

# City of Lauderhill

*City Commission Chambers at City Hall  
5581 W. Oakland Park Blvd.  
Lauderhill, FL, 33313  
[www.lauderhill-fl.gov](http://www.lauderhill-fl.gov)*



## Meeting Minutes - Draft

**Monday, December 16, 2024**

**3:00 PM**

**City Commission Chambers**

## **Special City Commission Meeting**

**LAUDERHILL CITY COMMISSION**

***Mayor Denise D. Grant***

***Vice Mayor Sarai Martin***

***Commissioner Richard Campbell***

***Commissioner Melissa P. Dunn***

***Commissioner John T. Hodgson***

***Kennie Hobbs, Interim City Manager***

***Andrea M. Anderson, City Clerk***

***Angel Petti Rosenberg, City Attorney***

## I CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Grant called to order the Special City Commission Meeting at 3:00 PM.

## II ROLL CALL

**Present:** 5 - Commissioner Richard R. Campbell, Commissioner Melissa P. Dunn, Commissioner John T. Hodgson, Vice Chair Sarai Martin, and Mayor Denise D. Grant

Commissioner M. Dunn attended the meeting virtually via Zoom.

Vice Mayor S. Martin arrived at 3:40 PM.

## ALSO PRESENT:

Kennie Hobbs, Jr., Interim City Manager  
Angel Petti Rosenberg, City Attorney  
Constance Stanley, Police Chief  
Andrea M. Anderson, City Clerk

**A motion was made by Commissioner R. Campbell, seconded by Mayor D. Grant, to ACCEPT the Revised Version of the Special City Commission Meeting Agenda for December 16, 2024. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Yes:** 3 - Commissioner R. Campbell, Commissioner J. Hodgson, and Mayor D. Grant

**Absent:** 2 - Commissioner M. Dunn, and Vice Chair S. Martin

**Abstain:** 0

## III THIS WILL BE A LIMITED AGENDA MEETING. THE ONLY ITEM TO BE DISCUSSED WILL BE:

1. RESOLUTION NO. 24R-12-302: A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF LAUDERHILL APPROVING THE APPOINTMENT OF OTTINOT LAW, P.A., TO SERVE AS INTERIM CITY ATTORNEY EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 17, 2024; AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO EXECUTE THE AGREEMENT FOR LEGAL SERVICES; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

**Attachments:** [RES-24R-12-302-Retention of Interim City Attorney-APR-12-16-24](#)  
[AR 24R-12-302](#)  
[resignation](#)  
[AGREEMENT FOR LEGAL SERVICES](#)  
[Ottinot Law - Brochure](#)  
[consulting agrmt](#)

Laura Brogan, Lauderhill resident, understood there had been some reshuffling of city management positions since the recent November 2024 elections, encouraging the Commission to ensure they properly vetted the persons who

assumed interim positions for those persons who left, such as former City Manager Desorae Giles-Smith, as well as to conduct a search for other candidates. These were well-paid positions with numerous responsibilities, so it was important that a proper search was done to ensure the persons selected to fill such positions permanently were the best people for the job. She wished everyone good luck in the new positions they now held.

Willie Mae Cooper, Lauderhill resident and president of the West Ken Lark Homeowners' Association (HOA), spoke on behalf of the West Ken Lark residents, as there was concerned about the direction the City appeared to be moving; city officials should represent the Lauderhill people's best interest. It appeared to her this was not the case, as Lauderhill had lost city staff that worked with the City since the annexation of her community, staff who were always welcoming and appreciated, as they understood Lauderhill City Hall was the people's house, and elected officials ran on the promise of serving the residents; this was their agenda. She observed with Ms. Giles-Smith's departure, she wished to see Interim City Manager Kennis Hobbs, and Interim Deputy City Manager/Finance Director Sean Henderson permanently fill the positions they now held, rather going through a hiring process of hiring others to fill those positions. As City Attorney Rosenberg was now leaving the City, the Commission was considering the hiring of an interim city attorney for whom she claimed negative and questionable articles were published on him; appointing him would not be serving the best interest of the Lauderhill public. Ms. Cooper believed the Commission had its own agenda and that the residents suspected who was behind it.

Samuel Wilkerson, Lauderhill resident and president of the Broward Estates/St. George HOA, wished to piggyback on Ms. Coopers comments, asking why the subject meeting was scheduled for 3:00 p.m. and not considered at a regular City Commission meeting. He asked what City Attorney Rosenberg did that was so bad, in the short time of the present elected officials assuming their seats on the Commission, that she should be terminated; the question asked was if the next person to be terminated would be the City Clerk or the Police Chief. The Commission should remember, before they cast their vote on the subject agenda item, that highest office of the United States could be impeached. He hoped the person the Commission was choosing as interim city attorney was a good decision, as it would be their choice, not those of the Lauderhill citizens.

