

**COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
CITY OF UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS, OHIO  
MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM | 835 9696 0788  
MONDAY, JANUARY 4, 2021**

Mayor Michael Dylan Brennan called the meeting to order at 7:01p.m.

Roll Call:

Present: Mrs. Michele Weiss  
Mrs. Sandra Berry  
Mrs. Barbara Blankfeld  
Mr. Phillip Ertel  
Mr. Justin Gould  
Mrs. Susan Pardee  
Mr. John Rach

Also Present: Law Director Luke McConville  
Clerk of Council Kelly Thomas  
Finance Director Dennis Kennedy  
Fire Chief Robert Perko  
Police Chief Dustin Rogers  
Economic Development Susan Drucker  
Communication/Civic Engagement Mike Cook

**Council Meeting December 21, 2020**

Mrs. Pardee stated than under Community Outreach Reports Daniel Cosgrove should read Danielle Cosgrove.

Mrs. Weiss noted a typographic error on page 8.

There were no other corrections or additions to the December 21, 2020 minutes.

**MOTION BY MR. GOULD, SECONDED BY MR. ERTEL for the passage of the December 21, 2020 Council Minutes as corrected. On roll call, all voted “aye,” except Mrs. Pardee, who “passed.”**

**Comments from Audience**

Ms. Winfred Weizer, 2177 Jackson. In response to watching the December 21, 2020 You tube Council meeting video and reading the article in the Sun Press Ms. Weizer stated she was appalled with what she had heard and made note of the following things: 1. City employees do not work for the mayor or council, they work for and employed by the city of university heights. 2. The city of university heights is NOT just the Mayor and council, it is all of us who reside here, pay taxes here and vote here. 3. The name on all of your checks or check stubs (if direct deposit) is University Heights. Try to remember just who you ALL work for. 4. We elect the mayor to run the administrative side of things. Unfortunately, we tend to elect people without clear administrative experience which can cause some issues. 5. We elect the council to monitor the effectiveness and fiscal correctness of the administration. That is why we give them the “power of the purse”. They have to “oversee” the administrative function to do this. 6. We anticipate there may be some tension between the 8 of you but we expect all of you to treat each other with respect. That demands that all of you drop your “sensitivities” when someone makes common sense suggestions. 7. As someone who spent 25 years in private sector management the request for documentation for absence is not inappropriate. It is common place and considered “good business practices”. It is neutral and needs to be understood as such. As someone who holds a Master degree in Public Administration, I can assure you this is taught as common practice within the public sphere as well. 8. Instead of considering the request for documentation as good business practices, the Mayor chose to use inappropriate language in an open public meeting and accuse the council person of something that they clearly said they were NOT implying. 9. Acting in this manner prevents intelligent compromise that needs to be embraced for the good of the city. For example, my current employer requires documentation of the absence once the person is off work for 2 consecutive days. My previous company required formal documentation for the second day off with an indication of when return to work would be possible. 10.If, as the Mayor implied, there is some written protocol that the city has, I am surprised that is has not been shared with council. That documentation provides evidence of good administrative procedures. For someone who ran promising that they would be more transparent than the previous administration the lack of sharing of basic information is concerning. 11. Unfortunately, the comments made at the council meeting were amplified in the Sun Press article on the back and forth. In my view this speaks to a tremendous lack of professionalism on the part of the Mayor. To use terms like “conservative” members in a dismissive manner indicates that apparently the request is not seen as business practice but rather political gamesmanship. That is ridiculous. That is what we have come to expect out of a dysfunctional Washington and is not appropriate in a nonpartisan University Heights. Quite bluntly both sides of the ideological divide

have good ideas that we have been able to see and incorporate over the years in our city because we hold to a nonpartisan tradition. Apparently for the Mayor this is coming to an end. The council person who was bullied and maligned deserves an apology. At this point, the residents of this city deserve an apology as well for this type of behavior from an elected official. We demand better of you.

### **Mayor's Report**

I will be delivering the State of the City Address on the week of Presidents Day, Thursday, February 18 at 7pm. We will look back at 2020 and where we have been. We will look at the year ahead, and beyond.

I am being appointed to the Executive Committee of the Cuyahoga County Mayors and City Manager's Association. I am taking over a seat that was occupied by South Euclid Mayor Georgine Welo, who has been term limited out on the board. I have been involved with group and a regular attendee of activities since taking office in 2018, I look forward to working together with my fellow mayors of issues of common interest.

County Executive Armond Budish is putting my name into County Council for reappointment to the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission. I will be delighted to continue to represent the Heights Region. Speaking of County Council, I congratulate our County Councilperson Cheryl Stephens for her election by her peers to Vice President of the Council

Since our last meeting, we experienced a significant snowstorm over the holidays. I delivered the following memo to our Service Employees on December 29th.

