



# MINUTES

## SPECIAL Meeting

6:00 PM - Tuesday, May 28, 2019  
Council Chambers

The SPECIAL of the City of Ypsilanti was called to order on Tuesday, May 28, 2019, at 6:00 PM, in the Council Chambers, with the following members present:

**PRESENT:** Council Member Jennifer Symanns, Council Member Steven Wilcoxon, Council Member Nicole Brown, Mayor Pro-Tem Lois Richardson, Mayor Beth Bashert, and Council Member Anthony Morgan

**ABSENT:**

### I CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m.

### II INVOCATION

Mayor Bashert asked all to stand for a moment of silence.

### III PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

a) I pledge allegiance to the flag, of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

### IV AGENDA APPROVAL

a) Mayor Bashert requested a motion to approve the agenda.

**Council Member Anthony Morgan moved, seconded by Council Member Steven Wilcoxon, to approve the agenda as submitted**

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| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>CARRIED.</b>  |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Council Member Anthony Morgan  |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Council Member Steven Wilcoxon   |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Jennifer Symanns, Steven Wilcoxon, Nicole Brown, Lois Richardson, Beth Bashert, and Anthony Morgan |

### V PUBLIC COMMENT (3 MINUTES)

1. Shashanna Wector, 310 Maple, supported Annie Somerville for appointment to Ward 3. She also brought up her work with Senator Jeff Irwin.
2. Sharman Spieser, 2266 Merrill St, Ypsilanti Township, advocated for the appointment of Desirae Simmons. She commented on Ms. Simmons' connections to many demographics.

3. Barbara Zmich, 314 Maple, spoke in favor of Desirae Simmons because they know Ms. Simmons and agree on many things. She said that she admires her bottom up approach and that she is very empathetic. She added that Ms. Simmons is politically talented and morally aware.
4. Brian Geiringer, 415 Pearl, recited the quote, "we are what we consistently do so excellence in not an act but a habit" and noted that excellence is a habit of Ms. Simmons. He added that she is thoughtful, decisive, and has the ability to translate the will of the people. He also noted that she is the only candidate to run for council in the last election.
5. Anthony Sammour, 1414 Harris Rd, advocated for the appointment of Desirae Simmons. He added that she cares about participatory democracy.
6. Tyler Weston, 302 N Grove, thanked those running and Council for the opportunity.
7. Steve Grose, 929 Pleasant, spoke in favor of John McMillian. He has worked with Mr. McMillian in the past and he gets things done with respect. He encourages his appointment.
8. Celeste M, 314 Maple, supported Desirae Simmons.
9. Ruth Cassidy, 1511 Woodier, spoke in favor of Desirae Simmons. She noted that she ran in 2018 and took 800 votes.
10. Amber Fellows, Ward 3, supported Desirae Simmons, but also respects Annie Sommerville. She noted that Ms. Simmons is the only person to have voter support. She thinks that her communications background will assist Council. She stated that Ms. Simmons really hears what people are saying. She also noted that Ms. Simmons is a millennial and many of the city is. She thinks that she is the clear replacement of Pete Murdock. She noted that Ms. Simmons listens to all people in the Ward.
11. Finn Bell, 1123 Pearl, supported the appointment of Desirae Simmons and it is important that she ran for council.

## **VI REMARKS FROM THE MAYOR**

## **VII WARD 3 VACANCY INTERVIEW**

### **a) John McMillian Interview**

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked John McMillan how he would go about representing the residents of Ward 3. Mr. McMillan responded that he would work with the other Ward 3 council member to represent their constituents. He has also lived in Ward 3 for 20 years and has been active in the Depot Town neighborhood since then.

Council Member Morgan asked Mr. McMillan what he feels the city's opportunities are for increasing tax revenue and what would he would do to support bringing those opportunities to fruition. He responded that the city has to develop parking which will help to bring the train station and more businesses into the city. This will also bring more employers and create a greater tax base.

Council Member Symmans asked Mr. McMillan how in the last 10 years he has worked across all 3 Wards and what his reputation is regarding the City, prior to City Council hopes. He has been involved with Ward 2, Heritage Festivals,

the pool, Eastern Michigan, Huron River, the Township, and has worked with the Freighthouse for 9 years.

