

MINUTES
CALLED MEETING
MAY 3, 2022

A called meeting of the Council for the City of Covington was held on Tuesday, May 3, 2022, at 5:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall located at 333 W. Locust Street, Covington, Virginia.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Thomas Sibold, Jr., with the following members present: Mayor Thomas Sibold, Jr., Vice Mayor David S. Crosier, Councilman William E. Carson, Jr., Councilman Raymond C. Hunter, and Councilman S. Allan Tucker.

The purpose of the meeting was to conduct interviews for the Alleghany Highlands School Board. The Mayor thanked each candidate for seeking appointment to the school board. He explained that each Councilman would each ask questions of the six candidates. If a candidate was not being interviewed, they would be asked to wait in the hallway of City Hall until being called for their interview.

Jonathan Arritt, was the first candidate. Mr. Arritt has the desire to serve on the new joint school board. Stated that there needs to be a smooth transition and there to be regional coordination. The merger with schools is a plus and an opportunity. In reference to budgets, there will need to be transparency for any new challenge. He believes he can work cohesively with all members of the school board. His goals and objectives are to ensure smooth transition, being flexible. There is a Governor's school at Dabney S. Lancaster Community College and is pleased to have the local college. In reference to handling something confidential for a student/family, the Superintendent would need to be made aware and a closed session meeting if needed. Mr. Arritt believes that the City sufficiently funds the school system. Believes that there should be fairness to all school children. That the merger of schools should be navigated with thoughtfulness.

Tammy Scruggs-Duncan, was the second candidate. She stated that she was previously on the school board, has spent time working as a substitute teacher. Being in the classroom she sees the prospective of teachers and how difficult it has been after COVID for teachers to work with children that should be on one or two grade levels ahead. There needs to be a strong plan for the children. She believes the larger class sizes will benefit the children, a stronger sports program and an end of the two schools rivalry and division. In reference to communication, the school board would meet with City Council in the past and know why decisions were made. She has worked with a merger plan believes that she can communicate with the other board members. Her goals are Arts and culture; the revival of music and teaching the children life skills to know how to balance a checkbook, do their taxes. In reference to confidential information, it would be kept confidential. She believes the City funds the school sufficiently. The merger of schools is a fair agreement and schools separately are strained. Her main concern is to achieve the goal of merger and stick to the plan. This is building something exciting and is willing to travel to Indiana or another state to see ideas and everyone working together for the merger.

Marie Fitzpatrick, was the third candidate. Ms. Fitzpatrick believes with her experience with budget/finance and working with young people in HR can benefit the school board. She stated that the merger of schools is positive. That everyone can work together and salary adjustments are a beginning. The school staff were told they would not lose their jobs however in a couple years it may change to be financially feasible. Ms. Fitzpatrick is not a native to the area and can look at controversy objectively and know decisions to be made. She believes the students need a path to success, all on same level. The technical center has improved and not all students will go to college. There needs to be more employment opportunities. In reference to confidential information, she would speak to officials in closed session because it is confidential and also children are sometimes sensitive. The City has provided competitive salaries. There needs to be curriculum and Dabney S. Lancaster Community College being an affiliation is a plus. There was situation were a student went to UVA and was missing classes/instruction however she caught up and graduated from college. She does not see any real concerns about school merger, and sees only the positive coming from this. She believes that with government support and economic development this will assist.

Karen Kessinger, was the fourth candidate. Ms. Kessinger believes that the school consolidation is a new adventure. She wants to make a difference and believes this will get the community to come together. She views this as students having more opportunities, classes more rounded and being cost effective. She would listen to other school board members and be positive and make her own judgements. She believes this can be a bonding together. The students will have more opportunities, that there should be hiring of those qualified, to maintain moral. She has worked as a teacher, aide and in private school. She has many years of education experience with staff working together. She wants to be a part of this merger and being honest and open. If something is confidential, it should be kept confidential if there is a need for it to go to other staff it would be confidentially. She believes that the City has funded the schools sufficiently. She has always been creative and made it work. There is a need for reading, writing and arithmetic. Some state mandates can cause an issue. She believe that if all students have the same benefits and all treated the same there will not be a problem with the merger. She does not see concerns with the merger, especially since a lot of the students are already friends. Her main objective is that students come first, that they are provided the best teachers and discipline. That they are also provided a safe facility, that all receive the same benefits. She wants students to be job worthy and have life skills, college is not for everyone, and most learn hands-on. She wants students to be supported. She can make a difference and wants the merger to be successful and support all students.

Mike Wickline, was the fifth candidate. Mr. Wickline believes the joint school system can be great for the kids and the area. Schools being separate is not cost effective. He hopes he could make a difference in students' lives. The joint school system would make more opportunities for kids, to be job ready and to build the community back. The City has a certain amount to support the schools. If the school board could have the best plan then funds would not be wasted. He believes he can work with anyone and can bring different ideas in the group. Students need life skills training. To enable to be self-sufficient. This is an electronic age, they need hands on skills. He believes that something confidential is confidential and that something should only be shared if there is a clearance to be so. Everything should be fair for all students. Mr. Wickline doesn't have any concerns about a joint school system, however there are challenges, he can think outside the box. The benefits can outweigh the challenges. He would like the opportunity to serve on the consolidated school board and share his ideas and see it prosper.

Jay Woodson, was the final candidate. Mr. Woodson believes the joint school system will expand technical and educational opportunities for youth. He is a numbers person when it relates to the school system. Students will be effective differently with the consolidation. He believes he can do his homework and spend the taxpayers' money effectively. He has deep convictions, is open-minded to hear others for the betterment of the community. The consolidated school board can be a good outcome and can hold true to aid the students. He believes that there needs to be a look at a deeper curriculum. The students have been hurt by COVID, they need to look for ways to fix this problem, to get policies in line with curriculum. If something comes up that is confidential, then the Code of Virginia needs to be followed. The City provides for students however there needs to be savings now. The school board needs to have a good solid plan put together with overall fairness for students. His main concern is that members of the school board be on there for the right reason, for the betterment of students. Serving on the board would be an opportunity not a problem. A good turning point for the area.

With no further business to come before Council, the called meeting was adjourned on a motion from Vice Mayor Crosier and seconded by Mr. Tucker.

THOMAS H. SIBOLD, JR., MAYOR

ATTEST:

REBECCA BRATTON NUCKOLS
INTERIM CITY CLERK