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10 April 2024

To the Bloomington Common Council:

I would like to see changes made in the way the council operates, specifically around the issue of public comment.

On April 3, 2024, the Regular Session of the Bloomington Common Council saw several speakers spew hate-filled speech during public comment. Comments about “mud babies”, “white power”, “hail Hitler”, anti-Jewish rhetoric, and anti-Palestine rhetoric were spoken in the course of the evening.

Some commentators and reporters have focused on where the comments came from. Whether it was from the podium or Zoom and whether the speakers were residents or not. It may be a comfort to think that comments made under the veil of anonymity are not really folks from our community. The problem with that view is that it ignores the very real impact on those listening to the rhetorical violence directed at them.

The current council process allows the council to listen to comments, but not directly engage. While this allows members of the public to speak, it does not create a healthy dialogue. We saw that play out in real-time on April 3rd. There were multiple times when the council could or should have spoken up. But the council remained silent.

While members of the public had several minutes to speak at length about their belief in white supremacy, the council seemed frozen under the weight of its processes. By the end of the evening council members had less than one minute each to speak on their thoughts related to an issue that many of you felt passionate about.

We can do better. We should expect better. We can ask our council to revisit their procedures related to public comment. There are several options available to the council, which include:

1. Time limits. Every speaker should be limited to the same amount of time, regardless of the number of speakers.
2. Technology. Provide tools for written comments for all attendees and then publish those comments as a part of the meeting record.
3. Talk! I believe the council does not want to allow nastiness to continue unabated and unaddressed. Saying something can make a big difference for people.

The Special Committee on Council Processes is one place where the council could begin to address the systemic issues that it currently faces. The council could also have a work session to get ideas and workshop the issues. The council could schedule a series of listening sessions or constituent meetings to see what the people of Bloomington would like to see in how the council conducts its meetings.

Rather than chastising speakers who specifically direct their comments toward council members, the council could direct that energy at speakers who specifically direct their hate toward our community. Public service does not have to mean accepting public abuse. The council does not have to remain silent, especially since you do not seem to want that either. The council can use all of the tools at its disposal to make comprehensive changes in its meeting procedures and policies to ensure a safe, equitable, and effective forum for the City of Bloomington.

Thank you for your time and attention,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Bolden', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Clerk Nicole Bolden, *JD, IAMCA, MMC*

