

Special City Commission Meeting Saturday, June 8, 2024

**Video of the Meeting and Schedule. Video of Part 1 can be found [here](#)
(meeting begins at 2:40 on counter)**

Mayor Cleveland, Vice mayor Perrine and Commissioners, Martin, McGuirk and Hartman were present.

Mayor Cleveland thanked city staff for the Meet and Greet the night before and escorting the finalists and their spouses around the city. He also clarified that a vote would not be rushed if anyone felt more discussion and input were necessary. (Note: Public Participation followed the interviews.)

The Commissioners and Mayor were provided a suggested list of questions they might want to ask the four finalists. There also were questions written by two of the Commissioners. Each of the five interviewers would ask four of the 20 questions prepared of each of the finalists. Each interview session would be 90 minutes including a 10-minute PPT presentation prepared by the candidate. Any questions about the presentation would be asked after the presentation was completed. Deliberations would begin following all four interview periods. The order of the candidates were Kevin Cowper, James Slaton, Robin Hayes, and Scott Moye.

Kevin Cowper

- City Manager, Dothan, Alabama 2019-2024
- Assistant City Manager, Auburn, Alabama 2007-2019
- Community Development Director, Pensacola, Florida 2001-2007
- Director of Planning and Zoning, Baldwin County, Alabama
- Master's degree in city planning, University of Memphis

Mr. Cowper's presentation was themed "*love our city...it gives back in the quality of life*". He indicated the biggest asset that the city has for attracting business is our quality of life and place. He added, however, that maintaining this quality requires that we support all neighborhoods while dealing with issues of development, infrastructure and economic development.

Below are a sample of the questions asked by the Commission:

- Mayor Cleveland asked about how he would jump start commercial development. Mr. Cowper indicated that we should look at existing assets such as the airport, proximity to I95, Kennedy Space Center, etc. and look for the types of businesses that would be attracted by those assets. We want to attract businesses that will provide good jobs that allow them to live here.
- Commissioner Perrine asked if he had any experience using benchmarking during the budget process. Mr. Cowper indicated that he had previously used benchmarking practices looking at underperforming programs and found different ways to manage them to increase revenues. He collaborated with employees and made it a team effort.
- Commissioner Martin asked for an example of a time when he encountered resistance to change. He explained that he did a reorganization of Auburn, Alabama employees which concerned many on the city's staff. He conducted more than 20 group meetings

with staff to explain how it would work and what the impact would be. That approach alleviated concern and it worked out well.

- Commissioner McGuirk asked about managing a capital project that has problems and completion is delayed. Mr. Cowper did a major project at an intersection in Auburn that affected many businesses, causing people to be skeptical of the need for this project. He spent a lot of time communicating with business owners, especially when old infrastructure problems were uncovered that needed to be addressed. Daily management of this project was required to get it completed on time so that businesses were not impacted longer than necessary.
- Commissioner Hartman asked for an example of a personal struggle during his tenure in government. He responded that he had to learn to be straightforward with people and tell them exactly what they had to do in a particular situation even if it is not a comfortable discussion. Being honest always worked out the best in the long term.

James Slayton

- City Manager, City of Lake Wales, FL 2020-present
- Deputy City Manager, City of Lake Wales, 2017-2020
- Public & Support Services Director, City of Lake Wales, 2013-2017
- Master's degree in management and leadership, Western Governor's University in Salt Lake City

Mr. Slaton's presentation focused on challenges New Smyrna Beach faces that he would address in the first year of his tenure. These challenges included growth and development as well as downtown redevelopment. He stressed the need to review the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan including impact fee analysis, the use of CRA resources, and the possibility of increasing the number of national chains in the western areas of the city.

Below are a sample of the questions asked by the Commission:

- Commissioner Perrine asked if he had experience with benchmarking in budget preparation. Mr. Slaton indicated that he had used it for two years.
- Commissioner Martin asked about his general approach to budgeting. He replied that the Strategic Plan determines the priorities that should be reflected in the budget and that the commission relies on the city manager to prepare the budget.
- Commissioner McGuirk asked how he would handle an unmotivated employee. Slaton responded that he would engage the person in conversation and try to set an example of what was expected.
- Commissioner Hartman asked what Mr. Slaton considered the city's greatest asset to attract business. He felt that the large areas of land to the west of the city and the proximity to I-95 were things that would attract businesses.
- Mayor Cleveland asked how he works for consensus from the governing Commission. Mr. Slaton's responded that his normal practice is to survey city staff and then conduct a retreat where team building can occur and the group can come together to decide their priorities.

(Note: There were several questions asked for which Mr. Slaton had no answer.)