In popular culture, we dream of a White Christmas. Here at the City, a White Christmas means everyone in the Service Department putting in the hours to clear the streets and sidewalks. This is time not spent with family and loved ones, spent instead in service to our community.

According to the National Weather Service, the snowfall locally measured in at 19.3 inches. That snowfall began as rain and freezing rain a little after 1pm on Christmas Eve, and snow continued well into Christmas Day and then the morning of first day of Kwanzaa. Plowing began as soon as rubbish was completed mid-afternoon on December 24th, with sidewalk plowing wrapping up around 9:30pm on December 26th. Starting with rubbish pickup on Christmas Eve morning, through the clearing of the last sidewalk, people in this department worked around the clock for over two and half days.

As Mayor and a resident of this City, thank you.

I attached to the memo a print out of the comments from the University Heights discussion board [on Facebook], of all the residents who thank our service employees as well, and love them for what they do.

I closed the memo:

It's been a tough year. Thanks for coming through again and again.

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of delivering remarks at the Investiture of William F.B. Vodrey as Judge to the Court of Common Pleas of Cuyahoga County. I have had the pleasure of working with Judge Vodrey dating back to our time together as young lawyers at the Justice Center over twenty years ago. My full remarks are on my Facebook page, and I will provide them to Mrs. Thomas rather than read them here. Suffice it state, we need good judges. Judge Vodrey will more than fit the bill. May he serve with distinction and impartiality as he continues the relentless pursuit of justice on the common pleas bench.

Finally, today, I issued a memo to all city employees declaring this Friday Cleveland Browns Spirit Day in the City of University Heights. City employees are welcome to wear Browns gear this Friday and every Friday as long as the Browns remain in playoff contention this postseason. Employees in police, fire, and service are to check with their supervisors as to how they may appropriately participate. The Browns play the Steelers in Pittsburgh this Sunday night at 8:15PM.

In the 1994 and 2002 seasons, the last two times the Browns were in the playoffs, they ended their run in Pittsburgh. May the third time be a charm. Go Browns!

Thank you, this concludes my report.

### **Mayor's Remarks at the Investiture of William Vodrey 1/3/2021**

It is wonderful to be among so many friends, colleagues, William's family including his wife, Susan, their sons, John, Ethan, and Thomas, and esteemed guests, as we gather to mark William Franklin Boyd Vodrey's investiture as a Judge to the Court of Common Pleas of Cuyahoga County.

I have had the pleasure of knowing William well over twenty years now. And really first getting to know him when he was a prosecutor and I was a judicial staff attorney here at the common pleas court, in the same courtroom, before the Honorable Kathleen Ann Sutula. From his humble beginnings in East Liverpool, his

achievement as Eagle Scout, his education at Oberlin and Case Western Reserve, William has had a lifelong dedication to justice, whether it was seeking justice for indigent people while working for Southeast Ohio Legal Services, justice for the victims of crime in the Prosecutor's Office, or equal justice under the law as a Magistrate in the Cleveland Municipal Court. William's dedication to justice and scholarly pursuits also consume his free time, whether in organizing and judging moot court for law students, mentoring young lawyers, lecturing at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and participating as member and former president of Cleveland Civil War Roundtable activities.

Indeed, one of the things I've long admired about William is his interest in the Civil War. There was a time that might have seemed quaint or unfashionable, though recent events speak to its everlasting relevance. A review and understanding of those times, the refounding of this country thru the ratification of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, the rededication of this country to equal protection under the law, to all persons born here being citizens regardless of race or origin, and the first concrete step in law on the long road we still travel towards atonement for slavery. As Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has told us, "real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time."

We are reminded once more that we need good judges. Empathetic, scholarly, but rooted-in-the-real-world people from all walks of life committed to justice. It was four years ago after another national election that William and I sat down, as we do from time to time, over lunch, and this time, we spoke of our respective plans to serve better our community, me in my plan to run for mayor of University Heights, and William in his plan to run for common pleas judge. Knowing what I do about William, I immediately pledged my support of his efforts. I didn't have to ask then which of the 34 general division benches he planned to run for. I did not have to know who he would be competing with to know his worthiness, and the necessity to have William and more people like him on the bench. As it would turn out, between the primaries and the most recent general elections, it was not about the lack of worthiness of the others who also sought this bench, but the qualities the William has and brings in particular. I saw it four years ago, and the majority of voters in this county saw it too in this past election.

While we celebrate William today and everything he has done thus far in life to prepare him for this moment, we also celebrate the constitutional system of ordered liberty and justice that we call the United States of America.

