

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the special joint meeting of the Brainerd City Council and Public Utilities Commission was called to order at 6:00 P.M. by Council President Bevans.

Upon roll call, the following members were noted as present: O'Day, Stunek, Stenglein, Johnson, Czezok, and Bevans. Mayor Badeaux was also noted as present. Member Terry was noted as absent. Commissioners Wussow and Matten were noted as present.

Staff present were Administrator Broyles, Public Utilities Director Evans, IT/GIS Director Strong, BPU Technology Supervisor Andersen, HR Director Schubert, Police Chief Davis, Finance Director Hillman, BPU Finance Manager Loch, BPU Operations Manager Hawkinson, and Public Works Director Habighorst.

Council President Bevans opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

Discuss Creation of a Single Integrated City IT Department

IT/GIS Director Strong and BPU Technology Supervisor Andersen gave an overview of their presentation including their recommendations. It is recommended to have six positions between both entities in the future. It is not best practice to integrate into one network due to security and processes of the utility. Integration could include basic IT desk support share to allow specialized positions to focus more efforts on key duties. Mr. Strong and Mr. Andersen noted that BPU needs to increase their IT staffing as soon as possible. They would like direction on whether they should maintain current structure and continue to collaborate when appropriate or formally decide to create an integrated IT department and draft a plan including organizational chart, job descriptions, financial considerations, and timeline.

Member O'Day asked about future needs at City Hall and current needs of BPU IT. It make sense to him to hire a help desk person to go back and forth from the City to BPU to assist with basic staff technology needs. He stated that he does not have a problem with taking the process of integration slowly and carefully.

Member Johnson stated that any changes made should be made over a number of years. He asked about the example of Rochester in the presentation. He also asked about hardware and eventually having the same applications. He stated that the differences in technology seems to be a microchasm of the lack of communication.

Technology Supervisor Andersen stated that BPU is unique that department has the hydro dam and electric utility. Rochester is using similar technology. He also stated that a lot of the hardware and applications that BPU uses is specifically designed for BPU.

Mayor Badeaux asked about the realistic timeline of integration, the union contract limitations, and what is the total need for staff. He would like to see an individual to help with day to day issues.

Commission Wussow asked that Council expedite the process to hire BPU technology staff.

Member Johnson stated that when the employee resigned, it was stated that the IT Analyst was not to be backfilled. The new positions require position descriptions and wage negotiations.

Member Stenglein stated that the process and obstacles will not get smaller. If the full integration process takes twenty years, if we don't start the process for ten years, it will still take twenty years. She appreciates that the City will not go to one network. We are one Brainerd, and we need to treat our departments like that.

Member O'Day asked whether the City wants to be further apart in ten years or whether we want to be closer together. We need to setup the next generation for success.

Commissioner Matten thanked IT Staff for putting the presentation together and for their opinions. She understands that to be hired under the City, staff can work in both departments. To be hired under BPU, they can only work on the utility. She hopes that communication continues to improve hardware and software.

Member Czczok asked for an updated on the sample job descriptions for the new BPU positions. He asked about how the union would be determined. If the position will work at both the City and Public Utilities Department he questioned whether they could be a part of the Public Utility Union.

HR Director Schubert stated that the sample job descriptions that were proposed to the BPU Commission for budgeting purposes reflected that the position would only work at the Public Utilities Department. The Council needs to determine whether integration will happen, who the position would report to, and what the duties are specifically. She referenced the HR Assistant position when determining which union would be utilized. She stated that the Bureau of Mediation Services has a ruling to determine which union a position would be a part of.

Will Keyes, IBEW Local 31 Business Manager, stated that he would have to check the union contracts to be sure.

Member Czczok stated that he is unsure how to give direction, if we don't know how it will all work with the budget, union, and department. This plan does not seem to be efficient in saving money.

Commissioner Matten read a statement for Commissioner Erickson.

Member Czczok asked whether staff has free will to speak without ramifications or repercussions. He asked whether integration will work.

Administrator Broyles stated that he has not directed any staff what to say at the meeting tonight.

Public Utilities Director Evans stated that he will fully support the City Council's decision on integration of IT departments. In all of his years of experience with utilities, he believes that cities of similar size are on a spectrum, at some point cities of 50,000 were a city of 16,000. He believes being separate works. An integrated model could work, however, it would not be as efficient as part of the struggle is specialization. The City should always be looking for opportunities to support each other. He added that integration is not the correct term and the way that the functional and project management would work in the proposed structure may lead to confusion and frustration for our employees. Communication is paramount.

Administrator Broyles stated that he believes in centralized control and decentralized execution. He believes that the City can administratively integrate these two departments and make virtually no changes operationally. He sees a clear chain of command and communication making the department more efficient. More people in a department creates operational flexibility through cross training. It is imperative that there is one director for IT. The drama that he has experienced at the City is astonishing. He believes that a large part of the reason he was hired was due to his leadership skills. The City has challenges with its organizational culture. Long lasting outcomes will require foundational changes. Intentional, targeted, functional integration where appropriate is the best path forward. He strongly recommends the integration of the IT departments at the City of Brainerd and Brainerd Public Utilities.

Member Johnson stated that he has not been convinced that there is no way that integration will not benefit anything. One of the biggest negatives that he has heard is the responsibility to the ratepayers and taxpayers. It will be beneficial to have more staff that provides better service to our citizens.

Member Czeczok asked how the City can get Technology Supervisor Andersen the help he needs.

Member Johnson stated that this was the first step, to make a decision so that they can move forward with hiring someone to help Mr. Andersen.

Mayor Badeaux asked about the timeline.

City Administrator Broyles stated that the first step would be to revise the job description for and hire a Director. Staff on both sides appreciates a definitive answer. All staff will support the decision.

HR Director Schubert stated that the timeline is typically about six weeks to on board new staff.

Member O'Day stated that hearing Administrator Broyles comments, he does feel more confident about the decision. He knows that there is hesitancy throughout staff, but the City Council hired Mr. Broyles and has the confidence in his leadership. He would like to see Administrator Broyles supported throughout the organization. He will want to take a slow look at integrating other departments.

Mayor Badeaux stated that this is a matter that the Council takes very seriously. Because of the stress, he likes to take the time to figure out where to move forward. It is important to receive the information and go at a good pace. Council needs to hear the struggles that staff is going through. He thanked staff and the Commission for being at the meeting tonight.

MOVED AND SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBERS JOHNSON AND STENGLEIN TO DIRECT STAFF TO CREATE A SINGLE INTEGRATED IT DEPARTMENT FOR THE CITY OF BRAINERD.

Upon roll call, Members Stunek, Stenglein, Johnson, Czeczok, O'Day, and Bevans voted "aye". No Member voted "nay". The Chair declared the motion carried.

Member Johnson asked whether there is an action to take tonight to expedite the process. He asked whether both jobs could be posted as of the January 6th meeting.

HR Director Schubert stated that the first step is to develop an IT Director job description, and to get the director in place. Staff will present an updated job description to the Council at its next regular meeting, unless the Council held a special meeting or gives staff authority to finalize the job description and ratify at the next meeting. The Department Head's input who will be overseeing the department in the development of other positions job descriptions is very important. Current staff could review the descriptions but if there is a disagreement, there would need to be someone to make the final decision.

Adjourn

MOVED AND SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBERS STUNEK AND JOHNSON, DULY CARRIED, TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 7:38 p.m.

Nicholas W. Broyles
City Administrator