

STATE OF KANSAS)
WYANDOTTE COUNTY)) SS
CITY OF KANSAS CITY, KS)

SPECIAL MEETING, TUESDAY, MAY 3, 2022

The Unified Government Commission of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas, met in Special Session, Tuesday, May 3, 2022, with eleven members present: Bynum, Commissioner At-Large First District; Burroughs, Commissioner At-Large Second District; Townsend, Commissioner First District; McKiernan, Commissioner Second District; Ramirez, Commissioner Third District; Johnson, Commissioner Fourth District; Kane, Commissioner Fifth District; Markley, Commissioner Sixth District; Stites, Commissioner Seventh District; Davis, Commissioner Eighth District; and Garner, Mayor/CEO, presiding. The following officials were also in attendance: Cheryl Harrison-Lee, Interim County Administrator; Misty Brown, Chief Legal Counsel; Bridgette Cobbins, Assistant County Administrator; Brett Deichler, Unified Government Clerk/Interim County Administrator; and Monica L. Sparks, Acting Unified Government Clerk.

Mayor Garner said before I call this meeting to order, I want to announce that we have individuals attending remotely as well as on-site. All participants joining by phone should mute their phones when not speaking to avoid background noise. During the meeting, please make sure that you announce yourself by name and title every time you speak so the public that is participating knows who is speaking. This is critical given the number of remote participants and is current guidance from the Kansas Attorney General.

MAYOR GARNER called the meeting to order.

ROLL CALL: Townsend, McKiernan, Ramirez, Johnson, Kane, Markley, Stites, Davis, Bynum, Burroughs, Garner.

NOTICE OF SPECIAL SESSION of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas, pursuant to Rules of Procedure 601 et seq, is to be conducted in a hybrid format in the Commission Chambers on Tuesday, May 3, 2022, at 3:30 p.m. regarding discussion of the process for posting of the County Administrator position.

CONSENT TO MEETING of the governing body of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas, accepting service of the foregoing notice, waiving all and any irregularities in such service and in such notice, and consent and agree that we, the governing body, shall meet at the time and place therein specified and for the purpose therein stated.

Mayor Garner asked, Clerk, are there any revisions to tonight's agenda? **Brett Deichler, Unified Government Clerk/Interim County Administrator**, said there were no revisions.

Mayor Garner said the first item and the only item on the agenda. The item is under the Commissioners' Agenda and it's discussion of the process for posting the County Administrator position. I'll ask Commissioner Markley to open up with remarks.

COMMISSIONERS' AGENDA

Item No. 1 – 211561...DISCUSSION: PROCESS AROUND POSTING COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR POSITION

Synopsis: Discussion of the process for posting the County Administrator position, submitted by Commissioner Angela Markley.

Commissioner Markley said at the time of Ms. Cheryl Harrison-Lee's appointment, several commissioners expressed that a nationwide search for a permanent County Administrator should be conducted. We have not received an update on the hiring process for this critical leadership position.

Ms. Harrison-Lee was appointed on an interim basis, without the opportunity for a nationwide search and evaluation of potential candidates. The community and the Commission deserve the opportunity to solicit, review and compare multiple County Administrator candidates to ensure the best possible candidate is appointed to lead the county. The hiring process for a County Administrator is extensive under any circumstances, and the job market today demands that the position be posted with all speed in order to locate and screen appropriate candidates for permanent appointment.

We request that the position be referred to an executive search firm and posted immediately, and in any case, no later than 30 days from this meeting date. We further request

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that a timeline of the hiring process be supplied to the Commission within 45 days. We request that the full commission participate in identifying finalists and interviewing those finalists, and that the process outlined provide ample opportunity for community input, similar to the process utilized to screen our Police Chief candidates.

Finally, we request that the Commission receive updates on the hiring process not less than one time per month until a permanent Administrator is appointed.

Mayor Garner asked, is there any discussion?

Commissioner Bynum said I concur with the statement. I think that the job of County Administrator is a job of utmost importance within our entire community. I don't know how we can identify that we have the very best candidate to do that work for us, which I reiterate is critical, if we don't post the job nationwide, conduct a search, conduct interviews, and select the candidate that we think is best from all of those who may apply. It's such a critical and important job. I believe that's the process we've gone through with previous leadership, as Commissioner Markley has indicated through both our Police Chief and Fire Chief, but not only that, for previous County Administrators.

Commissioner Ramirez said just as Commissioner Bynum, I concur with the statement given. We are still within a—we're coming out of a global pandemic which was a very unstable moment for our community. Past administration was able to maintain some form of stability and I think moving forward it's important that we continue to strive for that stability for our community, so I concur with the statement.

Commissioner McKiernan said I agree with the statement and I think it would be consistent with industry best practice to begin the process of formally searching for a permanent Administrator at this time.

Commissioner Kane said I agree with everything that's been said. When Mr. Bach got picked, we were all over at the Reardon Center. There was multiple candidates. In fact, we kind of liked one and he backed out, so then Mr. Bach got involved, but all the commissioners were involved,

staff was involved, and I think we need to continue moving forward with what we've done in the past to move in the future.

