

April 8, 2014

Re: Alder Morrisons letter

Dear President Perez and fellow Alders,

I had a travel delay and cannot get back for tonight's meeting. But I did want to respond to Alder Morrison's letter earlier today.

I appreciate the service that each one of you performs. After only 3 ½ months I am shocked by the amount of effort we all have to put in. Whether it be tending to the many constituent service issues, reading inch after inch after infinite inch of documents to prepare for debate and votes, attending lengthy committee meetings 4-5 times a month lasting sometimes for 5-6 hours, and then attending the actual board meetings, the job is a bear! So for that I am grateful to all. My only disappointment, which is very serious, is the lack of real debate. It seems as though many on the board were given a position but not a voice. As a result when they meet someone like me, they are frankly shocked. Who is this person with all this energy, and all of these probing questions? Unfortunately, this has resulted in a misguided attempt to censor me rather than join me in a vigorous debate. Debate in a city with so many social problems that need immediate attention is critical. Instead, these issues fall by the wayside as an oppressive demand for conformity takes its place.

I will not ask for any alder to be censured for their frankly abhorrent behavior towards me, as these issues are best resolved privately. I readily admit to frustration and some undignified interactions at two of the 30 plus meetings I have attended. And I extend an apology to the public, they deserve better from me. But I will not apologize to those alders that interfere with my rights and the public's right to real debate and democracy.

I make the following recommendations:

- Get a copy of the transcripts from these two meetings. What you will find is a chair who violated my responsibility to ask questions before voting on a union contract; who regularly cuts me off during debate; who regularly allows mob style rulings where she is joined by other alders in attacking me; who regularly allows other members to interrupt me while I have the floor; and who enforces rules that in reality do not exist in writing and have not been adopted—as when the chair sanctioned me along with three other members who stood over me for answering a direct question posed to me at a public hearing by a constituent (being told that there was a rule requiring members not to answer questions or say anything at a public hearing, I apologized. Then I checked to see if there was a rule like this. It seemed incredibly undemocratic but ignorance of the law or rule is no excuse. In fact there is no rule. This was a misrepresentation and I withdraw my apology on that issue).
- Immediately allow for experts in municipal finance and organization to testify at finance committee workshops. The finance committee cannot vote on a budget that

relies solely on department heads. The recent approval of an 114,000-grant writer manager was a very disturbing example of overpaying those in central bureaucracy without objective evidence. Grant writing managers make 61,000 a year. Alder Morrison voted for \$114,000 plus \$60,000 in benefits because she thought it was disrespectful to pay less “I wouldn’t take that job, its disrespectful less than \$114,000”. This sort of bizarre rationale for paying someone 6-7 times the median wage of a resident must end. We could easily have brought in a CCM consultant at 900 Chapel who is already on retention at city expense to tell us the truth. But no this is prohibited. This is a money and time waster and creates the extravagantly paid bureaucracy we now have;

- Charges of racism should not be tolerated without real evidence. In a city as diverse as ours, alders should never feed the fire with this sort of talk. When I said to Alder Brooks that she supported the bureaucracy because she had always lived within it—I was not calling her a welfare mom. I was telling her that I thought she lacked the objectivity to see how destructive her support for this bureaucracy was. The city currently has hundreds of people mostly non-residents making six figures and performing no direct services. I will fight for teachers, fire, police, parks, public works, libraries, youth, elderly, renters, and all residents but not this bloated central government. If we simply allowed an expert in municipal governance to testify, they would say we are spending \$50,000,000 on things that are of no benefit to the residents. It’s an outrage and it causes so much pain in our city. When I become passionate its because every day we do not address this inequity is another day the residents suffer from the dramatic teen who gets shot to the shut in with no services to the family who is forced to move. There is no time for catering to the needs of this central bureaucracy. It is in the final analysis a sin what we are doing with our budget. This is not racism. It is in fact the best of liberalism. I am a liberal. I wish that some on the board who call themselves that would self-evaluate and admit that protecting wealthy non resident bureaucrats is not democratic, is not fair, and is not liberal. The Peoples Caucus is a small voice in this aldermanic culture reminding all of us of our duty to the single moms and dads whether white, black, Arabic, latino, Asian who live in poverty, food insecurity, crime insecurity, and inadequate youth programming. It is them we should be protecting not those who as Alder Morrison says would feel “disrespected” earning less than \$180,000 of salary and benefits. Far from calling Alder Brooks a horrid slur about welfare moms, I was actually calling her the guardian for the entitled non resident central bureaucracy that she in fact been a big part of all her life along with Chief of Staff and Oxford resident Tomas Reyes;
- I would ask that public hearings of finance be interactive. The chair or her designee should help the public understand the budget, not just ask for comment. Finance and budgeting is complex. The public should understand our revenue stream and expenses. I fear the reason that it is not explained is that it is actually not understood by many alders (even I after 100 hours of study can only claim a moderate understanding—it is an opaque mess with layers of unprovided back up);
- I would ask that alders be allowed within reason to answer questions and provide their viewpoints on different aspects of the budget during public hearings. I don’t understand the reluctance to have a real exchange of ideas. Why hide our opinions until it is too late? Unless of course those opinions will be so unpopular and

- groundless that prohibiting any opinion protects them from review or scrutiny
- We need written and approved rules for finance. I have been told there are rules that in fact are not written or approved.
 - If Alder Morrison wants a full hearing on conduct, this should be a full investigation of all alder conduct done by an outside citizen commission not the alders who at this point are controlled by a super majority of so called “union alders”. Allowing the super majority to do an investigation of a member of the small minority is am recipe for grave injustice and disrespect for our local governance.

Thank you for you consideration. Please know that debate for me does not mean I am always right. It means I want to hear how you feel and why. I am extremely open-minded and readily admit when a position I have taken is actually not the best course. If however you have no response other than a censoring one, I will not back down, and I will not be bullied and I will never apologize to those who attack in mobs of alders to keep the truth from the light. Lets hope that such battle lines need not be drawn again. America was built on tolerance for different views not on fear and silencing of them.

Very truly yours

Michael Stratton
Alder, Ward 19