

Committee of the Whole Meeting discusses Alton Police Chief's future

by Brittany Kohler, Content Manager
May 12 2015 4:19 PM



Open public forum brings out concerns of reappointment

The City of Alton held a Committee of the Whole meeting Monday night, May 11, which covered important topics including the future of Alton Police Chief, Jason A. Simmons.

There were two main topics discussed, the first had to do with the City Planning Committee's 6 to 4 vote against allowing Grand Piasa Body Art to relocate from its current location at 3094 Homer Adams to 558-560 Broadway in Alton. The second topic proved more rancorous, dealing with Mayor Brant Walker's wish to reappoint Simmons to another one-year term. After regular agenda items were addressed, the floor was open to the public to comment.

About a dozen Alton police officers stood by the council room doors watching and listening to speakers both in favor and opposed to the reappointment of Simmons.

Simmons was appointed Chief of Police in May of 2013 after spending roughly 20 years on the force. Controversy throughout the department has clouded Alton Mayor Brant Walker's wish to reappoint Simmons for another year as Chief and has attracted the attention of local and regional media.

Should Mayor Walker's re-appointment of Chief Simmons fail for any reason, according to Dan Herkert, Chief of Staff, he will retain him as Police Chief pursuant to 65 ILCS 5/3.1-30 of the Illinois Compiled Statutes, as well as Title 3, Chapter 3, Section 2A of the Alton City Code which states that "the chief of police shall continue to serve until removed by order of the mayor or until his successor shall be appointed and qualified, whichever shall occur first."

One argument is that Simmons lacks the leadership that makes for a strong and stable force. Jan Mirikitani, the principal of her consulting firm and instructor, said she has received numerous calls, texts and e-mails concerning the welfare of the police officers within the department.

Mirikitani worked with 22 police departments in 2014, was a continuing education instructor at St. Louis County and Municipal Police Academy and teaches at the City Police Academy. After interviewing over half the policemen within the APD, Mirikitani says that she is concerned about the welfare of the police officers working under Simmons and believes that the department is a hostile work environment.

Each speaker was granted five minutes at the stand in front of the committee, however Mirikitani was granted extra time to speak against Simmons, due to the amount of information she was conveying.

“Chief Simmons has created a paranoid, political, patronage work culture where his definition of loyalty is you’re all in or you’re all out,” said Mirikitani. “He has surrounded himself with a handful of officers that he plans to reward with plum positions as he pushes out people who now hold those positions.”



Although the officers present did not speak out on their concerns or whether they were for his reappointment or against, there were speakers in favor of Simmons and the police force as a whole, one of which was local business owner, Marcus Henderson.

“As far as businesses are concerned, especially the African American businesses, sometimes it is a challenge for the groupings of people that we have in our area and it sometimes hinders the progress of our business,” said Henderson. “But the police department has come in and helped tremendously in decreasing the crime and creating a good rapport between businesses and the police department.”

Dr. Rance Thomas, PhD, who has worked in the area for over 30 years as a professor of criminal justice and lead coordinator of Sociology at Lewis and Clark Community College, was the last to speak on behalf of Simmons and says his involvement with the community reflects the character those should strive for in a Police Chief.

“I have had a pleasure of working with all of the chiefs of the police departments in the area,” said Thomas. “Chief Simmons will actually put his words into actions. He is good at working very hard to improve relations of the police and the community.”

In a recent interview with KMOV St. Louis, Mayor Brant Walker stands firm in his decision to stand by the Alton Chief of Police.

“A lot of this is political theatrics, unfortunately as we get into this a little farther no bargaining or disgruntled employee is going to set managerial policy for this city,” said Walker. “Myself along with my department heads will continue to set managerial policy and that’s the way it’s going to be as long as I’m Mayor.”

The city council will vote on the reappointment of Simmons and the approval of the relocation of Grand Piasa Art Wednesday, May 13, at the city council meeting located at City Hall at 7 p.m. The Riverbender.com media team will be attending the event. A video of raw footage of the meeting will be available on Riverbender.com at approximately 10:00 p.m. that night, May 13.