Council Member Brown asked how important it is to represent a constituency base and reflect their concerns despite how he feels about the concerns. He replied that it is very important, and the biggest thing is for the city to work together and with the Township to bring jobs and opportunities to the city. There are also many opportunities in the parks for more activities.

Mayor Bashert asked how Mr. McMillan plans to deal with the time intensive position with constituents who are used to responsive and strong council members. He responded that he is retired and has a lot of time to be available to constituents. He is also active with the University and Township communities.

Council Member Wilcoxon asked how he sees balancing the needs of the varied people in Ward 3 and the City overall. He responded that he is both a landlord and a resident of the area. He wants the whole city to grow and to make sure all the Wards work together.

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked how often he has attended council meetings and if he is up to date with the issues. He stated that he attends council meeting in spurts particularly when there is a topic with which he is involved. He is informed about council business on a daily basis from the community and has been involved with many departments including fire, police, parks and recreation, and public works.

Council Member Morgan asked Mr. McMillan if he were to receive a \$1 million grant to use for the city what would he do with it. Mr. McMillan responded that he would like to hear from other council members and the community to help him determine for what the grant should be used.

Council Member Symmans asked if someone came to him with a proposal to build a new piece of public infrastructure in the city how would he would evaluate whether the project was worth implementing. He replied that he is from the construction industry and is very familiar with evaluating these types of projects.

Council Member Brown asked Mr. McMillan what assets he will bring to council and how they would help move the council and city forward. He replied that his background, experience, and involvement with the community would be helpful. He will also work to make sure the community is part of the decision-making process.

Mayor Bashert asked given that this seat is being filled by vote of council rather than constituents, how does he plan to represent Ward 3 and balance his representation of the constituents if they are not congruent with his opinions. Mr. McMillian stated that it has been his experience that when working with different groups there is often some agreement. It is important to listen and work with the parties involved to make the best decision.

Council Member Wilcoxon asked Mr. McMillan if he thinks it is reasonable to use city government to limit legal activity based on personal moral values. Mr. McMillan responded that to an extent it is reasonable. In the past he has worked as a government contractor and has followed the required procedure.

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked Mr. McMillan to explain the difference between diversity, equity, and inclusion and how he sees them interplay in Ypsilanti. He replied that it is important to make sure we look at everything in the community and make sure that we are making decisions that have all three categories represented. It also depends on the topic and what is the desired outcome.

Following the questions from council, Mr. McMillan then made a short statement. He stated that he was born and raised in Detroit, moved to Northville, and has been in Ypsilanti for the past 24-26 years. He has enjoyed working on many projects and thinks he is an active member of the community. He has worked with many groups of people and diverse age groups. He described himself as level-headed, he offers his opinion, but also likes to listen to others.

**b) Desirae N.P. Simmons Interview**

Council Member Morgan asked Desirae Simmons how she would go about representing the residents of Ward 3. She responded that she would represent residents the way she currently does. She would find out what is important to them and the issues they face and would then look for the appropriate solution. She would also like to connect people with different government departments, informal groups, and share resources throughout the city.

Council Member Symmans asked Mr. Simmons what she feels the city's opportunities are for increasing our tax revenue and what she would do to support bringing these opportunities to fruition. Ms. Simmons replied that it is important to look at the relationship between the city and the township in the long-term. It is also important to support existing businesses districts. It is also important to make sure that there are opportunities for residents to stay and buy homes in the city.

Council Member Brown asked Ms. Simmons how in the last 10 years she has worked across all 3 wards and what her reputation is regarding the City, prior to City Council hopes. Ms. Simmons responded that while living in Boston she did a lot of community engagement work with youth and low-income communities and looked for more ways to support these students. Since moving to Ypsilanti in 2014 she has believes that she has a strong relationship across the wards. She has organized many community events within the city, worked with community groups, and served on the subcommittee on housing affordability.

Mayor Bashert asked how important it is to represent a constituency base and reflect their concerns despite how she feels about their concerns. Ms.

