

**Birmingham City Commission Minutes**  
**February 9, 2023**  
**Department of Public Service Building, 851 S. Eton St**  
**4:30 p.m.**  
**Vimeo Link: <https://vimeo.com/797574925>**

**I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Therese Longe, Mayor, opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. ROLL CALL**

City Clerk Bingham called the roll.

Present: Mayor Longe  
Mayor Pro Tem McLain  
Commissioner Baller  
Commissioner Boutros  
Commissioner Haig  
Commissioner Host  
Commissioner Schafer

Absent: None

Staff: City Manager Markus; City Clerk Bingham, Human Resources Manager Lambert, City Attorney Kucharek

**III. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**IV. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

Mayor Longe provided introductory comments.

CA Kucharek also provided guidance to the Commission, recommending that written responses to the verbal questions being asked by the Commissioners not be given any weight. She recommended this in order to preserve equity between the candidates since written answers to these questions were not sought by the Commission and not all candidates provided written answers.

A. Interview Candidate Troy Bell

In reply to Commissioner questions, Mr. Bell explained:

- His parents were both public servants, which set the foundation for his and his siblings' careers in public service. His passion lies with public service;
- Birmingham is attractive to him because of its community, schools, the City's organization, and the opportunities the City Manager role offers;
- He has a diverse career background including law enforcement, public works, information technology, and educational leadership, and has worked in many different parts of the country;
- He has a diverse educational background and was presently pursuing his PhD;
- He would be capable of implementing the succession planning the City has already done, and would also be capable of taking a different approach to succession planning which would include mentoring Staff, being open and engaging, and making decisions with his leadership team in mind;

- His priority once hired as City Manager would be to learn more about Birmingham first in order to determine how best to lead the City;
- He perceived safety and security, infrastructure, and the location of the senior center to be three topics he would get involved in early on;
- He would focus both on improving processes and making sure 'the trains run on time';
- He has spent his career working within a council-manager government format. The Commission outlines goals and objectives, and the City Manager guides the organization in achieving those goals and objectives. He would emphasize the importance of aligning the City's goals with its strategic and master plans;
- Challenges in the position could include aligning the City with the 2040 Master Plan in order to create certainty in the City, addressing safety and security and making sure the Police Department is well-accommodated, finding an appropriate location for the senior center;
- He would ensure that department heads are meeting their City-wide goals and objectives by focusing on consistent process improvement, creating consensus and collaboration, and doing some strategic planning. He would invest in the well-being and success of City Staff in order to ensure that the City achieves its broader goals;
- His research on the City included the 2040 Plan, the process of locating the senior center, the need for maintaining safety and security, the need to streamline processes, the importance of parks, recreation, programming, and arts to the City, and the need to increase transparency between the City and its residents. He would hope, once hired, to meet with Commissioners, community leaders, and residents in general to learn more about the City;
- He had a situation where Staff had to enforce an unpopular, but extant, ordinance. Once he explained the benefits of enforcing the ordinance, which included limiting blight and increasing revenue, Staff became more comfortable with enforcing the ordinance;
- He had experience managing the budget for an Everglades Restoration Program, a Miscellaneous Pump Station Project, and a deep well injection project. As part of those projects position he also managed requests for proposals and service contracts;
- Museums and libraries are part of a community's culture. Both institutions should be reviewed for how they are integrating digital services to meet the needs of the community. It would also be beneficial to look at other ways that the Library could expand its services, such as potentially renting out bicycles or other items;
- One of his strengths is a compassionate leadership style that is open, engaging, and approachable;
- Two of his challenges include recognizing that some people may need guidance and time before they are able to meet the high standards he sets, and needing to spend more time speaking French and Spanish;
- In order to communicate effectively about potentially difficult municipal events, he would begin by educating people about what has occurred, what the consequences are, and what resources are available;
- His philosophies and approaches to the City Manager position would include making sure that processes and procedures are optimized, making sure that there is collaboration amongst teams, and maintaining balance. He would prioritize clear communication of a project's timeline and goals throughout the given project's duration;
- Working in municipal government during the Covid-19 pandemic emphasized the importance of being capable of pivoting to keep the organization operating;
- He is attracted to public service out of a desire to use his skills, abilities, and assets to try and make a difference;
- The diversity of his experience demonstrates both his capacity and his suitability for the City Manager position;
- His family is important to him, and is enthusiastic about the prospect of moving to Birmingham;

