

**Special City Commission Meeting
December 26, 2023
2:00 p.m.**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Adrian Petrila, Mayor – appeared via Zoom
Mark Grill, Vice Mayor, Commissioner, District 2
Chris Graus, Commissioner, District 1
Ward Friszolowski, Commissioner, District 3
Rich Lorenzen, Commissioner, District 4

STAFF PRESENT:

Andrew Dickman, City Attorney – appeared via Zoom
Wayne Saunders, City Manager
Amber LaRowe, City Clerk
Matthew McConnell, Assistant City Attorney – appeared via Zoom

Vice Mayor Grill called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice Mayor Grill asked if anything else needed to be addressed today other than the interviews for the interim Commissioner.

Motion: Commissioner Friszolowski moved, Commissioner Graus seconded, and the motion carried 5-0 to approve the December 26, 2023, City Commission Agenda.

1. AUDIENCE COMMENTS

City Clerk LaRowe asked if the Commission wished to take public comment now, after each interview, or after the interview of all applicants. The Commission decided to hold comments until each applicant has been interviewed.

2. DISCUSSION OF COMMISSION VACANCIES AND POSSIBLE APPOINTMENTS

Vice Mayor Grill mentioned the establishment of ground rules, inquiring if the other commissioners felt that the applicants not being interviewed should be seated outside of the Chambers and if there should be a time limit established for each interview.

The consensus of the Commission was to continue conducting the interviews as was done for District 4 by allowing all applicants to be in the Chambers and to not put a time limit on the interview process.

Vice Mayor Grill stated that if there is a tie vote of 2-2, the Commission will need to deliberate to determine a majority vote, or the motion will fail and will need to be decided upon later.

Commissioner Graus gave his final remarks thanking the Commission, staff, and his wife. He tendered his resignation as Commissioner effective today and exited the meeting at 2:07 p.m.

Mayor Petrila expressed his opinions on the City Commission not allowing either District 1 qualified candidate (Karen Marriott or Lisa Reich) to interview or be selected because of the influence it may have on the March election. He opined that selecting one of them may give an unfair advantage by essentially making that person the incumbent.

Each commissioner expressed their opinions on the issue as outlined by the Mayor and reached a conclusion that the Commission should continue with the process as that was not a factor when initiating a request for interest. Attorney Dickman stated that there is nothing in the Charter that prevents the Commission from selecting an individual who has qualified for an upcoming election.

The Commission began the interviews with Deborah Edney.

Deborah Edney gave her remarks on why she is interested, stating that she felt that it would be a good opportunity to serve for a few months in an interim capacity and would help her to decide if running for a future District 1 election would be something she would be interested in doing.

How have you been involved in the City?

Ms. Edney highlighted her volunteer efforts with the rehabilitation facility near her residence and her experience with preparing meals for those in need.

What are some issues in District 1 that you feel are most important?

She addressed a house located on Mangrove Avenue that has continuous unsafe and unsanitary conditions. She would like to work with Code Enforcement to understand the issue and how to address the cleanup.

Are there broader issues facing the City that you feel you can address?

Ms. Edney would like to see a consensus on the high-rise development in the City and how to be developed reasonably. She would like to see a balanced approach between developers and residents. Ms. Edney also touched on elevating District 1 to match the other districts in the City.

How do your background and experiences help with being a Commissioner?

Ms. Edney discussed her life-saving experiences and critical decisions working in the nursing field and how that would translate well to decision-making as an elected official.

How long have you been a resident?

She has been a resident since July 2004.

During the time you have lived in the City, what has the City done well and what do you hope to bring to make the City move forward in a better direction?

Ms. Edney would like to make efforts to bridge the ongoing divide in the development views of the City.

Do you have any ideas on how to do that (question above)?

She would like to see more meetings that create an atmosphere for people to express their views and be heard. She opined the environment is not conducive to open dialogue and that she could contribute to making that change.

What are the top 3 priorities that you would like to work on if you're selected?

Ms. Edney would like to see the house addressed (on Mangrove Avenue), she would like to address the negative behaviors that are impacting the District and hold more community meetings for productive dialogue.

Are you a member of any advocacy, civic, HOA, etc. group?

She is not involved in any groups.

How will your prior angst/passion affect the ability to act as Commissioner, District 1?

Ms. Edney assured the Commission that she can act neutrally when it comes to making decisions for the

betterment of the constituents. She makes efforts to do her homework and will continue to act that way when seated as a Commissioner.

The Commissioners then interviewed Karen Marriott.

Karen Marriott introduced herself and gave a brief background on her tenure as a resident and business owner. She is one of the candidates who qualified in November for the March 2024 District 1 election. She elaborated on being able to bring a perspective to the Commission as a St. Pete Beach resident (since 2009) and small business owner/operator.

Please share any community involvement you have had.

Ms. Marriott stated that her business is a member of the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce, she served on the Library Advisory Committee, and recently transitioned her service to the Beach Stewardship Committee. She stated that she was interested in being involved in the City for some time; however, it took her quite some time to figure out how to go about doing that.

What local issues do you feel need to be addressed?

She discussed the redevelopment plans for both the east and west end of Corey Avenue. Ms. Marriott would like to see further transparency in the permitting and zoning departments to help prepare interested individuals, ideally small businesses, on how to properly meet the City's requirements, what those requirements are, how to navigate the Code, etc. She also mentioned the hiring of the new City Manager along with the two conditional use permits for Gulf Boulevard hotels.