Eula Murray-Hylton, Lauderhill resident and president of the Northwest Lauderhill Neighbors Association, said that as a longtime resident of Lauderhill, she felt compelled to address the replacement of Ms. Rosenberg's law firm with that of Mr. Ottinot's. The position of city attorney was one of the most critical and consequential roles in the City's administration; while it was recognized that the city attorney served at the pleasure of the Commission, and the Commission had the authority to replace them, it was imperative that such decisions were made transparently and with full accountability. She believed that in the subject instance, there were significant concerns about both the process, and the proposed choice; the current city attorney served with distinction for over 26 years in all legal matters, serving Lauderhill well 24 hours a day, seven days a week. She knew of no issues or scandals during her tenure with City of

Lauderhill; in contrast, she claimed the proposed replacement Ottinot Law Office had a professional history that raised serious red flags; while their resume was impressive, there were troubling aspects of their recent tenure, and they merit scrutiny. For example, she said billing practices during their interim tenure at the City of Tamarac and fees in excess of \$195,000.00; dismissal from different municipalities; a possible conflict of interest, given the firm's extensive work in economic development and land use; concerns about potential conflicts of interest that could arise and jeopardize the impartiality of their role. Ms. Murray-Hylton commented, beyond the abovementioned overarching concerns, Lauderhill residents deserved to be represented by a law firm with a good reputation, one that was well-managed and had a reliable partner. Fiscal responsibility in any decision could increase expenditures, particularly through questionable billing practices, and threaten our ability to keep taxes low and maintain financial stability. She stated Lauderhill's future depended on securing economic growth, the benefits to its resident on terms favorable to them; she asked if any other law firm was considered for the subject post, as with all changes in staff, several candidates were reviewed.

Felicity Swanson, Lauderhill resident and vice president of Broward Estates/St. George HOA, congratulated Mayor Grant and Commissioner Campbell on their success in getting Desorae Giles-Smith out the way. She demanded, as a Lauderhill taxpayer, an explanation for the replacement of Ms. Rosenberg as the City's attorney, and the choice of a replacement with a poor track record proven from multiple cities, such as Tamarac and North Miami, asking if the plan was to allow him to bankrupt the City. This was not fair to the Lauderhill taxpayers, as they were the ones who paid his salary and for any damages resulting from this decision by the City Commission. Many residents present in the Chambers were longtime Lauderhill residents, and it now appeared to the elected officials, some of whom she had no knowledge of their origins, were bent on changing everything. She wanted to know who would be next to go, as she thought the goal was to unite the Lauderhill community, but she was trying to figure out where the City was going. She hoped Mr. Hobbs was here to do the right thing and she questioned why the subject action being brought forward for a vote was being done while Commissioner Dunn was out of town; she was also unsure as where Vice Mayor Martin was. Ms. Swanson felt sorry that Ms. Giles-Smith, Ms. Rosenberg, and Leslie Johnson had to be forced out.

Millissa Woolcock, Lauderhill resident, congratulated the new elected members of the Commission, asking for an explanation of the reasoning behind the recent City management changes, adding that she was very proud of the City of Lauderhill and its great strides. For reasons of transparency, the taxpayers should be informed as to why these changes were made, including any future management staff changes planned.

Ronald Surin, Southwest Ranches resident, spoke to the City's consideration of hiring the proposed city attorney, Mr. Ottinot. He understood the concern of the Lauderhill residents and though change was, sometimes, inevitable, when people were used to working with a particular person, they formed an attachment with them. He stated he could guarantee that Lauderhill's residents would be in good hands with Mr. Ottinot, whom he knew for 28 years and attended law school with at the University of Miami. Throughout those years,

Mr. Ottinot proved himself to be a man of high integrity, but when one became involved in political circles, one became exposed to innuendoes and accusations, something he felt sure Lauderhill's elected officials experienced themselves. He said, as the City's purse was with the City Commission, not Mr. Ottinot, and he promised there would be no mismanagement, over billing, or any unfair treatment of Lauderhill citizens. Mr. Ottinot was highly qualified, and he served in the capacity of city attorney for 27 years, and he helped found some cities, such as Surfside, Miami Gardens, etc. He urged everyone to give him a chance to help with the management of Lauderhill's legal matters; Lauderhill was a great city, and it would continue to be so with such vigilant watchdogs paying attention to all that transpired.

Francois Leconte, Pembroke Pines resident, mentioned he previously worked with the members of the City Commission in various capacities, such as when he was the CEO of the Minority Development & Empowerment Agency, who serviced Broward's minority community, and they did an outstanding job; he was now the Chairman of Findal Media & Telecommunications, they had a television stations in Miami, and Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, and Port St. Lucie. He wished to speak about his good friend, Mr. Ottinot, who he knew for a long time; he was an outstanding lawyer who would do an outstanding job for the City of Lauderhill, as he had the experience, expertise, and knowledge to the job required of him. The concerns expressed by some were heard, but he concurred with Mr. Surin that Mr. Ottinot should be given the chance to make the City of Lauderhill proud; he would be a city attorney for not just Lauderhill's government but for ever single citizen of Lauderhill. He stated Mr. Ottinot was very community minded and gave in numerous ways to many people throughout South Florida; he represented people who did not have a voice in the process and the less fortunate who called up on him were helped, whether they could pay him or not. He urged the Commission to approve the subject resolution.