- Although his PhD relates to the experiences of marginalized communities, knowing more about the resources necessary for a community to thrive can help inform his work in Birmingham;
- He did not anticipate that writing his dissertation would interfere with his work as a City Manager, stating that the research phase was the most difficult part and already complete;
- The budgets he has managed range from \$17 million to \$1.03 billion; and,
- He would hope to be in his next position for a minimum of eight years so his youngest child could complete high school. He hopes to complete his PhD and to continue to write and publish. If he were to retire in the future, he would hope to be in an adjunct role at a university.

The Mayor noted that Mr. Bell's name has been in the press, and asked if he would like to comment.

Mr. Bell stated that something being in print does not make it true. He said that while he would appreciate the opportunity to correct misinformation in the press, he believed choosing not to do so was an ethical matter. He said he chose to work in Muskegon Heights because the opportunity aligned with his PhD research and was close to where his wife grew up.

#### B. Interview Candidate Blaine Wing

In reply to Commissioner questions, Mr. Wing explained:

- His career has been in public service, largely in municipalities in Illinois and in Rochester, Michigan. In addition to his other graduate degrees, he was presently studying for a certificate in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from Northwestern University;
- To prepare for the interview he read the draft 2040 Plan, website, budgets, manager's reports, newsletters, looked at the 3D rendering of the City, and visited some of the shops in Birmingham;
- In the first ninety days of the position, he would set up regular communication with the Commission, publish a manager's report on Fridays, establish regular meetings with Staff and then schedule meetings with other related organizations such as the County. Within the first six months to a year he would focus on aligning the City's Planning with the 2040 Plan, continue the lead service abatement project, get the funding for pensions and healthcare completed, continue the capital improvement plans, and fill staffing positions;
- His last six positions were within a council-manager government format, has been a member of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) since 2000, and was the President of the Assistant ICMA in 2009 and represented Illinois at the National Conference Committee in California in 2009;
- Staffing would likely be one of the greatest challenges in the position, which reflects a national trend;
- He would ensure department heads are meeting the Commission's goals by setting the titles in the budget appropriately and then having monthly meetings with those Staff members. He would maintain open communication with the department heads. He has used software in two of his previous positions to track department heads' progress towards goals;
- He introduced the idea of having local governments enter into a consortium for healthcare expenditures. He communicated that doing so would reduce insurance costs without reducing benefits. Some members joined, and while there was some resistance, the consortium was able to settle on a compromise position that still realized significant savings;
- He has had experience creating budgets, helped Rochester, MI maintain its triple A bond rating, and has worked extensively with requests for proposals, and service contracts;
- Libraries and Museums are very important, are instrumental in placemaking and play an important part in the community;
- One of his strengths is his adaptability and ability to communicate well with a variety of people in various contexts;