What is your business?

North Beach Windsurfing.

What does your business do?

Her business is an online retail store with primary service through their brick-and-mortar store located here in the City; they also hold windsurfing lessons.

If you were to serve on the Commission, what conflicts would you have, if any?

There are no specific conflicts that she can identify at this time.

If selected as a Commissioner, why should the Commission pick you or the other candidate running for the District 1 election rather than letting the voters decide?

Ms. Marriott stated that the voters will still be deciding the District 1 Commissioner during the March election. When deciding whether to put her name in for the selection today, she weighed the pros and cons and decided that there were pros/advantages but there were also cons/disadvantages if she didn't meet the residents' expectations. She opined the Commission should be picking the best candidate for the position.

Should the Commission stay out of the election [meaning do not select a current qualified candidate for the interim seat]?

Ms. Marriott does not see the choice being interpreted as the City Commission being involved in the election.

If the other candidate were to withdraw their name from the interview list today, would you still leave your name in?

Yes.

When considering the priorities in the City, what is your view on what the City should do differently to fill

the vacant lots from a commercial perspective?

Ms. Marriott noted the hurdles placed on small businesses by the Federal Government and shared her personal experience and the known experiences of other individuals in the City regarding the City's building department and permitting process. She opined that the City should take steps to help small businesses by making the process more transparent and clearer on all the necessary steps.

Are you a member of any organizations such as civic, HOA, advocacy, etc.?

None personally; professionally a member of the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce.

What are your top 3 priorities?

She elaborated on the selection of the City Manager as the biggest priority of the Commission currently.

The Commission interviewed Lisa Reich.

Lisa Reich expressed her struggle with the process that the Commission is undergoing for the selection of a Commissioner for District 1. She cited her opinions of unfairness due to this being in the middle of a campaign for the March election, the advantages vs. disadvantages that it may create, and that the selection should be left to the election in March. Because of this, Ms. Reich withdrew her application for interim Commissioner, District 1.

When asked if she was familiar with the City's Charter, Ms. Reich noted that she is familiar with and still struggles with fairness during these unprecedented times.

Commissioner Friszolowski stated that although this is unprecedented, this process has been conducted in times before this, including Mr. Friszolowski's temporary one-time appointment.

Vice Mayor Grill mentioned his appointment in 2021 after Commissioner Doug Izzo resigned.

Resident Deborah Schechner complimented the City Clerk for her efforts during this selection process. She spoke of her opinions on the unfairness of the process being reopened after the consensus was disclosed and advertised. Complimented Deborah Edney on her involvement in the community.

Resident Dana Richardson complimented the service of the Commissioners. She mentioned that the Form 6 filing requirements were known to the Commission months ago; however, they waited until the last minute to step down, and that resulted in this process. She expressed her opinions of reopening the request for interest and the unfairness of it. She also addressed the misconceptions that she has heard regarding the Protect St. Pete Beach Advocacy Group.

Vice Mayor Grill clarified the process and stated that during the December 18th meeting it was said that if the Commission does not get enough interest, they can reopen the submittal period. He explained that questioning the applicants about their involvement in any group is on the advice of the City Attorney for conflict identification, if any.

Commissioner Friszolowski stated that because of the Sunshine Law, he had no way of knowing if any other elected official was struggling with the filing of Form 6 as he was; he was hopeful that the State would make a ruling to "grandfather" current elected officials in.

Resident Joe Moholland stated that he was asked if he made any contributions to any elected official campaign; that question has not been asked of any other interviewee.

Commissioner Friszolowski thanked all the candidates for submitting their interest to serve. He expressed his support for selecting Karen Marriott.

Commissioner Lorenzen thanked all those who stepped forward. He expressed appreciation for Deborah Edney's service in the nursing profession. He is leaning more towards Karen Marriott based on the direction of the interview today.

Mayor Petrila reiterated his opinions on the selection of either Karen Marriott or Lisa Reich and applauded Ms. Reich for stepping down. He reminded the Commission of their Oath of Office that requires them to uphold the Constitution and Laws of the State of Florida. He was disappointed that all the Commissioners were choosing to remove themselves, especially at the last minute. Mr. Petrila spoke about the Charter, the discussion at the December 18th meeting regarding the application deadline and opined that the right thing to do would be to remove the two qualified candidates to allow for a clean campaign/election.

Vice Mayor Grill clarified the comment made by the Mayor regarding the Oath of Office. He feels that the Mayor's remarks are disparaging of his efforts in serving the City. He addressed the reopening of the deadline and the intent to find the best, most qualified candidates for the job.

Commissioner Friszolowski stated that had the Mayor wanted to exclude the two qualified candidates from District 1, that should have been made a part of the discussion on December 18th.

Motion: Commissioner Friszolowski moved, Commissioner Lorenzen seconded, and the motion carried 3-1 to appoint Karen Marriott to City Commissioner, District 1. Mayor Petrila voted no.

All the candidates were thanked for stepping up and Ms. Marriott was congratulated. The next meeting will be held tomorrow at 7:30 a.m. to discuss District 2.

Vice Mayor Grill adjourned the meeting at 3:09 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVED: JANUARY 9, 2024



AMBER LAROWE
CITY CLERK



ADRIAN PETRILA
MAYOR