



WORK SESSION of the Greenbelt City Council held Wednesday, June 6, 2001, for the purpose of meeting with the chairpersons of City Council advisory groups.

Mayor Pro Tem Turnbull started the meeting at 8:10 p.m. It was held in the Multipurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmember Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Pro Tem Alan Turnbull. Mr. Edward V.J. Putens arrived at about 8:25 p.m.

STAFF PRESENT INCLUDED: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager; David E. Moran, Assistant to the City Manager; Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk; and Nicole DeWald, Arts Coordinator.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Pamela Moody, Advisory Committee on Education; Charles Jackman, Advisory Committee on Trees; Sheldon Goldberg, Advisory Planning Board; Dennis Jelalian, Arts Advisory Board; Steven Skolnik, Board of Appeals; Judith Ott, Board of Elections; Kevin Hammett, Community Relations Advisory Board; James O'Reilly, Employee Relations Board; Lola Skolnik, Park & Recreation Advisory Board; Kelby Brick, Public Safety Advisory Committee; Leonie Penney, Senior Citizens Advisory Committee; Brenda Walker, Youth Advisory Committee; Carrie Quigley, Interpreter; and Amy Boyes, the Gazette.

Following introductions, Mr. Turnbull asked for any additions to the agenda. He said people should feel free to bring up any topics related to improving the workings of the advisory groups or their interactions with the City. He asked if any of the groups perceived themselves as being significantly over- or underused. Responses to this question illustrated for the first time during the evening that the groups have a wide range of function and method of operation. Mr. Turnbull commented that the Board of Appeals and the Employee Relations Board (ERB), for example, meet as needed in response to specific situations. Mr. O'Reilly commented that the ERB had recently found it helpful to meet when a new member was assigned to the board, in order to orient the person to the group rather than waiting until a required meeting.

Ms. Moody commented that even for a group meeting regularly, the "new member" issue is one that needs to be considered. She suggested that it might be worthwhile to have a more structured way of orienting new members. Mr. Turnbull responded that, from his prior experience of serving on boards, he thought it was up to the chairs to take new members under their wing, and he encouraged the chairs to do so. He also suggested that if any groups felt themselves to be in need of any "training" type activities (e.g., small group facilitation), they should get in touch with Connie Harris, the City's Human Resource Officer, for assistance.

Mr. Jackman commented that since the Advisory Committee on Trees (ACT) is a new committee, its members are still trying to find their way as a new group, as well as being "new members."

Mr. Brick questioned what Council's expectation is of individuals' time commitments and levels of involvement. There is sometimes a problem created by committee members' different expectations, since some want to be very actively involved in undertaking activities, and others anticipate having committed to nothing more than attending a monthly meeting. He asked if other groups had a problem with this, and he suggested that Council might make its expectations clear to applicants when they are interviewed. Ms. Penney said she thought it was acceptable for people to be engaged at different levels, and Mr. Turnbull said he agreed it is not inherently a problem. Mr. Putens said there is too much variation among groups for Council to be more prescriptive than to assume participation at monthly meetings or whatever the comparable basic participation level would be. He said some groups are by definition more passive than others; some may be more active at some times than at other times, depending on what Council is doing or what is going on externally. As an example, he noted that the Advisory Committee on Education has become more actively involved in policy issues as educational policy issues have become more pressing in the county.

Mr. Turnbull said some clarification of the role of Council liaison might also be in order. He said that, speaking for himself, he tells the groups to which he is assigned that they should speak up if they need his attention but that it is not likely that he can attend meetings on a regular basis. Mr. Putens added that the Council liaison should not be too involved with the workings of the group, since the intention is for the group to advise Council with a voice that is independent of Council or staff.

Ms. Penney said she thought it was important for the Council liaison to attend meetings and get to know the group and the issues. Mr. Putens responded that Council understands this need and wants to respond to it, but that Council members are very overextended with night meetings and events and, realistically speaking, probably cannot attend advisory group meetings on a regular basis.

Mr. Turnbull asked if there were any issues regarding the function of the staff liaison. Ms. Penney said the Senior Citizens Advisory Committee (SCAC) believes both the committee and its staff liaison have been put in an inappropriate situation. SCAC's understanding is that it is supposed to advise Council, and at one time it met with Council in January or February following its fall Open Forum. Then their reports were made to staff in the City Manager's office. For the last couple of years, since the staff liaison has coordinated it, it has seemed to SCAC as though they are making recommendations to their own staff liaison. Ms. Penney emphasized that their staff liaison is "wonderful" and that the committee's problem with this structure is not in any way a criticism of the individual who is caught in the middle. Since this issue was specific to SCAC, Mr. Turnbull suggested it might more appropriately be taken up directly with Council or the City Manager. Mr. McLaughlin said returning to the previous system was certainly a possibility. It was noted that Mr. White had already advised Council of SCAC's wish to schedule a work session.

Ms. Walker said the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) needs new members and described a couple of outreach efforts that had been made. Mr. Turnbull asked if, in general, the chairs and committees were actively involved in recruitment efforts and encouraged them to be so. There

was also discussion of involving young people on groups other than YAC. Mr. Brick said it might be useful to have young people on the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC).

Everyone was supportive of Mr. Brick's suggestion that committees be informed when more than one group is reviewing a referral from Council or staff so they can interact if appropriate. This information can be included in the cover memo from staff conveying the referral.

There was discussion of using e-mail as much as possible to share information. One problem with this is that there is not universal access. Ms. Skolnik currently receives copies of Council agendas and minutes by U.S. mail, and she suggested those be sent out by e-mail instead. It was also noted that Council minutes are posted on the City Web site.

Mr. Brick said the PSAC would benefit from more community input. It was suggested that the PSAC hold an open forum similar to SCAC's. Mr. Putens suggested consideration of holding a Citywide open forum or town meeting, in which all the chairs and group members could participate, be held in September.

Ms. Moody asked how Council thought the advisory group process was going. Mr. Turnbull described it as "frustratingly imperfect," noting that different committees have different levels of information and pro-activity. Mr. Roberts said it was important, however, for the advisory groups to be as independent from Council as possible so they would remain "another voice." Mr. Putens agreed with that, saying that the roles of the different groups are very different. He said that becoming more active is not necessarily a good thing for all the groups; some of the boards are strictly advisory and should continue to play precisely that role.

Council thanked the chairs and representatives for coming and for all their ongoing work.

The meeting ended at about 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Gallagher

City Clerk