Part 2 Video can be viewed [here](#)

Robin Hayes

- Most recent position – City Manager, Cocoa Beach Florida (Feb. 2022-Dec. 2023)
- Previous work experience includes Director of Finance for several cities (including Port Orange May 2021-Jan 2022),
- City Manager for Mount Dora (Sept. 2016 – Apr 2021)
- Bachelor of Science, Business Administration – UCF

Ms. Hayes' presentation covered the "*financial challenges affecting all requests to the City Commission*" where she feels opportunities exist by moving away from using the general fund to pay for everything. She recommends looking for other sources of funding such as state programs and grants. She has had significant success in obtaining state appropriations for special projects in several of her previous positions. She also stated that a lobbyist could also serve as a grant-writer, helping to obtain outside revenue for special projects. She recommends that reserve balances should be increased above the minimum requirements. There are infrastructure and growth challenges, and the Strategic Plan needs to be updated and aligned with the budget.

Below are a sample of the questions asked by the Commission:

- Mayor Cleveland asked how she would facilitate open communication with all staff, the Commission, and the community. She emphasized the importance of learning how to communicate with each group and figuring out how best to get them what they need. For staff, she meets with each person to determine their goals first by listening to them.
- Commissioner Perrine asked about her experience with benchmarking, and Ms. Hayes indicated that she had been a member of the Florida Benchmarking Consortium since 2002 through her previous positions. She used their data for comparable size cities particularly in the areas of staffing, where they realized they had some limitations.
- Commissioner Martin asked her to describe what she considers any unique dynamics of New Smyrna Beach. She stated that because we are a coastal community, emergency management must always be ready. New Smyrna is also unique in having several distinct communities that present different challenges, but they also provide different opportunities, especially for expansion.
- Commissioner McGuirk asked whether she had experience having to get a capital project back on track in terms of the timeline. She spoke of a park project that had become bogged down with engineering and other changes, and that she realized they had to eventually stop making changes but also that each stage of the project needed a budget and timeline for the overall project to stay on track.
- Commissioner Hartman asked what her biggest work mistake has been, and she responded that she made a mistake putting an item on an agenda that she had explained individually to each of the commissioners, but several were new, and she had not yet learned their communication style, so she realized in hindsight that she should have pulled it off the agenda and given them more time to research the issue.

Scott Moyer

- Masters, Public Administration – Georgia Southern University

- Current positions – County Manager, Ware County Georgia (Aug. 2016 – Present) and Adjunct Instructor of Interpersonal Relations for personal and professional development (Sept. 2005 – Present)
- Previous work experience includes procurement for a major health care system, multiple City and County administrative positions
- Bachelor of Science, Business Administration – Georgia College

Mr. Moye's presentation was *"New Smyrna Beach has a strong need to balance development with the preservation of natural, environmental, historic, archeological, and recreational resources for the benefit of its present and future generations."* He indicated that zoning, subdivision development ordinances, the Comprehensive Plan and land development codes need to be kept current. Also, daytime populations need to be considered in our planning, and passive parks can be used for conservation. The City Manager's role includes implementation of the Commission directives from the Strategic Plan, creating and managing the Capital Improvement Plan for the city, grant writing, and administration. Public engagement should be open and transparent. Two-way communication is important with opportunities for public education and input, and public complaints should be documented and tracked.

Below are some of the questions asked by the Commission:

- Mayor Cleveland asked how he has managed communication for major projects to keep all entities updated on the progress. Mr. Moye responded that he keeps a project board with all current projects on a wall, so it is always at the forefront. He meets weekly with the staff, managing the projects and generating reports that are then shared with all interested parties.
- Commissioner Perrine asked about his experience with balancing growth for better job opportunities, and he indicated that some of the issues facing New Smyrna Beach are those Fernandina Beach faced, such as having a small industrial base which they were able to increase. The residential growth will continue, but the mindset needs to be there to gain ground in pursuing industrial development.
- Commissioner Martin asked how he begins the budgeting process and he stated that he starts with a visioning workshop with the Commission to determine their goals. He then takes that information back to the staff, and they begin the process of putting together a plan for pursuing and achieving those goals, which then goes back to the Commission.
- Commissioner McGuirk asked him to describe a time he had to deal with an unmotivated employee, and he shared that he had an employee whose performance had deteriorated, and after meeting with the employee he determined that he was burnt out from his current position, so Mr. Moye facilitated a transfer to another department where the employee once again became a valued employee.
- Commissioner Hartman asked what his greatest struggle or limitation is in supervising others and how he has been able to overcome that. Mr. Moye stated that he is very competitive and tends to have a sense of urgency about getting things done, but that he has learned he can encourage, support, and motivate others to get things accomplished but that sometimes it is necessary to back off.

