

Board talks MLK Day, wet/dry

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By Joe Phelps
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Brenda Hagerich

Democracy is not working in Clark County. I don't care if you don't drink alcohol. People deserve the right to vote. Let's settle this issue.

— Brenda Hagerich, city director

There was hardly a place to sit Thursday in the Town Hall Boardroom, where the Arkadelphia City Board of Directors held its regular meeting to discuss a variety of issues, from accepting the resignation of one director to allowing sanitation workers off on MLK Day and lengthening the lease agreement for the Community Family Enrichment Center.

A group of about eight sanitation department employees stood near the entrance of the boardroom to hear discussion about their getting the day off on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a holiday they have chosen to work, with overtime wages, in the past.

In an earlier board meeting, Henry Wilson, president of the Clark County

NAACP, addressed the board about the employees working on MLK Day while other city employees have the holiday off. He said he had shared his concern with others in the community, and even some sanitation employees.

Thursday, Mayor Chuck Hollingshead noted the employees' presence and commended them for the "outstanding job you do for our city every day." He said he has lived in other cities where sanitation employees throw a bag of trash toward the truck, miss the target and leave the mess in the street.

City Manager Jimmy Bolt agreed, adding that he only gets about one call per year from someone complaining about the department.

Bolt said his staff over the last two weeks has reviewed the current policy, and its

"best guess" for what sets the city's holiday schedule is which holidays the Arkadelphia schools recognize.

However, the holidays that fall on Mondays or Fridays require the sanitation department to run its commercial routes with at least a "skeleton crew" because many people eat at restaurants on holiday weekends, causing a larger amount of garbage than normal.

The department employees 13 full-time people and, in some cases, up to nine employees are required to work and in other cases only two or three are required.

There has been discussion about the issue since Bolt was hired as city manager, including the cost and risk associated with allowing sanitation employees working on the holidays. The "pros" of giving them the day off would save the city

money while alleviating the risk associated, and the "cons" will be the confusion from residential residents who put out their trash on Monday.

Bolt said his staff supported allowing the workers the day off to observe MLK Day.

Vice Mayor Ann Sanders said the workers made a "conscious choice" to work on the holiday, but did so because taking off one day would cause them to "double up" on their duties the next day. "You have to work one day at a time," she told the employees. "The stuff that's missed on Monday or Tuesday can be picked up the next day."

She urged that the city give its residents ample notification that the routes will not run on MLK Mondays,

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Hagerich addressed the signing of the petition to put the sale of alcohol on the November ballot — an “issue no one wants to talk about.”

Beginning with the Clark County Strategic Plan, which set the blueprints for economic growth, she said \$200,000 was spent in 2006 to develop the Plan. From the plan, Leadership Clark County emerged. A group of the inaugural class performed an analysis on the economic impact of the county with its dry status.

That group conducted a survey of 571 people who live or work in Clark County. Of those who participated in the survey:

64 percent travel outside the county at least once a week to purchase clothes, entertainment or alcohol;

34 percent spend \$75 or more per week (with an average of \$50);

93 percent travel to Hot Springs and 74 percent travel to Little Rock at least once a week;

93 percent of them purchase clothing outside of Clark County;

57 percent purchase alcohol;

100 percent purchase entertainment/dining outside the county.

Next, she said, the Alliance spent over \$70,000 on the Del Boyette firm to draw out the county's economic blueprints for future growth. That firm produced a similar hypothesis of the correlation between alcohol

rights.” She said she encourages democracy, and encouraged any group that pushes for democracy, notably Let the People Vote 2010.

“Democracy is not working in Clark County,” she added. “I don’t care if you don’t drink alcohol. People deserve the right to vote. Sign the petition. Let democracy work, let the majority rule. Let’s settle this issue.” Her comments were followed by applause from some board members and much of the audience.

Director DeDe Baldwin said, “on a lighter note,” she enjoyed seeing the new hybrid police cars and said police officers seem to be excited about them as well.

Calhoun said he, too, was happy to see the cruisers. He said the city had a good meeting about the bluff property. He also thanked those there for attending the meeting. “I wish the room was full every time we meet.”

Democracy was also on Sanders’ mind. She implied that city employees have in the past been threatened to have a “hard time at work” if they were to sign a petition. “If so, let me know and I’ll help you find a lawyer. We’re not in Russia. We’re supposed to be in a democracy.”

She also had an issue with people telling board members what to do. “This board is a group of adults. Whether or not you like it, I don’t need a soul to tell me what

I need to do or say on this board. The board is capable of speaking for itself.”

She said she would not be controlled by special interest groups. “Like it or not, the board is capable of doing what it needs to do. One or two people are not going to run Arkadelphia. They’re not going to run it — this is a democratic society.”

Though she voted in a previous meeting in favor of the bluff property feasibility study, she spoke out against using the property Thursday. “Trees are falling off the bluff, and after they’re all gone, it’s going to be nothing but red clay. We can’t hide it. The Lord washed them down, and we can’t bring them back up.

“I’m afraid someone knew about the bluff before it was handed to us.”

The city attained the prop-

erty in a land swap with Ouachita Baptist University. “We might as well tell the citizens. There’s a gate out there by Car-Mart where the trail goes out to it. Unlock that gate. Let the people look.”

She said the City Board has “made some of the biggest mistakes, and we’re still making them,” but said of people who repeatedly criticize it, “If you want to be on the board, put your name in the hat.”

Hollingshead said it was “good to have a crowd” at the meeting. He said the meetings are televised on Cable Channel 9 for those who cannot get out of their home to the meetings. He said if there are complaints against the board, “we welcome you to tell us your thoughts. We’re going to continue to do what’s best for the city.”