Simmons responded with a few examples of working with constituents on topics that were not her top priority and also times she was honest about her position on a subject and was able to still retain their support.

Council Member Wilcoxon asked Ms. Simmons how she plans to deal with the time intensive council position with constituents who are used to responsive and strong council members. She responded that she is very responsive and present in the community. She is used to balancing a lot of things has shown commitment to council business by attending meetings and catching up on council business.

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked Ms. Simmons how she sees balancing the needs of the varied people in Ward 3 and the City overall. Ms. Simmons responded that Ward 3's diversity is her favorite part of living there. Though her work, she has also found that people often want similar things and it is important to bring other voices into those conversations and increase access to information.

Council Member Morgan asked Ms. Simmons how often she has attended council meetings and if he is kept up to date with the issues. She stated that she attends once or twice a month and also tries to attend other commission meetings. She feels very up to date on council issues, but also recognizes that there will be a learning curve.

Council Member Symmans asked Ms. Simmons if she were to receive a \$1 million grant to use for the city what would she do with it. Ms. Simmons replied that she would look at the city budget and try to fund some of the projects the City has not been able to fund. She would also put up signs to reduce vehicle speed and increase safety.

Council Member Brown asked Ms. Simmons if someone came to her with a proposal to build a new piece of public infrastructure in the city how would she evaluate whether the project was worth implementing. Ms. Simmons stated that she would get a sense of the proposal to determine if there is a need from current residents, look at the success of past projects completed by this person, and think about how this piece of infrastructure would lead to other opportunities.

Mayor Bashert asked Ms. Simmons what assets she will bring to council and how they would help move the council and city forward. Ms. Simmons responded that she can support communication and transparency efforts and seeks to improve engagement among residents.

Council Member Wilcoxon asked given that this seat is being filled by vote of council rather than constituents, how does she plan to represent Ward 3 and balance her representation of the constituents if they are not congruent with her opinions. She responded that she will always represent her opinions and people will know her position on topics. She will also represent the voices of her constituents and support them as much as they do not go against her values.

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked Ms. Simmons if she thinks it is reasonable to use city government to limit legal activity based on personal moral values. Ms. Simmons replied that it is not.

Council Member Morgan asked Ms. Simmons to explain the difference between diversity, equity, and inclusion and how she sees them interplay in Ypsilanti. She responded that diversity is about general representation of different demographics. Equity is about allocation of resources and opportunities. Inclusion is thinking about how everyone can be included in a space. She stated that Ypsilanti is a very diverse place does not provide equitable access to resources. Inclusion is about thinking about opening the space for people who do not feel like they can be a part of the decision-making process.

Following the questions from council, Ms. Simmons noted that she is a very open person, reasonable, and is trusted by members of the community and thinks that serves her well.

**c) Annie Somerville Interview**

Council Member Symmans asked Annie Somerville how she would go about representing the residents of Ward 3. Ms. Somerville responded that she has worked in Ward 3 and has a good sense of where to meet people. The biggest thing is to be available and flexible to communicate with constituents.

Council Member Brown asked Ms. Somerville what she feels the city's opportunities are for increasing our tax revenue and what she would do to support bringing these opportunities to fruition. Ms. Somerville replied that one of her concerns is to make sure that Eastern graduates can stay in the city and thinks that bring more jobs and increasing connection to other jobs will increase home ownership within the city.

Mayor Bashert asked Ms. Somerville how in the last 10 years she has worked across all 3 wards and what her reputation is regarding the City, prior to City Council hopes. Ms. Somerville responded that she has been in the city for 6 years. When she was an EMU student she was active on campus to increase millennial civic engagement. She also tries to make sure that she is aware of important that happen at council meetings.

Council Member Wilcoxon asked Ms. Somerville how important it is to represent a constituency base and reflect their concerns despite how she may feel about their concerns. Ms. Somerville responded that because this is an appointment it is especially important to be very accessible and value the constituents over personal opinions.

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked Ms. Somerville how she plans to deal with the time intensive council position with constituents who are used to responsive and strong council members. She responded that she has had to balance work and school in the past. She also has to respond to constituents as part of her current job and would use the same standards as in her office.

