issues were. McLaurin responded she had attended many meetings and the main issues she saw was the rural versus commerce. She stated it appeared the City had a black eye with some community members who felt the City wasn't doing enough. She believed a lot of this could be a lack of communication and the wrong information getting out.

Erkel asked if she had any specific goals or objectives she wanted to accomplish. Ms. McLaurin responded she didn't have goals, but what she would like to see happen is for the City to continue to grow and she wanted to see this be done with cautious thought and optimism. She stated with listening, compromise, and negotiation most people understood why something had been done within the limits of the City Ordinances.

Mundle stated on the City Council there can be issues and situations that are stressful, had adversity, and confrontational. He asked if she believed she could handle those kinds of situations and how did she handle them. Ms. McLaurin responded she used to do union negotiations and she handled things by asking direct questions and then weight the good and the bad. She noted nothing was every black and white and there was a gray area which is what she liked to look at. She believed she could handle it.

Harrington asked if McLaurin had the time to do this. McLaurin responded she did have the time.

Ms. McLaurin thanked the Council for the opportunity.

Randy Plaisance, 715 92nd Avenue NE, stated he regretted the fact that Ms. Beck decided to resign as he thought she would make a very good City councilmember and now Council was left with a difficult decision for a replacement. He stated his family moved to East Bethel 30 years ago and all three of

his children had gone to the local school system. He indicated he worked for Target Corporation and had been at Target for 20 years and hoped to retire with them.

Harrington asked what Mr. Plaisance's thoughts was about promoting business and the expansion of the City. Mr. Plaisance responded he believed it was important this be done in an organized fashion. He noted currently the Elevage development was progressing, and he wanted the City to work closely with them in order to develop the City. He believed the City had to be careful to ensure that the Ordinances and zoning were proper to ensure that this was done in a way that they wanted the City to develop. He stated he wanted to be welcoming to all businesses and consider them appropriately but realized there might be certain businesses that did not fit well with the City. He stated the City needed to work with the businesses on any disagreements to build a better community together.

Mundle asked if Mr. Plaisance if he had attended or reviewed a City Council meeting in the last 2 years and was, he aware of the current issues the City was facing and what did he believed those issues were. Mr. Plaisance responded he was on the City Council for the previous four years prior to this year and obviously he attended almost all of the meetings. As to the issues that are facing the City, he believed there were a few including making sure they were getting the proper due dates for the IUPs and ensuring that the documentation has been filed correctly. He believed the Council had to consider how to keep an eye on those issues. He stated the City had to consider how they were going to go forward with some of the properties that are in the area and ensuring that they are talking to those businesses and landowners to ensure they were working together as a team in order to develop the City. He indicated there were other issues as well such as animal control issues, dog bites, etc.

Erkel asked why Mr. Plaisance wanted to come back on the Council. She asked if he had any specific goals he wanted to accomplish. Mr. Plaisance responded watching over and making sure that City staff was covering the issues they needed to cover. He stated the other thing they needed to do was to take a look at reinvesting in the Ordinances and zoning to ensure they were doing those appropriately. He stated he would also like to reinstate the game nights they had in the City prior to COVID if possible. He believed it was important they made sure the Council worked to judge everything fairly and to ensure things are transparent. He stated he would like to also create a YouTube series that would go over how the City worked, how Ordinances affected peoples' lives, etc. He believed they could do a better job communicating with the residents as to how the City worked and how they could do better.

Voss noted the Council was in the middle of the current budget review. He asked Mr. Plaisance if he has been following that discussion. Mr. Plaisance responded he had and one of the biggest changes on the budget was hiring a new fire inspector. He stated obviously he was not watching it as closely as he did when he was on the Council, but he was familiar with the process and it would not take him long to look it over and get back up to speed.

Mr. Plaisance thanked the Council for their time and consideration.

Voss thanked all four candidates for their interest. He stated there was one opening on Planning and this was an opportunity for people to be involved in the City. Davis indicated the application process was open until September 15.

Harrington thanked the candidates. He indicated this was going to be a tough decision.

Mundle thanked the candidates for applying and putting their name in for consideration. He stated if a candidate did not get this opportunity to look at other opportunities in the City.

Council voted and handed their ballots to the City Administrator. The City Administrator reviewed the ballots and handed them to Voss.

Voss stated Mr. Balfany received one vote, Ms. McLaurin received three votes.

Mayor Voss stated I'll make a motion Resolution 2021-60, Resolution appointing Wanda McLaurin to the vacant Council seat of Shelly Beck. Harrington stated I'll second. Voss asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Voss asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

Ms. McLaurin took the Oath of Office.

4.0 Adjourn

McLaurin stated I'll make a motion to adjourn. Mundle stated I'll second. Voss asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Voss asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

Special meeting adjourned at 7:51 PM.

Submitted by:

Kathy Altman

TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.