

Galesburg City Council Special Meeting
City Council Chambers
55 West Tompkins Street, Galesburg, Illinois
June 12, 2023
5:30 p.m.

Called to order by Mayor Peter Schwartzman at 5:30 p.m.

Roll Call #1: Present: Mayor Peter Schwartzman, Council Members Bradley Hix, Wayne Dennis, Evan Miller, Dwight White, Heather Acerra, and Steve Cheesman, 7. Absent: Council Member Sarah Davis, 1. Also Present: Acting City Manager Steve Gugliotta, Interim City Attorney Paul Mangieri, and City Clerk Kelli Bennewitz.

Mayor Schwartzman declared a quorum present.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Council Member Miller moved, seconded by Council Member Hix, to adjourn into Executive Session at 5:33 p.m. for the purposes of discussing the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance or dismissal of specific employees of the public body or legal counsel for the public body (5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1), and approval of the executive session minutes from the May 15, 2023, and June 5, 2023, meetings, (5 ILCS 120/2 (c)(21).

Roll Call #2:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Dennis, Miller, White, Acerra, and Cheesman, 6.

Nays: None

Absent: Council Member Davis, 1.

Chairman declared the motion carried.

During the Executive Session, Council Member Miller moved, seconded by Council Member Dennis, to return to the Special City Council Meeting at 6:47 p.m.

Roll Call #3:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Dennis, Miller, White, Acerra, and Cheesman, 6.

Nays: None

Absent: Council Member Davis, 1.

Chairman declared the motion carried.

Interim City Attorney Paul Mangieri announced that together with Attorney Jeffrey McDaniel, a severance of employment and compensatory settlement agreement with full and final release of all claims between the City of Galesburg and Gerald Smith is being proposed to the City Council to accept and approve.

Council Member Miller moved, seconded by Council Member Dennis, to approve the presented Severance of Employment and Compensatory Settlement with City Manager Gerald Smith.

Roll Call #4:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Dennis, Miller, Acerra, and Cheesman, 5.

Nays: None

Absent: Council Member Davis, 1.
Abstain: Council Member White, 1.
Chairman declared the motion carried.

Council Member White stated that he was part of the group who hired Mr. Smith and he had a chance to speak to him and apologized for getting him into this mess.

Mayor Schwartzman announced that based on previous meetings, he asked everyone to remain civil. No cheering or clapping will be tolerated. He noted that it is not fair to those in the room who may disagree and that they are entitled to their opinion. He asked that comments are directly related to City business.

Jim Jacobs addressed the Council and shamed Council Members Hix, Dennis, Miller, and Acerra, for running the City Manager out of town.

Kevin Wallace addressed the Council and distributed information about the rail park and the lack of safety. He also stated regarding the City Manager, that he and Council Member White never wavered on choosing him. He was the individual with the best education, background, knowledge, and they hired the best person. Not because he was black, but because he was progressive and knew what he was doing. He stands with Mr. Smith and is ashamed of the process that happened tonight.

Mr. Wallace added that he has been talking with Chief Hovind about issues of preparedness with the railroad and any possible spills of hazardous materials. He has been involved for many years with the railroad and stated that they don't care about such things and will bury the cart or burn the hazardous materials. The Council has the opportunity to negotiate these items with the railroad and because he is employed by the railroad, that is one of the reasons why he abstained on any rail projects when he was on the Council. He further added that we are all still dealing with a race problem but he's praying the Council turns around and sees what they're doing. We're dividing our cities and telling lies. He hopes in the near future that they gain confidence and do what they're supposed to be doing to represent the city.

Wendell Hunnigan addressed the Council and stated that he moved to Galesburg over 50 years ago and has taught at Carl Sandburg College, Knox College, and Monmouth College. Over the years, he believes he's taught close to 9,000 students during his half century career. He also served as a library board member for 35 years, and just completed his term on the school board. He stated that he heard someone use the analogy to describe diversity and inclusion as diversity being the process of being invited to the party, while inclusion is the process of being asked to dance. Mr. Hunnigan further stated that he feels that not only has he been asked to sit down and shut up, but warned by several members of the City Council in no uncertain terms to never attend this dance again unless he conforms to their beliefs and agenda.

He stated that they may have won this battle but they have started an unnecessary war, particularly with the black and brown community of Galesburg. He wondered how they are going to attract first class talent to this community when the first thing on the meeting agenda is to fire the City Manager.