Council Member Morgan asked Ms. Somerville how she sees balancing the needs of the varied people in Ward 3 and the City overall. Ms. Somerville responded that she is a renter in Depot Town and was formerly a renter in Ward 2. Her perspective as a renter will be helpful when making decisions to ensure that they work for everyone.

Council Member Symmans asked Ms. Somerville how often she has attended council meetings and if she is kept up to date with the issues. She stated that she attended the last two budget previews and is aware of the issues facing the city.

Council Member Brown asked Ms. Somerville if she were to receive a \$1 million grant to use for the city what would she do with it. She thinks that this money should be used to help Eastern students and current residents get jobs and stay in the city.

Mayor Bashert asked Ms. Somerville if someone came to her with a proposal to build a new piece of public infrastructure in the city how would she evaluate whether the project was worth implementing. Ms. Somerville responded that it is important to make sure it is safe, there is money available, and that it would not put additional burden on the city.

Council Member Wilcoxon asked Ms. Somerville what assets she will bring to council and how they would help move the council and city forward. Ms. Somerville responded that it would be good to have more women in positions of power. Through conversations with residents she has also gained an understanding of their concerns. She also works for the State of Michigan and has a good understanding about council functions and the connections between different levels of government.

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked given that this seat is being filled by vote of council rather than constituents, how does she plan to represent Ward 3 and balance her representation of the constituents if they are not congruent with her opinions. She stated that it is important to listen to constituents and weigh their concerns when making decisions.

Council Member Morgan asked Ms. Somerville if he thinks it is reasonable to use city government to limit legal activity based on personal moral values. Ms. Somerville responded that she does not believe it would be her role to limit legal activity as a council member.

Council Member Symmans asked Ms. Somerville to explain the difference between diversity, equity, and inclusion and how she sees them interplay in Ypsilanti. She responded that they are present within Council, Eastern Michigan University and City and County initiatives, but there is still more to be done.

Following questions from Council, Ms. Somerville thanked Council for the opportunity to be interviewed. She noted that Pete left big shoes to fill and hopes to be as accessible as he was.

**d) Tyler Weston Interview**

Council Member Brown asked Tyler Weston how he would go about representing the residents of Ward 3. Weston responded that he knows the home owners, renters, and business owners in the Ward as a resident and with his career in real estate. He ran for council 5 years ago and became even more familiar with the business owners and non profits in the ward.

Mayor Bashert asked Mr. Weston what he feels the city's opportunities are for increasing our tax revenue and what she would do to support bringing these opportunities to fruition. Mr. Weston responded that it is important to understand strategies that can increase taxable value of parcels within the city. It is also important to work with the business community to increase their taxable value as well. His career in real estate has given him a deep understanding of tax value.

Council Member Wilcox asked Mr. Weston how in the last 10 years how he has worked across all 3 wards and what his reputation is regarding the City, prior to City Council hopes. Mr. Weston replied that he has been on the committee for Ypsi Pride/Proud Clean-Up Day for the last 10 years and has helped organize thousands of residents to clean all parts of the city. He was also named Ozone House's Volunteer of the Year.

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked Mr. Weston how important it is to represent a constituency base and reflect their concerns despite how he feels about their concerns. Weston responded that he listens to people to understand their needs and wants before he responds.

Council Member Morgan asked Mr. Weston how he plans to deal with the time intensive council position with constituents who are used to responsive and strong council members. He responded that he has experience balancing many things and has found that he is able to find time for things that are important to him. He stated that he would not take on a new commitment if he does not think he has the necessary time and passion. He also noted that he is very responsive and a good communicator.

Council Member Symmans asked Mr. Weston how he sees balancing the needs of the varied people in Ward 3 and the City overall. Mr. Weston replied that he is very well connected to the community because he serves these communities on a daily basis.

Council Member Brown asked Mr. Weston how often he has attended council meetings and if he is kept up to date with the issues. He stated that he in the past four years he has been more involved with Ypsilanti Community Schools. Before that he attended council meetings more frequently. He is very aware of current community issues.

