



This Week

With the Mayor



March 11th, 2019

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Racism, Homophobia, and Current Events

Last week, four City Council members initiated a process that resulted in the resignation of our City Manager. The process began with these Council members calling a special City Council meeting with 24 hours notice. The stated reason was “staff review.” No other information was provided. When an agenda was published, it contained one item, going into closed session.

This process was begun immediately after the City Manager had hired an outside white candidate over an internal black candidate for the position of Fire Chief. Many people from the community stepped forward to speak up for the internal candidate, Ken Hobbs. Consistently, over and over again, people spoke about race bias or implicit bias in the hiring process. Interestingly, the sexual orientation of the City Manager and myself was also brought up a number of times.

Our City Charter forbids anyone on City Council from commenting on or lobbying for or against job applicants. It also forbids us from criticizing staff in public, either in any form of writing, or verbally. Lastly, due to legal concerns, I am not able to give any information yet about what our next steps will be about the Fire Chief position. Thank you for your understanding.

Racism and Homophobia in Ypsilanti

Racism and homophobia are clear and present dangers in our community, both locally and nationally. Both permeate everything, including hiring and perceptions of job performance, access to education, quality of life, life span, public safety, and more. Shamefully, we live at a time when we have more tools than ever to deal with these issues, and yet more than ever, we seem to be struggling with them.

I am committed to addressing racism and homophobia in our community. I have worked on these issues for more than 20 years and will continue to do so for the rest of my life. As your Mayor, I reiterate that commitment to you and the City of Ypsilanti.

What we can do to address making things more equitable:

1. When considering applications, remove personal data to make hiring “blind.”
2. Have job postings placed in ways that ensure distribution to diverse communities.
3. Continue to examine our processes and policies and removing or correcting anything that constitutes or implies race bias or homophobia.

Systemic racism has been a blight on our nation for 400 years. We are not going to correct it overnight. Homophobia is also deeply rooted and we see it at every public Council meeting when my and others sexual orientation is brought up as a regular comment by some residents. Yet we cannot allow bigotry in any form to poison our community further.

My wish is that we will work together to eliminate the biases that affect many systems in our local government and not continue these unjust practices. By working on the systemic issues, we can make real, lasting change possible.

Transparency in City Government

I am also committed to transparency to our community in all aspects of government. This process was not transparent.

- This process smacked of back room politics, of deals made behind closed doors. Residents wonder why the emergency reaction, when a Council meeting had taken place just 2 nights before and another was scheduled before the end of the month.
- In this case, the lack of transparency was completely unnecessary. With 4 votes, they had all they needed, and sharing information was completely without risk. Taking measured, deliberate action, and setting a plan in place, could have avoided problems for the City.
- Trust is the victim when secret agendas are compiled. The trust of the community has been harmed by this process.

I am committed to protecting our City from the unintended outcomes of actions like this. By not having a plan in place and taking such strong action with no notice, our City INCREASED our problems dramatically. The City Manager is a key staff person in countless areas of pressing work now underway in Ypsilanti. Last minute work by staff mitigated some of it, but not all. At the least, this action cost the City tens of thousands of dollars and it could have been much worse.

Next Steps

I am committed to helping our community move forward. Following is a partial list of the projects our City Manager was working on that now will be handed off to other staff without a plan or robust transmission of information to bring us up to speed.

- A train stop in our City again, a large project that has been in the works for years and just last week moved into actions steps, starting with sending a grant application to Washington DC.
- Finally establishing a City-wide parking strategy; I don't have to tell you how important this is and how long we have needed it.
- We have a decision forthcoming on Peninsular Dam and, whatever decision is made, it will be a big project.
- Hiring 3 department heads and now a City Manager.
- Upgrading our city council technology, adding live streaming, and other improvements.

This is a time of opportunity for our City and we must take action on these opportunities while we can. We cannot miss the opportunities in front of us. It has taken years to get the train station, a HUGE and federally-funded/-managed project. It is a big lift to get it going and will be more to complete it. Our community wants and needs progress on all these projects, and I am going to work as hard as I can to make sure we get them.

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