

MINUTES
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
October 25 & 26, 2022
Special Meeting

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Rusty Moore, Mayor, at 5:00 p.m.

Commissioners present

Rusty Moore, Mayor Louise Bryan Bob Weigel
Haley Dale, Vice-Mayor James Hunt

City staff members present: Beth Reardon, City Manager

Also present: Patty Heminover, Director, Bakertilly

Wednesday, October 25th:

1. Meeting with Brad Hennessee, finalist candidate for City Manager

BRAD: The time spent with the staff was very beneficial and I feel the staff was very knowledgeable and has the best interest of the city at heart. They are aware of what the residents want and need. From these meetings, I do not see much that needs to be changed. I am attracted to this position because of Belle Meade's reputation, the stability of the finances and Board, as well as how the Mayor and Vice-Mayor positions are elected by the other board members. In Sparta, the Mayor is elected by the citizens, and the political winds can change quickly. Everyone here seems to be in sync. It appears that the commissioners serve to give back to the community, whereas in other cities, some elected officials serve to advance their social and/or economic status.

BRAD: One of the difficulties the new city manager will have is following someone who has been in place for such a long time and who the residents are so familiar with.

LOUISE BRYAN: How would you make residents feel that the change is going to be OK?

BRAD: You need to engage them and understand they want to be heard, so treat them with respect, even if the answer is no or the solution is not exactly what the resident wants. However, the "no" answer needs to be justified - be diplomatic.

HALEY DALE: The residents of Belle Meade are often not used to hearing the word "no" or not being able to do what they want. How would you handle these situations?

BRAD: In almost every situation, people want to be heard and be taken seriously. I approach these situations with patience, and am careful to listen to the issues and react calmly. I do not shy away from saying no if there is justification for it.

RUSTY MOORE: After meeting with the staff, would you enjoy working here with them?

BRAD: I began my talks by telling the staff that I am a hands-off manager, and would allow them to make decisions about their work, giving them credit

for knowing what was needed since they do the job. They take more pride in their work and the residents get a better level of service. From there, I went to a more personal level. I feel the personal relationships between the manager and staff are more important than the nuts and bolts of the job. I feel like I would be welcomed here and do not feel any of the staff's questions were negative. My work mode is calm and measured and I am careful not to make decisions without research. I am not a disrupter.

HALEY DALE: We think your technical experience as an engineer will be very helpful at Belle Meade, especially with the TDOT and TDEC grants.

BRAD: That is one side of me, and I do have good contacts and relationships with them. In Sparta, I was able to save money on a TDEC sewer project by doing some engineering calculations, enough to buy a sewer camera worth almost \$100K. Previously, Sparta's relationship with TDOT and TDEC was damaged.

RUSTY MOORE: Belle Meade has a Historic Zoning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals and the Planning Commission, and we are currently undertaking a re-write of the zoning code. One issue with citizens is the increased amount of new construction, often resulting in much larger structures. How do you see yourself managing and working into the building/zoning issues?

BRAD: Fortunately, you have a building official that has experience in home construction. The issues need to be prioritized, in the context of how many people are affected. Some issues are widespread and should be handled with zoning code changes, but other issues may be relative only to one neighbor. Developers interested in flipping a property will have different issues than a homeowner building or renovating a home to live in for the next 40-50 years. Many cities are experiencing an influx of out of state residents and developers, and these are the folks standing at city hall's doorstep demanding changes, which often results in conflicts with established neighborhoods and the zoning rules.

JIM HUNT: What is your situation on commuting to work?

BRAD: I made the drive to Belle Meade back in August when I was contemplating applying for this position. I do not see it as an issue for me. My family and I come to Nashville often, for Vanderbilt football and basketball games, the Titans and Predators games, my son commutes to MTSU, and I have family members who work at St. Thomas West and commute. It is 72 miles and I am not bothered by it. I will actually gain about 45 minutes every day, because now I commute 40 miles to/from Sparta, and I have to arrive an hour early to start the boiler/chiller and get the building ready for employees. Also, most board meetings start an hour or more after city hall closes and all boards meet twice a month.

After a recent election of a new mayor, my situation in Sparta has become unbearably stressful. I've concluded that I need to leave and hope that this position will work out. I plan to work another 10-15 years, and feel that I can make a difference here at Belle Meade.

RUSTY MOORE: Do you have any questions for us?

BRAD: I want to show you something. (He passed around a picture to everyone.) It was a gateway monument TDOT project that had been sitting in the office for 7 years. I arranged a meeting with TDOT representatives and was successful in changing the guidelines for where these monuments could be

placed in order to be more visible. I helped design these granite signs and they were constructed successfully.

BRAD: A year from now, what would you like your home-run hire look like?

RUSTY MOORE: Someone who can keep the continuity and build consensus with community to proceed with Master Plan projects, and connect well with staff.

BOB WEIGEL: I realize you are very experienced with Public Works and infrastructure projects. How will you do in a beautification world or looking over the shoulder of the Finance Director?