Commissioner Townsend said I concur with the statement. I also want to say, just so it's clear, that I don't—I'll speak for myself. This is not a knock in any way on Ms. Harrison-Lee. As Commissioner McKiernan indicated, I believe this is a best practice procedure issue and Ms. Harrison-Lee could certainly apply for the full-time position, but I think it serves the community, the Mayor's Office, and this Commission best if we follow the procedure that was done, I guess, now five or six years ago when Mr. Bach was hired. There was a lot of community engagement, not just this Commission. I agree with the statement. It is not, from my perspective, a personal charge against the interim, but I think this is the right practice and the best procedure to follow.

Commissioner Johnson said I think I was pretty clear from day one, I was very impressed with the resume that we received from Ms. Harrison-Lee. The only apprehension I shared then, and I'll just reiterate for the record, was that we did not at that time look at other candidates although I was very impressed with her resume. As a matter of best practice, and I think it's already been stated, I thought from day one, and I stated that to you, that I thought we should have looked at, you know, a few more candidates as well. I just wanted to make sure that was understood. This is something not—it's not stated just because of the meeting tonight for me. It's something that I have stated from day one.

Commissioner Burroughs said, Mayor, just for the discussion I would ask some of my colleagues if there's a timeframe maybe that would assist us in coming to some resolution. That we set forward a timeframe this is the action we choose to take on a national search, make it date certain that we start, what actions may be taken in reference to a national search. Will it be in journals, will it be in publications that go out across the nation? I'm sure there's a licensed organization of Administrators. I was just curious if there has been any discussion by my colleagues and/or administration to determine if we're going to take this potential action today if we have an idea of what action may be taken.

Commissioner Stites said I concur with the statements that were previously given and I think it's just the right thing to do to be transparent and to open it up to all possible candidates. I for sure think that Ms. Harrison-Lee should apply, you know, just like anybody that was interested in that position. We can vet them just like we would a Police Chief, Fire Chief, and make sure we have found the best candidate to run as County Administrator for our county.

Commissioner Markley said in response to Commissioner Burroughs, yeah, I do think we would hire a nationwide search firm. That would be keeping with our practices for past upper-level leadership that would perform the rest of the process and would know where to post and what to post and how long to post, all of those sorts of things. I did reference the Police Chief candidate process just because staff put together a series of sort of workshops to help evaluate those candidates as well as for community input in the same way that I think would be appropriate for this job. I think that's what we're looking at.

Commissioner Kane said, your thoughts on this Mayor. **Mayor Garner** said I'll share that with you.

Commissioner Davis said I think it's important to note, you know, thank you all for coming, especially the public because it's the middle of the afternoon on Tuesday and not necessarily the most convenient time to show up. I think the fact that all of the commissioners showed up at 3:30 on a Tuesday speaks—I mean, we can't get all of us to show up in person for our regular meetings so the fact that we're all here I think shows the commitment for us to get this right.

I agree with the statement. I want to also add that our community should have a voice. Like forget Commissioner Davis, forget me, I want our community to have a voice on who the next—who the permanent County Administrator is. I want time to be able to talk with my constituents about what they see, what they feel, what they're experiencing in their neighborhoods. I want the people of Wyandotte County to feel a part of the process. So, yes, I concur with the statement, but I really, really hope that it is people-centered. It is the constituents of Wyandotte County that have a voice in this process.

Mayor Garner said we read the Charter Ordinance Section 2-61, Appointment and Removal of Employees Administration, Forfeiture of Office. It says neither the Commission nor any of its individual members shall in any manner direct, supervise or require the appointment, promotion, transfer, assignment, demotion, discipline, suspension, discharge or removal of any officers or employees that the Mayor, County Administrator, or any of their subordinates are empowered to appoint. I think that speaks for itself.

I stand firmly in alignment with our Administrator. She has been our Administrator barely four months. She's in the middle of doing an assessment and an audit of the Unified Government. We need to give her time to do the work that needs to be done. It sends a bad message to this community when you talk about stability and when you talk about moving this organization in a different direction. If you didn't get the message loud and clear from this community that they wanted change, change is here and it's not going away. I'm not here to play politics as usual and I won't.

I feel really bad for Ms. Harrison-Lee having to endure a Commission that is coming forward and say do a national search when she hasn't even been here for the duration of her contract. I want her to feel confident in the work that she is trying to do and it's imperative that not only this Mayor, but this Commission, support her in that work. I said it before and I'll say it again because it was brought up out-of-order in a Commission meeting, I'm not prepared to have that discussion, I'm not going to have that discussion until I'm ready.

We will abide by the ordinance because that's what we're bound to abide by. If we get to that bridge that says we need to have a discussion about seeking a new Administrator from a national search, I will definitely be sure to let you know. We have got to work together as a Commission, as a staff, and as an administration. I can tell you what, we had survey results and I've been out in this community talking to the residence community, I have not heard from anybody in this community that says open up a national search for an Administrator.

I would like to see this Commission have a Special Session about how do we lower taxes, how do we do something about the PILOT, how do we improve the quality of life for our residents that have been demanding and begging for change. Those are the things that we need to bring to this table and talk about and not behind closed doors, open, so everybody knows where you stand and where we stand on trying to move Wyandotte County forward. I'm not here to play politics and I won't. You can play it if you want to.

I feel ashamed that we are even having this conversation. I ask that we come together and we work on the issues that are important to Wyandotte County and it's not about me. It never has been and never will be. This meeting is adjourned.

MAYOR GARNER ADJOURNED
THE MEETING AT 3:46 p.m.

Brett Deichler
U. G. Clerk/Interim County Administrator

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