We are, after all, a nation of laws, and not men. It is an observation as old as the republic, made by Founding Father John Adams. This was the American rejection of the divine right of kings, and the recognition that the country and the best of what it stands for is greater than any one person. In the weeks since this election we have seen how the American Court System remains the firewall and final bastion to protect democracy and freedom in our nation. That the rule of law has triumphed over the rule by one man by a record now of 60 and 1. Regardless of the party of the person who became judge and heard those cases.

Far be it for me to offer advice, but on occasions like this, it seems to be called for. So, I will share the same advice my wife Gina gives me every morning before I head out to handle the people's business at University Heights City Hall: "don't be a jerk." It bears daily repeating. When lives are in your hands every day, remembering that you are part of something bigger and greater, and keeping a sense of proportion of one's place in it, keeping grounded about it. That is paramount. That of course does not mean, don't stay out of trouble or don't fight for the reforms you know are necessary in our justice system. We know you too well, and we know you won't avoid the worthy fight.

As Chief Justice Earl Warren once said, "Everything I did in my life that was worthwhile, I caught hell for." That which is righteous is well worth the grief. It is, as the Honorable John Lewis called it, the good kind of trouble, the necessary kind of trouble, the kind of trouble that may redeem the soul of the nation. I know of no one better equipped than you William, to engage, to do, to be, to strive every day to do your best work and to be the best you can under a flawed system that remains the best one we know. May it be better for your addition. May you one day leave it better than you found it. And until then, may you endure all the hell you catch for the good trouble you make doing what is worthwhile, necessary, and just.

Thank you, William, for strengthening the rule of law and bolstering our system of justice.

#### **Agenda Items:**

- A) Motion to Hold an Executive Session immediately following this Regular Meeting for the Purpose of Discussing the Status of the University Square Redevelopment**

**MOTION BY MR. ERTEL, SECONDED BY MRS. WEISS to hold an Executive Session immediately following this Regular Meeting for the Purpose of Discussing the Status of the University Square Redevelopment. On roll call, all voted "aye."**

**B) Motion to Hold an Executive Session immediately following this Regular Meeting for the Purpose of Discussing Personnel, Legal and/or Real Estate Matters**

There was no need for an additional executive session for the Purpose of Discussing Personnel, Legal and/or Real Estate Matters.

**Director's Reports**

**Finance Director – Dennis Kennedy** reported that the Finance Department is in the process of closing out financial reports and noted that all bank accounts have been reconciled.

**Law Department – Luke McConville** announced that the City received a fully executed Development Agreement from Dommus Construction regarding the Groveland project that was approved by Planning Commission and by Council at the last Council meeting. The project can now move forward.

**Fire Department – Chief Perko** reported that he continues to work with the Cuyahoga County Fire Chiefs Association, the County Board of Health and the Ohio Department of Health regarding COVID vaccinations. Chief Perko added that another round of vaccinations would be occurring during the week.

**Service Department – Jeffrey Pokorny** stated that the Service Department continues to collect brush, debris and Christmas trees following the rubbish route days. Leaf collection will resume if the weather permits.

**Communications and Civic Engagement – Mike Cook** announced that the Mayor will give his State of the City Report virtually on February 18 via social media.

**Economic Development – Susan Drucker** reported that at the Economic Development Committee met on December 15, 2020 the committee reviewed the RFP draft for the Comprehensive Zoning Update. Mrs. Drucker stated that she would have the RFP and the RFP scorecard ready for review at the next Council meeting. The review process for the Residential Attached project on South Taylor is beginning; Knez Construct will be presenting site plan renderings at the January 14<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission meeting.

There were no other director reports.

**Standing Council Committees:**

**Building and Housing Committee** – Mrs. Blankfeld reported that the Building and Housing Committee would be meeting on Tuesday, January 12<sup>th</sup> at 7pm to discuss Code Section 1280.10 Renter Registration.

**Community Outreach Committee** - Mrs. Pardee reported that there would be a Community Outreach meeting on January 11 at 6:30pm the agenda includes update reports from the committee members on mediation programs in other municipalities. Mrs. Danielle Cosgrove from the Cleveland Mediation Center will provide information about programs and training that the Cleveland Mediation Center offers. The meeting will conclude with questions and answers.

**Finance Committee** - Mrs. Weiss reported that there is a Finance Committee meeting regarding the budget on January 5, 2021 at 7pm. The Sub-committee for Strategic Planning will meet on January 11, 2021 at 7:30pm.

There were no other committee reports.

Executive Session was entered into at 7:25pm.

**MOTION BY MRS. BLANKFELD, SECONDED BY MR. RACH to re-enter regular session. On roll call, all voted “aye.”**

**MOTION BY MR. ERTEL, SECONDED BY MRS. BLANKFELD to adjourn the meeting. On roll call, all voted “aye.”**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50p.m.

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Michael Dylan Brennan, Mayor

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Kelly M. Thomas, Clerk of Council