

Minutes of the Independence City Commission's April 17, 2019 Special Meeting

The Independence City Commission met for a special meeting on April 17, 2019 at 5:30 P.M. in the Veterans Room at the Memorial Hall. Mayor Louis Ysusi, Commissioner Gary Hogsett and Commissioner Leonhard Cafilisch were present. Others present included:

City Staff

Craig Whitehead, City Manager
Kelly Passauer, Assistant City Manager
Lacey Lies, Director of Finance
Jeff Chubb, City Attorney
David Schwenker, City Clerk/City Treasurer
April Nutt, Director of Housing Authority
Barb Beurskens, Park and Zoo Director
Devon Mendoza, Police Officer

Visitors

Steve McBride
Jerry Bright
Judi Harris
Bob Pierce
Dean Hayse
Richard Folk
Harold Baden
Jeff Weimer
Larry Weimer
Judy Ysusi
Jean Barnett
Jon Risner
Nancy Smith
Bev Chubb
Ned Stichman
Jim Kelly
Tabatha Snodgrass
Anthony Royse
Dorcus Sutton
Anita Atherton
Larry McHugh

I. **SPECIAL SESSION**

A. Call to Order

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Mayor Ysusi called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M. and reviewed the ground rules for citizens who wished to speak.

II. PUBLIC FORUM

A. Increasing the number of City Commissioners from three to five.

Dean Hayse read the following statement:

"Dean Hayse, 2625 Rolling Green Drive. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening on the issue of the number of City Commissioners.

What most of us want from the City government is simply for it to work. Maybe even work well. When this question of the number of commissioners came up, one of the first questions I ask was what is not working? What about the Commission of three members would be solved by the Commission of five members?

It seems that three Commissioners can be cumbersome and slow. Progress is limited to very brief and very busy formal meetings. Where there is no way to form a committee of Commissioners to investigate or research an issue. You must either work alone or work as the whole Commission. So, the effort to flesh out thoughts and opinions before presenting in public is solitary work with no real peer available to serve as a sounding board or as a critic. These situations would be solved by a five-member Commission.

Still, some voters lack trust in their elected officials, and fear committees or meetings without the Open Meetings Act coverage will not be in their best interest. They fear shady deals might be made and once exposed would further erode the trust in government.

What is it that is not working? Three Commissioners might not be representative. One Commissioner for every 3,000 people. Is that it? I don't think so. In larger communities, a single Commissioner represents tens of thousands of people.

Is the problem lack of opportunity? Only three means it's harder to get elected. With five slots, it would be easier to get elected. Maybe more people would throw their hat in the ring. People would see that opportunity, become engaged, and step up to serve as a Commissioner. That might be good.

But, some voters lack trust in the quality of the pool of candidates and fear a poorly qualified or otherwise substandard pool of candidates might be the result and once in office they would be unproductive and create unnecessary turmoil.

With either three or five Commissioners, it ultimately is crucial to the citizens of Independence that the community encourage persons who have the skills and talent, and the best interests of the community at heart, to step up to serve in the City Commission. I know you all have encouraged others to run for the office which I think is good and appropriate.

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My point tonight is, whether we have three or five Commissioners, I believe it is in the community's best interest to stay with an at-large election for City Commission. Dividing the City into wards or districts to select its Commissioners simply creates artificial barriers to enter for candidates and thus dilutes the pool of potential candidates for the office. Potential candidates are already not running because the job is perceived as thankless and difficult. We do not need additional barriers to entry for them by excluding them certain seats on the Commission because of their address. What's more, dividing the City into wards or districts creates barriers between the citizens themselves when, more than ever, what we need to be seeking ways to break down real and perceive boundaries and barriers that separate us from each other. Let's stay with at-large elections for City Commissioners.

Please consider these comments as you discuss your action on this matter. Thank you”.