Mayor Bashert asked Mr. Weston if she were to receive a \$1 million grant to use for the city what would he do with it. He responded that he would try to match it from the county or state. He would work on property maintenance within the city.

Council Member Wilcoxon asked Mr. Weston if someone came to him with a proposal to build a new piece of public infrastructure in the city how would he evaluate whether the project was worth implementing. Mr. Weston replied that he would first learn towards a project that would have the most impact on the community. He would also like to see investment in the I-94 crossing bridge and the one-way streets to increase safety.

Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson asked Mr. Weston what assets he will bring to council and how they would help move the council and city forward. Mr. Weston responded that his understanding of economic development and what people are looking for when investing in the city would be beneficial.

Council Member Morgan asked given that this seat is being filled by vote of council rather than constituents, how does he plan to represent Ward 3 and balance his representation of the constituents if they are not congruent with his opinions. He stated that he makes decisions based on his experiences working with residents. He is a good listener and communicator and cares about the community.

Council Member Symmans asked Mr. Weston if he thinks it is reasonable to use city government to limit legal activity based on personal moral values. Mr. Weston does not think it is reasonable.

Council Member Brown asked Mr. Weston to explain the difference between diversity, equity, and inclusion and how he sees them interplay in Ypsilanti. He responded that diversity is difference in many forms including people, places, and ideas. Equity starts with recognizing that some people have privileges that others do not. equity helps give people a level up with the recognition that they started at a lower level. Inclusion is also a recognition of privilege and that most decisions have been historically made by white males. He noted that it is important to listen to many different perspectives.

Following the questions for council, Mr. Weston then thanked Council for the opportunity. He noted that Pete Murdock left big shoes to fill and would do the best he can to step in to the role.

## **VIII PUBLIC COMMENT (3 MINUTES)**

1. Julia Bayha, 401 W Michigan, supported Desirae Simmons to be appointed. It is important for people to be involved. She met the best activists in the city and Ms. Simmons was a part of that.
2. Bryan Foley, 425 Ainsworth Circle, supported Desirae Simmons. He has worked with her on many different projects. He noted that she is very actively engagement in council meetings. He stated that the constituency has already

spoken and that it would be a direct violation and disrespect of the democratic process to select anyone other than Ms. Simmons.

3. Carly Ebersol, 205 Maple, supported Desirae Simmons. She stated that Ms. Simmons has worked to make information more accessible and has shown a commitment to engage with people from a variety of backgrounds.
4. Mary Garboden, 1123 Pearl, supported Desirae Simmons. She was impressed because she put her name in because she was asked to run. She noted that Ms. Simmons brings humility and recognized that she has a lot to learn.
5. Kyle Hunter, 430 S Adams, supported Desirae Simmons. He has been involved with the Human Relation Commission and has seen how she has been involved with HRC and Council.
6. Taylor FQ, 201 N Washington, stated that the ideal function of democracy is to reflect the desires of constituents and serve the community. She supported Desirae Simmons and noted that she is the only person to run for Ward 3 and has continued to be involved after she lost. She stated that Ms. Simmons is the only candidate for Ward 3.
7. Stephanie Weston, 302 N Grove, supported Tyler Weston. She stated that he has done a lot of work in service of the city and thinks he would be a great choice.
8. Amy Shrodes, River St, supported Desirae Simmons, the only qualified candidate for Ward 3.
9. Amber Fellows, Ward 3, stated that each candidate has great qualities. She still supported Desirae Simmons and think she is the right person for the role. She noted that it is important to note the tensions and acknowledge inequity and thinks Ms. Simmons would be the best candidate to ease tension.

Nicole Brown thanked all the candidates for there is a lot to think about. Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson noted that it takes a special person to consider running. She thanked the candidates for applying and coming out to interview. She encouraged candidates to continue to be involved even if they are not chosen.

## **IX REMARKS FROM THE MAYOR**

## **X ADJOURNMENT**

**Council Member Morgan moved, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Richardson to adjourn the meeting.**

On a voice vote, the motion carried, and the meeting adjourned at 8:42 p.m.