



Special City Council Meeting

Monday, July 1, 2024, at 4:30 PM

City Council Chambers, City Hall (10 3rd Ave SW)

Any person needing special accommodation for the meeting is requested to notify the City Clerk's office at 857-4752.

1. ROLL CALL
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
3. PRESENTATION OF AWARDS TO OUTGOING COUNCIL MEMBERS
4. CLOSING REMARKS FOR OUTGOING COUNCIL MEMBERS
 - 4.1. CLOSING REMARKS FOR OUTGOING COUNCIL MEMBERS
5. ADJOURNMENT
6. SWEARING IN OF NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS & SIGNING OF OATH OF OFFICE
7. ROLL CALL
8. ELECTION OF CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT
9. ELECTION OF CITY COUNCIL VICE PRESIDENT
10. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES
 - 10.1. APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES
11. ADJOURNMENT

Council Remarks
Alderman Stephan Podrygula
July 1, 2024

Reflecting back on the past four years, I wanted to strike three themes: gratitude, admonition, and hope.

My opening theme is that of gratitude:

First, to the citizens of Minot, for the opportunity to have served them for the past four years.

Second, to our city staff, who work hard to provide basic municipal services. I particularly thank those who work under adverse circumstances, such as cold, snow, mud, or darkness. My special gratitude goes to those in our police and fire services, who daily put their lives on the line for us.

Third, to the members of the current Council, for their collegiality and dedication to the welfare of the city.

Fourth, to the members of the press who have covered our proceedings. In particular, I want to mention the following: Josh Wolsky, for his energetic muckraking; Rob Port, the Forum's excellent investigative reporter and political columnist; and Jonathan Starr, who conducted extensive candidate interviews.

With corporate restructuring, local television news coverage has diminished, although Joe Skurzewski does his very best at KMOT.

I want to particularly single out Jill Schramm, Minot Daily News associate editor, who has provided remarkably accurate, objective, and timely reporting for many years.

I highlight the work of the press to report on what the city does and hold us accountable. These days, many individuals and forces attack some of the basic institutions of our society, including law enforcement, an independent judiciary, election integrity, and a hard-working civil service. Some even go so far as to call the free press "the enemy of the people" – this is a total perversion of reality and an extraordinarily dangerous position to hold: in reality, a free and vigorous press is the bulwark of a free society and our democratic form of government, and it deserves our gratitude and strong support.

My second theme is to admonish, meaning to counsel, caution, and instruct.

While I agree with the three new members of the Council that “we can do better”, and that there are important similarities between a successful business and responsive government, I must point out that there are also fundamental differences.

For one thing, while the goal of business is generally to make a profit for its owners, the purpose of government is to serve the public in general. By necessity, a public servant has to focus on what is best for the entire community, not just one’s friends, political party, or ideological allies. Also, we need to look at a much longer timeframe – years, decades, or even longer – rather than just aim for a profitable quarter or year. An open mind, wisdom, and discernment are called for.

The issues that come before the Council are often complex, with no simple or obvious solution. To effectively address our city’s issues, you need to take a broad perspective, and look at a situation from different points of view. Looking through only one lens will narrow your focus and limit your ability to honestly weigh alternatives. At times, a “conservative” lens may help you see most clearly; however, at other times, a “liberal” or “progressive” point of view may be most effective in seeing the solution to a problem. If you are too strongly wedded to a particular political ideology, you will lack the flexibility needed to function effectively and responsibly represent all the people. Appreciation of diversity is a real strength.

George Washington, in his Farewell Address of 1796, cautioned about allegiance to “factions” and “combinations or associations”, rather than to the public good in general. He warned about “the dangers of Parties in the State”, which is of increasing concern given the tendency of some to become openly partisan in their politics and the increasing polarization in our society.

Related to this danger is the influx of large sums of money into the political process, even at the local level, which can threaten the integrity of those in office and adversely affect their objectivity and allegiances. For example, I recently discovered that a local political action committee, or PAC, had raised over \$304,000 in the past couple of years, and that two Council candidates were closely associated with it; the business one of them owns received over \$37,000 from the PAC.