Richard Folk of 1217 N. 4th noted that he has lived in Independence for over 50 years and has seen a lot of changes with the City government. He believes that government has gotten more complex and more involved with different aspects of the government. He believes that in order to function properly and be thorough, you need more than three members. In his opinion the City would best be served and be more diversified with a five-member versus a three-member Commission.

Robert Pierce of 3444 W. Main said that he has seen three Commissioners get along well together and he has seen two gang up on one. He personally believes that diversity is good, and you get a wider variety of ideas. He is for a five-member Commission.

Kansas House of Representative Jim Kelly, 309 S. 5th, read the following statement:

“Having served on a three-member Commission for 6 years and having served on a seven-member school board for 8 years, and now in a 125-member chamber of the State House of Representatives for 9 years, the numbers I don't think make a lot of difference. I had three members of the Commission went well, school board went well. I think that your five is not an objection to me. I would echo one of the previous speakers that not going “at large” would be a very big mistake. Most cities with a City Manager in our size range I believe utilize five Commissioners elected “at large”. The ward type system would generate the possibility of little fiefdoms with emphasis on a certain area of the City and not the City as a whole. Also, If an excellent Commissioner, one of you three moved to another location in town outside of the ward, you would no longer be Commissioner. The five is fine, not going “at large” would be a huge mistake. In visiting with others across the state, the ward would be a big mistake. Across the state the feeling is that the “at large” is what gives the best representation, and the best chance for success for the city. Five is fine and I would suggest that the “at large” five would be the way to go.

Commissioner Caflisch stated that tonight was good to start the conversation. He welcomed the input from the community to see what direction the Commission should go. He discussed the different types and size of governments in the State.

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Commissioner Hogsett noted that he had been on another City Commission with five members. He stated that there are some real advantages to a five-person Commission. He said that he would love to discuss a topic with another Commissioner to prepare for a meeting but, under the current structure it would not be possible. He also stated that he would support an "at-large" system but not the "ward" system.

Mayor Ysusi expressed that part of the reasoning for having a worksession is that it would give the Commission the ability to talk about items they wanted to put on the agenda and to bounce ideas off one another.

Commissioner Caflich stated the need to have a Commission that is diverse and that districts is one way to do it, but it might not be the best way. He agreed with Mayor Ysusi on the use of worksessions as a tool for communication with the other Commissioners.

Commissioner Hogsett Stated that people have said to him that increasing the Commission to five members would be a mistake because you can't get five qualified people to run. He thought that was nonsense. He would prefer to increase the Commission to five members.

Commissioner Caflich has received comments that three Commissioners was enough and that this was an informational gathering event to help make the best decision for the City.

Mayor Ysusi said he has received the same comments as the other Commissioners and asked that the citizens of Independence please contact the Commissioners with their questions and opinions so that they could make an informed decision on this topic.

III. ADJOURNMENT

A. Adjournment

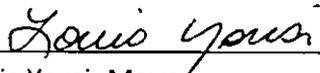
Motion:

Commissioner Caflich moved to adjourn. Commissioner Hogsett seconded.

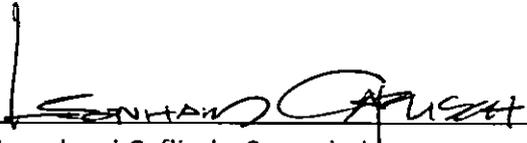
Aye: Ysusi, Caflich, Hogsett

Nay: None

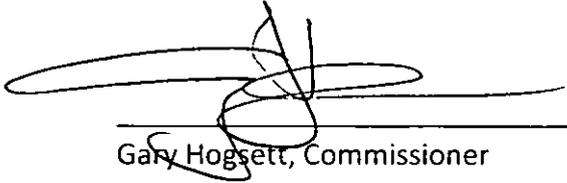
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Louis Ysusi, Mayor



Leonhard Caflisch, Commissioner



Gary Hogsett, Commissioner

Attest:



City Clerk/Treasurer

City Commission Meeting 4/17/2019

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