- His challenges include needing to volunteer a bit less so he has more family time and needing to remember to speak a bit less and listen more;
- In communicating about potentially difficult municipal events, he would activate an Emergency Command Center as appropriate, making sure individuals facing difficulties are taken care of, working with public safety, communicating with residents directly to collaborate and get needs met. He listens to individual issues, demonstrates empathy, and attempts to address each concern. He would also use the website and other digital communications to keep residents informed;
- His overall approach to City Management is to gather as much information as possible, regularly touch base throughout processes, ensure the processes are adhering to schedules, and also to trust Staff's expertise. For large projects he would bring in a Finance or Assistant Finance Director to make sure the financing is in order;
- During Covid-19 he drew from international, national, and local resources and guidance, and utilized his National Incident Management training. He created Staff pods early on to minimize in-person staffing and had options for virtual meetings and work from home set up in March 2020. He worked with non-profits to check on older residents and other under-resourced members of the community;
- He has a number of certifications in addition to his graduate degree as laid out in his resume;
- He enjoys working with technology and uses it to benefit the communities he works for;
- He did regular monthly meet-and-greets with the Rochester Older Persons Commission (OPC) to get to know the residents and answer questions. He promoted and participated in the various OPC programs, and saw working with the OPC as an important and strategic partnership; and,
- In order to perform recruitment, some of his techniques include: communicating through his career and professional networks, training middle management in their skill sets so they might be prepared to become department heads in the future, encouraging all Staff to pursue further education because of the benefits to the community, and partnering with local resources to create discounts for City Staff.

In reply to Mr. Wing, the Mayor stated that the federal funds granted for the lead line service abatement program should be sufficient to complete the lead line servicing in the community. The Commissioners provided a brief summary of the challenges they see presently facing the community, and summarized the characteristics they would like the next City Manager to have.

#### C. City Commission Discussion of Nomination of Three Candidates, distribution of Candidate Selection Forms, and Tally Count of Candidates Moving Forward

In reply to Commission questions, CM Markus and CA Kucharek advised the Commission that they had discretion to advance all three candidates, or fewer; that they should discuss the candidates' positive aspects; and that criminal background checks, credit background checks, and reference checks would be conducted.

Commissioner Baller stated that when the previous City Manager departed the City, one of the present candidates was one of the people that occurred to him as a possible candidate for the position at that time. He noted that a candidate's familiarity with Birmingham is an important consideration.

The Mayor noted that the results for Birmingham's City Manager search were similar to those conducted by search firms. She said she had been following municipal City Manager searches since Birmingham commenced its own search, and noted that Grand Haven, which used a search firm, had 43 replies, and Birmingham received 46 replies. She noted that other local City Manager searches ended up with some of the same finalists that Birmingham ended up with and even hired from the same group. She explained that City Manager searches are challenging presently, with some City Managers having retired during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. She noted that some municipalities use temporary staffing to fill the positions or

hire people without a City Management background. She said she felt fortunate to have a highly qualified internal candidate and two other qualified external candidates.

Mr. Host spoke about the importance of the public attending the upcoming meet-and-greet with the final candidates. He said he saw positive attributes in both Messrs. Bell and Wing.

MPT McLain said she favored all three candidates moving forward so that the public had an opportunity to interact with the candidates.

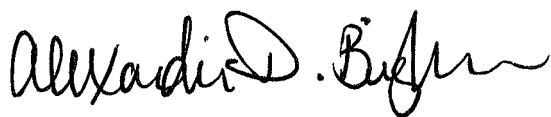
Commissioner Schafer said that all three candidates seemed well-qualified, and noted that Birmingham was fortunate to have one candidate that had demonstrated a long-term commitment to the community.

CC Bingham then tallied the Commission's votes on the candidates, stating that Mr. Bell had four votes, Ms. Ecker had seven votes, and Mr. Wing had five votes. Since all three candidates had at least four votes each, all three candidates were advanced to the next round.

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Votes</u>
Bell	(4) Commissioner Haig, Commissioner Host, MPT McLain, Commissioner Schafer
Ecker	(7) Commissioner Baller, Commissioner Boutros, Commissioner Haig, Commissioner Host, Mayor Longe, MPT McLain, Commissioner Schafer
Wing	(5) Commissioner Boutros, Commissioner Haig, Commissioner Host, MPT McLain, Commissioner Schafer

**XI. ADJOURN**

Mayor Longe adjourned the meeting at 7:05 p.m.



Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk



Laura Eichenhorn, City Transcriptionist