

THE GENEVA CITY COUNCIL

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING

February 15, 2023 – 7:00 PM

Public Safety Building  
255 Exchange Street  
Geneva, NY 14456

Presiding – Steve Valentino, Mayor

1. ROLL CALL

Present: Clr. Regan, Clr. Gaglianese, Clr. Camera, Clr. Brimm, Clr. Burrall, and Clr. Pealer

Absent: Clr. Noone and Clr. Salamendra

2. AMENDMENT TO THE AGENDA

**ACTION TAKEN by Mayor Valentino; seconded by Clr. Gaglianese**

**MOVED THAT item 6 on the agenda “Local Law Creating Staggered Terms of Office for the Geneva City Council and Mayor” be removed from the agenda and placed on the March 1<sup>st</sup> agenda**

**MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (7-2 absent)**

3. PUBLIC HEARING – Local Law Creating Staggered Terms of Office for the Geneva City Council and Mayor

Mayor Valentino opened the public hearing at 7:03pm

Larry Campbell said that he is all for this change and feels it is a no-brainer.

Mayor Valentino closed the public hearing at 7:04pm

4. PUBLIC HEARING – Local Law Authorizing an Exemption Which Would Provide a 10% Exemption for Volunteer Firefighters and Ambulance Drivers

Mayor Valentino opened the public hearing at 7:05pm

Michele Neary said that she has been a proud resident of Geneva for 4 years and she was disappointed during the February 1<sup>st</sup> meeting when council members discussed this exemption for firefighters and ambulance drivers. She noted one council members remark that DPW workers could also potentially be called into dangerous situations, but they are not getting this exemption. Ms. Neary pointed out that DPW workers are supported by the taxpayers through their wages and other benefits for being a city employee. She said that volunteer firefighters and ambulance drivers are on call 24 hours a day, and she questioned why they would disrupt their lives and celebrations to go and help people who they most likely do not know. She said we owe them more, but the 10% tax reduction is a way to say “thank you and we value you.” She would like to see this help with recruitment as well. She finished by saying that we respect our veterans by giving them tax exemptions costing the city over \$70,000 per year, and she feels firefighters and ambulance drivers deserve our respect, and she asked council to vote in favor of this local law.

Mayor Valentino closed the public hearing at 7:07pm

## 5. DISCUSSION REGARDING STAFF RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS

Mayor Valentino told everyone that this will just be a discussion tonight to try and provide staff with direction.

Clr. Gaglianese said he is in favor of changing the law and including a 20 mile radius around the city. He said he feels it would have been beneficial for the city manager after seeing what she went through to buy a house in the city. He said with our housing market being difficult, he does not know if it is worth it to disrupt a family. He questioned if a police chief moved his family here and decided he didn't want to stay what that would do to them. He referred to other municipalities changing their requirements. He noted school teachers in our district saying he feels they are still vested in our community if they lived within 20 miles. He added that he feels the decision should be up to the city manager since it is her appointment.

Clr. Brimm said he is in favor of removing the residency requirements with some sort of cap. He feels we could obtain much better talent if the residency was opened up, also noting our housing stock is low. He said he feels a 60-mile radius would be the maximum.

Clr. Camera said he is in favor of removing the residency requirement referring to studies printed in a USA Today article noting there was no significant benefit found to having a chief living within the city limits. He referred to an officer who works at the Geneva Police Department and lives outside the city limits, noting that this officer is very popular and a community leader where he lives. Clr. Camera said he feels we would be open to more talent if we allowed non-resident applications. He referred to studies being done about police forces being understaffed all over the country and are experiencing significant numbers of retirements related to the national atmosphere causing more problems. He said a 60-mile radius would be the maximum.

Clr. Regan said she is in favor of removing the residency requirement to allow the city the opportunity for more talent. She said she was going to propose using the Geneva City School District residency as her

boundary. She said she feels allowing an hour distance seems a bit much. She said she likes the idea of them living in our community and shopping in our stores.