Andrea Bejarano-Robinson addressed the Council and stated that she is a new member of our community and chose Galesburg specifically because she's a Latin woman. She felt that a city led by an African American would understand the realities that her children have, but instead all she sees is division. She added that her kids don't feel safe or want to attend school here. Additionally, she hopes that if Council Members are invited to their events, to be part of their community, they attend.

Reverend Jowers addressed the Council and stated in full disclosure that he worked for Mayor Schwartzman to help him get elected. He noted that his church is in the Fifth Ward but that he lives in the Sixth Ward. He added that he wanted to use his three minutes for a moment of silence. He stated that he would rather people get their sheet with eyes cut out and the hood instead of what happened tonight. He stated that the LGBTQ+ people don't mind being real and letting you know who they are. The City Manager has a family, children, and relatives that look up to him. He quoted Jeremiah 17:9 that the heart is above all else deceitful and wicked.

Reverend James Hailey addressed the Council and stated that he has invited members of the Council to functions and they have not shown up and noted past Juneteenth celebrations. He hoped they all would support each other's Wards and invited them to attend this year's Juneteenth events at Carl Sandburg College.

Pastor Tony Franklin addressed the Council and stated that it hurts his heart to move back after seven years and witness what he saw tonight. He noted that he and Jim Jacobs used to present diversity training around the City to help people understand how they need to come together as a community and be unified. He stated that when he spoke at the dedication of the underpass for Reverend Sibley, he talked about him being a bridge builder, which is what the Council needs now.

Pastor Franklin noted that the community had a diverse City Council and for some reason, people didn't like that. Council needs to realize that the community is made up of more than people that look like them and start sitting down at a table with people who are different. He hopes they can develop true relationships with people different from themselves. He believes each person has a conscience and they need to take time to evaluate themselves. He hopes the Council pays attention to the people and listens to what they have to say and invited everyone to attend a workshop during the Juneteenth event, 1 p.m., with a panel of people to talk about the thin line between love and hate.

Jeanette Chernin addressed the Council and distributed information on recently burned out houses on East North Street that happened in early April. She stated that there is no fencing around these homes, a generator on the front porch, several inoperable vehicles and children in the home. She asked what it would take to condemn these properties for the safety of the neighborhood and children.

Council Member Acerra stated that she totally supports what Ms. Chernin has stated that these houses are also very close to her home. She thanked her for taking the time to document issues with many of the homes in the Ward. She added that she has shared her concerns with Mayor Schwartzman, as well as several pages of other initiatives that she would like to undertake to

really help the City in addressing abandoned and specifically burned properties. She's learning that there are various legal steps that have to be taken to address these to be fair to the property owner, but this is a huge commitment of hers.

Debbie Ward addressed the Council and stated that she loves rainbows and loves our community. She hopes everyone has a chance to live their best life, not be judged and that there is no room for bigotry in our community. She asked the Council to be united, inclusive, and promote peace and acceptance.

Sallee Wade addressed the Council and stated that she still believes Galesburg can be a lighthouse instead of a clubhouse. She invited everyone to read an article that will be coming out this weekend on facing issues with resilience and creativity. She added that many who have white privilege have no idea what black individuals have had to face in their lifetime. She is concerned that with the actions tonight, the City will be hard-pressed to find another City Manager.

Reverend Jowers stated to the Council that he was unaware of the new public comment ordinance not taking effect for ten days. He noted that he is of African descent and that his ancestors were slaves. He added that people are watching, especially when they place their hand on their hearts and recite the pledge.

Bruce Weik addressed the Council and asked the amount of severance payout Mr. Smith would be receiving. Interim City Attorney Mangieri announced that the amount will be \$74,795.56. Mr. Weik stated that the City is lucky that Mr. Smith's attorney isn't suing for \$50 million or giving him City Hall. He believes this is a blatant racist act and that four Council Members led this charge and are also attending Patriot meetings. He stated that they will be dealt with and gotten rid of.

There being no further business, Council Member Dennis moved, seconded by Council Member Miller, to adjourn the Special City Council Meeting at 7:39 p.m.

Roll Call #5:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Dennis, Miller, White, Acerra, and Cheesman, 6.

Nays: None

Absent: Council Member Davis, 1.

Chairman declared the motion carried.

Peter D. Schwartzman, Mayor

Kelli R. Bennewitz, City Clerk