BRAD: I have experience in reading financial statements and in preparing the annual budget. If I don't know something, I will find the answer and am willing to learn some new things at Belle Meade. I currently handle a 22M budget at Sparta and have to deal with TVA's authority over our utilities.

Mayor Moore thanked Brad for his candid and informative comments.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:51 pm

Thursday, October 26th:

The meeting was reconvened at 1:00 pm

2. Meeting with Tracey Thurman, finalist candidate for City Manager

JIM HUNT: What did you learn from your meetings with staff?

TRACEY: Of course, Public Works deals with many of the same issues I have in my current job - rough winters, conditions of streets, recycling, restricted items being thrown in trash (paint). Everyone I met with seems very happy.

RUSTY MOORE: If you were hired, what would be your first order of business?

TRACEY: Get together with staff and determine their priorities and concerns. It appears that the younger staff is vested in the city and that says a lot that the city has so many younger employees, especially in the police dept. It's important to stay competitive with other cities.

LOUISE BRYAN: What do you think is going to be most different here in the day-to-day activities as city manager?

TRACEY: Probably not that much different. I will have less staff to supervise. No job will be too big or too small, I would not ask an employee to do something I wouldn't do. I try to build morale by having employee events. Be available to speak with and listen to citizens when they have questions or complaints. I will encourage employees to think outside the box.

RUSTY MOORE: We are in an area known to be restrictive on building and zoning. We are currently re-writing the zoning code. What can you bring to the table in this area?

TRACEY: I am very appreciative of the way Belle Meade is, going back to my college days working here as a house-sitter on Howell Place. I visit Belle Meade often and am disappointed to see where a beautiful house was torn down and a new one in its place. I want to make sure that the historic values so important to Belle Meade are preserved as much as possible.

LOUISE BRYAN: For many reasons, (gentrification, people moving from out of state, economy) Belle Meade is experiencing issues with an increase in the homeless population outside of its borders. What are some options for dealing with this new issue now and for years to come?

TRACEY: Increase community policing and use city police as much as possible. Partner with other communities and agencies to find solutions. It's difficult, and mental health issues are such a big part of the problem. The city should be aware of any new shelters being built in the area, as this increases the density of the homeless population.

HALEY DALE: You met all the staff. Is there any department where you don't have extensive knowledge and are thankful for the staff in place?

TRACEY: Lyle has a great knowledge of building and codes, but overall everyone seems knowledgeable. Public Works has such a nice shop, well organized and clean, which speaks to their overall treatment of the city.

RUSTY MOORE: How would you build consensus among the residents for projects related to the City's new Master Plan, such as traffic calming, safe pedestrian areas, etc.

TRACEY: Boots on the ground, listen to citizen comments, they want to be heard. Not every area needs a sidewalk. Use new lighting that brightens when a car drives through, increasing visibility and safety. Listen to comments from all sides, have explanations for why things won't work. People get emotionally attached to their opinions and can't hear what the other side is saying. City staff and commissioners need to be the bridge in the middle and explain what can/cannot be done and why. You also need to be careful not to let the vocal minority direct the decisions.

JIM HUNT: Is your financial background pretty strong and have you seen Belle Meade's budget?

TRACEY: Yes, I spend about 6 months of the year on budgets. I have a 42M department budget, and 10M payroll budget. I audited the budget when I took over my current position and was able to reduce some of the funding that was unnecessary, such as a landfill, which was never going to happen in Lexington. I know that Belle Meade's budget is approximately six million, but have not gone through it by line item. I do know that grant research is important, as there are many available grants available just for asking.

RUSTY MOORE: Does it make sense to keep outsourcing the trash pickup or bring it in house?

TRACEY: It is a very costly and cumbersome task. About \$500K to purchase and outfit vehicle and then you have to hire the workers. It also means residents would have to put their cans out by the road.

RUSTY MOORE: What do you think you would enjoy the most about relocating to Nashville and being part of this community?

TRACEY: Nashville always has something to do. So many events, beautiful parks. My husband and I are at the point in our lives where we have time to do more recreational things.

BOB WEIGEL: How would you grade yourself on finding grants, writing the grant application, being successful in getting it, and then managing the grant project?

TRACEY: That is one of my strong points. My English degree has helped in writing the application. For managing grants, we have a branch that handles that. Some of the standard grants can be managed in house. It is important to meet the grant guidelines and deadlines. I enjoy this part of my job.

RUSTY MOORE: Do you have any questions on anything about the city?

TRACEY: I don't have any questions. I see that your city manager has done a great job in running the city and the staff is very proud about the work they do here.

Commissioners thanked Tracy for making quick travel arrangements to be here in person and spending time with everyone and answering all the questions given to her.

Patty Heminover suggested the commissioners review all of their notes on the two candidates, and also speak with staff regarding opinions on their meetings with the candidates.

No actions were taken at this meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Mayor Rusty Moore

Beth Reardon, City Manager