Clr. Pealer said he would really like people to live in our city, and if they do not want to, we should be asking why not. He suggested giving incentives to employees to move here. He finished by saying that the wants to be competitive in the environment, but he also wants employees to be our neighbors.

Clr. Burrall said that he has mixed feelings because he is a relationship person and feels that if someone's boss were the taxpayers of Geneva, he feels they should want to live where their boss lives. He said he also believes there are always exceptions to commitment. He questioned if the city could ask questions of individual applicants as to why they don't want to live in our community. He said he knows the applicant pool is rough today regardless of the occupation noting that a friend of his told him when he was first hired at the state police over 20 years ago, there were 41,000 applicants in one year, and today there are less than 12,000 with probably less than 1,000 who are qualified to take an interview. He said that if we cannot find a qualified employee within the city and have to go outside the city, he would suggest amending the benefits package. He said he prefers hiring residents, but has had challenges, noting the world is different and people don't mind driving distances to work or are able to work remotely. He finished by saying that he cannot agree one way or the other without changing the benefit package for those who choose not to move here.

Mayor Valentino reminded everyone that the city manager and city clerk are charter changes while the police chief and fire chief were done by resolution. He said he was on council when the resolution for the chiefs was passed, noting that there was a big push to get them into our city to be a part of our city, and not for response time. He said he could be open to a 15-20 mile radius or residency preferred with exceptions allowed. He also said that if someone is not willing to change their formal residency but are willing to have an apartment with an upfront conversation, he could work with that. He said he does not want us to limit to only city residents and receive no applications, so we would need to be open to discussions.

Clr. Gaglianese said he feels we need to get the right person for the job and retain the employees we already have. He said with the pool of applicants getting smaller and smaller, we need to give people a reason to apply and move here.

City Manager Hendrix said that this topic came up in the police chief search with applications needing to be in by this Friday, February 17<sup>th</sup> for the Geneva Police Chief exam. She said she has told interested police chief candidates to watch this meeting to see what council's thoughts are on changing the residency requirement. She noted in the information she provided to council that most other municipalities only require the city manager to be a resident. She said that some municipalities have offered changes to their benefits packages while others grant waivers. She added that vague language is not super helpful.

Clr. Camera said he does not support a residency requirement, but he also does not support a long distance drive for the new chief. He said he hopes whoever the new chief is that they will be a leader who

comes in and created leadership patterns and guidelines to improve morale. He said he would like to see as many people as possible apply for the police chief position because Geneva is a great place to be. Clr. Pealer said that he encourages all watching this meeting to take the test because council agrees there is flexibility.

When asked about the exam, City Manager Hendrix said that it is a New York State civil service exam with a scoring mechanism that creates a list for us to interview from. She said she believes the exam fee is \$20.

Mayor Valentino said that council has given the city manager direction that they want to amend the resolution to open up residency and have something on the March 1<sup>st</sup> agenda. Clr. Gaglianese said he would like to stay away from saying they have to live in Ontario County because there are parts of Seneca County that are closer to Geneva than some parts of Ontario County. Mayor Valentino said that council can make changes to the resolution the city manager brings in March. City Manager Hendrix said that at a minimum council can abolish the 2009 resolution requiring residency for the police chief and fire chief, but staff will put something together per council's direction so it is not wide open.

6. AMENDMENT TO THE AGENDA

**ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Gaglianese; seconded by Clr. Camera  
MOVED THAT Appointments to Boards and Commissions be added to the agenda  
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (7-2 absent)**

**ACTION TAKEN by Clr. Gaglianese; seconded by Clr. Camera  
MOVED THAT Jim Norwalk be reappointed to the Shadetree Committee  
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (7-2 absent)**

7. ADJOURNMENT

**ACTION TAKEN by Mayor Valentino; seconded by Clr. Pealer  
MOVED THAT the meeting be adjourned at 7:56pm  
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

*Lori Guinan*

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City Clerk