

August 25, 2008

Minutes of the special meeting of the City Council of the City of Clinton, Illinois in session in the Council Chambers of City Hall, Monday Aug. 25, 2008 at 6:00 p.m. Mayor Ed Wollet, presiding. On roll call Commissioners Edmunds, Hickman, Wise and Milton were present.

Mayor Wollet said the Council will have a work session this evening for the purpose of talking with the Volunteer Fire Dept. and IMAP if time permits.

Mayor Wollet gave some ground rules for the meeting to a large attendance of volunteers and interested citizens of the community.

Before taking any comments or questions from those attending, Mayor Wollet explained the basic format of the Commission (modified) form of government – the thought of shared responsibilities for the Fire Chief to report to someone other than Commissioner of Public Health & Safety is not true. They cannot. The thought that the Council can re-vote on the Fire Chief – is not a possibility also. Removal from an office after appointment involves charges being levied against the individual. The Commissioner of Public Health & Safety has control over all of the various employees and equipment of the Fire Dept.

This arranged special meeting can only be held in open session not meeting any of the requirements of a closed session material.

Opening the discussion up to the Officers of the Volunteers first brought Steve Mayfield, Captain in the organization. He informed the Councilmen that the volunteers are not on strike with no work stoppage and care very much about this community.

With a group of 16 volunteers getting together after the Fire Chief was appointed on Monday Aug. 18th, Steve came forward to represent those volunteers and communicate their thoughts and feelings to date. With the loss of 2 volunteer officers having 22 years of experience, Steve wanted to convey to Council the risk of having a shortage of even more firemen in the near future leaving might create a safety risk. Basically their concerns are that there needs to be a separation or buffer between Commissioner (father) / Fire Chief (son). Several other concerns about the process in which this fire chief position was fill, was answered one at a time as they were asked.

Ray James also reiterated that at no time are they not protecting our community. He mentioned that with a group you have a wide gambit of opinions with some only wanting to be firemen – yet they do not think this is right. The department has been through such emotional times after the sudden loss of Chief Pearl. These volunteers are passionate about their role or they would not stay with the force – yet they hope everyone is on the same page. Mayor Wollet expressed the Council's appreciation to not only Ray but also Steve for what the Fire Dept. does in this community.

Mayor Wollet said that when the vote was taken, that when the person and position was appointed – we have a Fire Chief. He cannot perform the duties until he is sworn and

bonded through the City of Clinton. The only thing that can take that away is to be charged by cause. In the department looking for a buffer – there is no buffer.

Steve Mayfield questioned two points – throughout this process to hire a Fire Chief it was never talked about by Council the concerns of the volunteers. The other question is why the Commissioner did not vote “present”.

Answer from Commissioner Milton was that by law he is allowed to vote, which he did exercise.

Daryn Black said that with a shortage of volunteers, it will take close to four months to train and get them prepared for duties – beginning without the experience that is very hard on the department.

Aaron Kammeyer – Secretary/Treasurer of the Volunteers reported that he thinks this these issues have been festering for the last 10 years. In the past 6 months things have intensified to a much greater degree. A lot of disturbances go on within the department, however general public is not aware of those problems. The department is in need of a leader and he felt the leader walked away and resigned the previous week.

Darren Barnhill felt that this appointment should be someone who can bridge all of these rifts within the department. He quoted some qualities that should have been looked into for an independent person to make decisions and wise enough to accept input from the fellow firefighters.

Mayor Wollet interjected at this point in time that this new Fire chief has not had a chance to perform yet. He had been an assistant a little over a year and Council hasn't had a charge brought against him.

Kim Gaff said that as a community person she feels the firefighters are very unhappy and the Council is lacking in support. It should be addressed soon before all of the experience men are gone – something the City would not regain.

Mayor Wollet then turned to Council after making a final call to the audience for comments.

Commissioner Edmunds appreciates everyone's concern and that he has never had these rifts conveyed to him in the past. It is so much more complex now than in the past years. Any problems in the future would go directly to the Council to hold a hearing/determination. He continued by addressing the comment that funds were denied to the Fire Dept. for purchasing equipment/gear – this just hasn't happened. Work has been cut out for not only the Fire Chief but also the Volunteers to keep this department top notch like it's reputation stands.

Commission Hickman repeated the statement he made at the Council meeting last week. How will putting a new title on this person will make a difference for this department – the last nine months, things have continuously gotten worse.

Commissioner Wise in talking with the firemen this past week, helped to bring both sides together to get some dialog going hopefully to start on the road of healing all feelings. As a Commissioner, he based his decision on his notes and personal feelings about the interviews, not what Terry Ford had compiled. He leaned more toward someone new that had no ties to the department what so ever. At this point he will work hard continuously to help this appointment succeed.

The volunteers whole hardily do not want in any way to continually be calling on the City Council to intercede if other problems arise – they just want to be firemen.

Mayor Wollet wrapped up this meeting by saying there are two choices left – one choice would be to fight your way through this appointment or help him be the very best Fire Chief he can be.

Motion was made by Commissioner Edmunds and seconded by Commissioner Milton to adjourn the meeting. Motion was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rozella D. Wickenhauser
City Clerk