I’m used to the way it was in the old days, when you passed the hat around at a picnic or held a bake sale to raise campaign funds, not where wealthy individuals or large sums of money held sway. For the record, I have not asked for any campaign contributions for at least the past six years, and the most I ever received from an individual or couple was \$100.

A recent former president has decried “the swamp” that exists in American politics, and I agree with him, particularly when it comes to the potentially corrupting influence of large sums of money. 29 individuals gave \$1000 or more to this PAC; apart from this, two individuals gave a total of \$7000 to one candidate in a single day. This is a lot of money, and I think the average citizen would be surprised and probably disappointed to learn that “the swamp” is seeping into our local politics.

As a clinician, part of my job is to help my clients understand the things that are motivating them and influencing their behavior, and to make conscious and deliberate choices (rather than being influenced by other forces). As a forensic psychologist, I am keenly aware of factors that might adversely influence my judgment and compromise my objectivity. Knowing that a person has given you this much money will undoubtedly influence your judgment. Even if you think you will not be unduly influenced, look at it from the donor's point of view: do you really think that someone will write you a check for \$3500 out of the goodness of their heart, and without expecting something in return? Scripture, after all, warns us that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil"; while a check for \$3500 may not lead to love, it could easily lead to infatuation.

My final admonition has to do with the increasing intolerance and hostility in our civic life. Voter apathy and cynicism are nothing new, but my sense is that they are increasing, along with rigidity, intolerance, religious zealotry, and outright hostility. We need to restore and maintain comity, civility, cooperation, and principled compromise. At the very least, we need to abide by George Washington's faith, expressed in his 1790 Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, that our government give "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance", and that "everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid".

My third and final theme has to do with faith and hope.

While I do not want to impose my deeply held beliefs onto others, I feel some obligation to clarify what they are, and to encourage the members of the Council to carefully examine their own guiding principles and actualize them in their actions.

As for many people, the Sermon on the Mount is the foundation of my moral principles, particularly as expressed in The Beatitudes. Concern for "the least of these" has been at the core of my professional work and also what I have tried to accomplish on the Council.

On a more secular note, I am guided by the observation of the eminent North Dakota historian, Elwyn Robinson, that being "on the prairie... emphasizes the worth of the individual, where each is needed and each can do his part in the upward struggle of a rural society".

I continue to be deeply influenced by the motto of the school I graduated from: "That the better self shall prevail and each generation introduce its successor to a higher plane of life".

Let me end by expressing my gratitude, ultimately, to the Founders of our country, who, relying on Divine Providence, established a republican form of government that is still the hope of the world, and the foundation of all our cities and states ever since.

Building upon that foundation, our challenge is to perpetuate those ideals, institutions, and processes, from our Council chambers to the halls of Congress.

As some of you may know, my parents were political refugees to America. I learned from them what evil tyrannical governments can do, and what a particular blessing liberty and democracy can be. I have tried to serve in a manner that helps repay the debt that my family owes to this country.

I believe that every citizen has an obligation to serve their community, and to participate in its shared governance, to the best of their ability. This is an important and very personal process and activity for me.

I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity to serve, and the Blessings that we have been given. Thank you all.

SP/d
07/01/2024

2024-2026 Committee Assignments

All Seasons Arena (Q)

1. Mark Jantzer
2. Mike Blessum

Liaison (City/County/Park/School) (Q)

1. Mark Jantzer
2. Lisa Olson

Commission on Aging (M)

1. Mike Blessum

Souris Basin Planning Council (M)

1. Lisa Olson

Library (M)

1. Rob Fuller

MADC (M)

1. Tom Ross (Mayor)

County Planning (M)

1. Rob Fuller
2. Scott Samuelson

CVB (Visit Minot) (M)

1. Paul Pitner

Emergency Resource Council Steering CMTE

1. Rob Fuller

Pension Board (AN)

1. Mark Jantzer
2. Scott Samuelson

Ward Co. Narcotics Task Force (AN)

1. Mark Jantzer

Renaissance Board (AN)

1. Paul Pitner

Zoning Ordinance Steering (M)

1. Scott Samuelson

Emergency 911 Committee (Q)

1. Mike Blessum

(M) Monthly

(Q) Quarterly

(AN) As Needed