

From the League of Women Voters event  
March 15, 2006

This City Council has been on the job since January

When the League of Women Voters offered this opportunity to talk with those who demonstrate an interest in city government, I couldn't say NO. The Charter calls for a state of the city message by February 28th but this is more of an opportunity for dialogue which is better than giving a speech.

We recognized during the campaigns for these positions that the most important task we have before us initially is to hire a city manager. After receiving resumes from self-selected applicants, we thought we could do better and asked our city attorney to assume the duties of acting city manager. There were many compliments from citizens for making that decision. It made the institutional memory available to all of us who had no prior experience governing this city. I'd like to publicly thank Jim Flitz for keeping us on track and helping us keep the city ship afloat. The firm, which has been hired to help us winnow the prospects for city manager, has begun interviewing us as to what we expect the city manager to do – what kind of a manager we want. The process is on track to complete the selection by early July.

There were many vacancies on boards and commissions—some so depleted that they could not muster a quorum. Most of the applications on file were dated 2002, so the call was sent out for currently interested people to make applications for boards and commissions. Enough of those vacancies have been filled so the boards have a quorum or better and can conduct business. There is more to be done in that area. Some board members were elected city council members and needed to resign and be replaced by others willing to volunteer their time and in some instances their expertise.

We were given a mighty Christmas present in the compromise between Cedar Rapids and Marion on Site #2 of the landfill on County Home Road. That is not the end of the story: Site #1 still must be capped and the compost relocated. That will be an expensive process which will also bring up all the NIMBY (not in my back yard) arguments. That politically volatile process must be completed before Site #1 can be put to a public, adaptive use such as a park or bike trail.

A park at Site #1, affectionately known as Mt. Trashmore is supposed to be part of Cedar Bend, as the development project south of downtown has been titled. Vision Iowa has granted five million dollars to help develop the area. Since taking office we have learned what the previous administration promised in exchange for the money and what has and has not already been accomplished in that regard. We realize the burden those promises represent. There will probably be a decision on Cedar Bend at a Council meeting soon.

The City Council has conducted budget hearings and tried to learn as much as we can about where the money comes from and where it goes to run our city. "Deep Throat"

told Woodward and Bernstein, the authors of All the President's Men, to "follow the money." That is what we have been doing as we fashioned the budget for the city which must be certified to the County Auditor by today.

When Sarah Henderson and I joined the Chamber of Commerce on its trip to Washington, D.C. to confer with our Congressional delegation, we emphasized the federal court house for which the land has already been assembled, cleared and made free of environment problems, as well as the levee and flood control problems in the Time Check and Indian and Dry Creek areas. These items are the keys to the revitalization of the down town area. Linn and Johnson counties lobbied together as the Technology Corridor. We also talked about the ancient, outdated Hygienic Lab in Iowa City. With bird flu likely, we need to have a modern, cutting edge facility able to do many functions. Immediately after the election the list of things I wanted to accomplish in the first month was published. Here is a report of the successes and shortcomings:

#1 was Meeting with the Executive Committee of Priority One to ensure a coordinated strategy to recruit jobs for Cedar Rapids. I've met with Priority One on a regular basis. I missed a meeting when I went to Washington for the opening of the Grant Wood exhibit at the Smithsonian. The Friday morning economic development ad hoc discussions have been resurrected and should help with the goal of job creation.

#2 was Working with the League of Cities to train newly elected Council members and begin team building. We had a session with the representative of the League of Cities together with the local legislative delegation. Some of us attended seminars sponsored by the League of Cities. We also organized another meeting for team building purposes with Ron Fielder from Grant Wood AEA who is an expert at helping new organizations.

#3 Create a task force consisting of new City Council as well as department heads from human resources, budget and finance to establish criteria for the recruitment and evaluation of a new city manager. After a false start over choosing an interim, we are on track to hire a city manager.

#4 Engage Cedar Rapids in the current Lu Barron/Lyle Hanson proposal for reconciliation and moving forward with Marion on the short-term resolution of the Landfill Issue. On Monday a couple of Council members met with Supervisor Langston and Ms McShane of the Solid Waste agency to review the plans for Cell 2 at Site #2 and progress is being made.

#5 Schedule a summit with local State Legislators to introduce the newly elected City Council and develop a strategy to move Cedar Rapids to the forefront of state funding. The legislators met with us in conjunction with the League of Cities meeting and we have had additional meetings with local legislators. They have been told of our needs concerning potential flooding in the Time Check area, Indian and Dry creeks. We have also discussed MAHP funding and other matters. It looks to me that there has developed a good working relationship among city, county and legislative representation for the people of Cedar Rapids.

#6 Work with the Cedar Rapids Chamber of Commerce on ways to capture increased federal funding during the Chamber's February trip to Washington, D.C. I've already talked about that.

#7. Create a new Youth City Council to serve as an advisory board dedicated to pursuing ways to keep our young, educated citizens in Cedar Rapids. Council member Sarah Henderson and Sarah Halbbrook are helping with this, but it is not as far along as I hoped. We have concluded that two groups must be treated separately; those who are still full time students and those who are working in the area.

#8. Establish a schedule of quarterly "Town Hall" meetings in each quadrant of the city to expand dialogue and ensure that our new government is tuned in to the concerns of all Cedar Rapids residents. Council members McGrane, Gulick and Henderson, elected to represent particular districts have had meetings in their districts. The three at-large Council members, Shey, Fagan and Podzimek have scheduled a meeting. The meetings have been well-publicized and well attended and I expect they will continue.

#9. Work with the Cedar Rapids Chamber of Commerce to "fast track" the most promising and productive 15-in-5 initiatives. Brian Fagan has tracked these meetings carefully and can give you the most up-to-date information about them.

There are many more things I'd like to talk about, but that is not the reason to be here. I learn more with my mouth closed and my ears open, so please let us have your questions.