Public Participation

- One resident wished that bits of all the candidates could be put together to make the perfect City Manager, but one did bubble up and that was Scott Moye due to his city and county experience, backbone, and honest demeanor.
- One resident stated that she was impressed with the structure of the process, but since residents weren't given all the information that the Commissioners and Mayor received, her opinions have changed due to today. She suggested that the vote be delayed.

Deliberations

Mayor Cleveland reiterated that a decision didn't need to be made today. He asked the Commissioners what they felt about this, and a discussion ensued. Most felt that their choices shifted after the interview session today and that there was no one stand-out. Many liked how they saw the candidates in a variety of circumstances which helped in their decision making. It was thought that delaying the decision may put off the candidates, and they may think of them as indecisive.

The city's recruiting consultant said there is always a shift in choice as they purposely have the candidates be seen in different situations which can change opinions. He added that this is a challenging market to recruit for, and the candidates are prepared if a decision isn't made today, but it will be a problem if it goes beyond Tuesday. **A motion was made to vote for the new CM today and passed 4 to 1, with VM Perrine, and Commissioners Martin, McGuirk, and Hartman voting, YES. Mayor Cleveland voted NO.**

The Commission then voiced their top two choices, and the reasons why.

- VM Perrine (in no order, but stated later she liked some qualities in all four and would be happy with any choice)
 - Cowper's calm demeanor was a plus and interviewed well but some answers were vague.
 - Hayes had detailed, consistent answers to questions both today and one-on-one; understood finance and its importance.
- Commissioner Hartman (top two in alpha order as either could be #1)
 - Cowper was a seasoned veteran, well-versed, has larger city managerial experience, loved that he focused on the quality of life being an asset to NSB.
 - Moye was experienced as well, consistent with answers from yesterday and today; used real-life issues with resolutions, loved his "vibrant community" comment about NSB.
- Commissioner Martin (All four are very strong candidates)
 - First choice- Cowper was very decisive in answers to questions and very community oriented.so
 - Second choice- Moye was very strong in his responses but not sure he has the steadiness we need esp. if hit by a hurricane; his energy was strong which may balance that.
- Commissioner McGuirk
 - First choice- Cowper, and agreed with what everyone else had said, but at times seemed too calm. However, he reminded him of Brian Fields who had been our Asst CM and who "did it all" and whose integrity was impeccable.

- Second choice- Moyer was very polished and had seemed to do a lot with the scope of his job.
- Mayor Cleveland
 - First choice- Slaton as he had done his homework about NSB and understands our future, is math, science and logic driven and loved his direct approach all of which are attributes we need.
 - Second choice, Hayes but didn't say why.

Mr. Thomas asked to give his opinion on the candidates' strengths before the vote:

- Kevin Cowper's background in planning/zoning will help with future development, but more importantly, he can help NSB in finding its vision regarding "what we want to be" like he did with his "Love Dothan" by having community conversations.
- Scott Moyer has city, county and FEMA experience and knows coastal Florida. His style is also approachable.
- Robin Hayes has a great background in finance. She is reflective when answering questions and knows NSB, living so close to our city.
- James Slaton has a lot of energy, thoughts, and ideas. He hadn't been in an interview situation in 20 years which may have hampered him.

Last, he wanted the Commission to keep in mind before they voted, to look at their style and decide which one will be the best fit for NSB. **With no more discussion a motion to nominate Kevin Cowper for City Manager passed with a 4-1 vote with VM Perrine, Commissioners Martin and McGuirk and Mayor Cleveland voting, YES, and Commissioner Hartman voting, NO.**

Mr. Thomas suggested that a second vote be taken to show the choice is supported across the board as the chosen candidate would like to know this, so **a second motion to reconsider the previous vote nominating Kevin Cowper as the City Manager passed unanimously.**

Part 3 can be found [here](#). (This is only 3+ minutes long)

Mr. Thomas stated that he will work with the Commission, Mayor, and City Attorney during the contract negotiating process, and once that is done, a formal draft agreement will be made and shown to the Commission. But first, a leader from the Commission was needed for the negotiations, so **a motion to approve the nomination of Mayor Cleveland to negotiate the contract was unanimous.**

He also asked for a motion to be made to approve Scott Moyer as a back-up candidate, in case there isn't a contracted agreement between the city and Mr. Cowper, so they do not have to meet again. **A motion to approve Scott Moyer as a back-up candidate was unanimous.**

And last, **a motion to approve the sample City Manager's contract will come to the Commission before it goes to Mr. Cowper was approved unanimously.**