Alan Brown, Lauderhill resident, remarked the City was bigger than the seats of the members of the Commission, as the voters of Lauderhill put them in office and the voters only asked a few things of the Commission: due diligence, transparency, better communication, and inclusiveness with the people. He took the time to read the resignation letter provided in the backup and, in the first two or three sentences, Ms. Rosenberg's law firm stated they would continue to provide legal services to Lauderhill for the next five months, so there was no need for the Commission to rush the subject decision; every city needed a constitutional officer; the residents understood this. However, with the subject resolution before the Commission, it appeared to send a negative connotation to the Lauderhill public, stating that for Mayor Grant, and Commissioners Campbell and Hodgson, this was an opportunity to include the input of the residents of Lauderhill in the discussion on the subject matter before making this decision. He said the residents cared about this issue, claiming the only three members of the Commission present to vote on this matter were the same three who came in under that cloud of controversy of receiving funds from Yoram Izhak, the Lauderhill Mall owner, a controversial individual as it related to some Miami-Dade commissioners who removed their support of him. Yet it appeared the three abovenamed members of the Lauderhill Commissioned were attached to him.

Mayor Grant commented that it was the Broward County Supervisor of Elections decision that Mr. Izhak's location and business were good enough to be there for over 26 years; additionally, the City's Police Department currently leased space from him on a two-year lease and the County was satisfied enough to place a bus transit hub on his property. She asked the public to do their due diligence as they spoke on any individual.

LaToya London, Lauderhill resident, asked the Commission to table their consideration of the subject item and discuss the matter further in a Commission workshop, as she sought more information on how Mr. Ottinot's firm was selected and the extent of the legal services they would provide. She, too, read the resignation letter provided in the backup, so there was no need to rush the vote on the subject resolution at the present meeting in light of the physical absence of two members of the Commission. This would allow for more time to do due diligence, take into account the feedback from the Lauderhill public, and then come up with a resolution all parties could accept. She yielded her remaining time to Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown restated his request that the Commission include the people's input in their decision-making process. He wished to know how the resignations of both City Manager Giles-Smith and City Attorney Rosenberg were communicated to the Commission, asking if it was in writing, by email, by text, or a phone call. If the Commission read Ms. Rosenberg's letter of resignation, they would see that the law firm was willing to continue providing the City with legal services for the next five months. He said it appeared the Commission intended to pass the subject resolution and this raised a serious concern for him, as Lauderhill's public participatory process allowed public input to be factored into the Commission's decision-making and there was still time to send out notification that would allow more residents to give input before selecting the next city attorney for Lauderhill. At present, along with the absence of two members of the Commission, the Lauderhill public who spoke at the present meeting were against the passing of the subject resolution. He claimed it appeared there was some kind of agenda.

Varion Harris, Lauderhill resident and current president of the United Lauderhill Community Association, played a short recording of Mayor Grant stating the City and its residents would travel the road together, arm in arm, building city policies and practices that worked in the best interest of the City of Lauderhill, disregarding those that acted as barriers for Lauderhill's collective wellbeing and prosperity. He recalled asking a question about Title 7 at the last Commission meeting that dealt with retaliation against employees who spoke out when investigations were conducted, whether it was the police chief, city clerk, city attorney, or city manager; the same applied to when Ms. Johnson and Ms. Rosenberg submitted their resignations. He asked who in the City's administration would be next, wondering if the Lauderhill homeowners who spoke out against Mayor Grant would have targets on their back; vengeance was not that of the Commission. He too, yielded the rest of his time to Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown felt it was a shame that the residents had to be discussing the

subject matter, as it had only been weeks since the new members of the City Commission began serving, restating his objections to the subject resolution. He felt the Commission seemed bent on passing the resolution, and the question was how the process moved so quickly from discussing to hiring, particularly in light of the resignation letter Ms. Rosenberg submitted. He commented that this was the third meeting of the present Commission, and the first two had their own controversies that stirred up Lauderhill public present at those meetings. The Commission was urged not to make hasty decisions they could regret later, and listen to the residents, and factor their input in the decisions to fill the vacated positions in city management. He stressed that residents were not against the City Commission, they were there to help, so they should be listened to; the Commission was asked to stop being exclusive and be more inclusive.

Maria Munro, Lauderhill resident, stated her comments were from the approach of following the dollars; the numbers she came up with was the former city attorney, and assistant city attorney were being paid \$97,900.00 monthly; asking if this was correct.

Mayor Grant thought the city attorney salary was \$1.2 million for the year.

Ms. Munro observed the interim city attorney monthly rate was \$84,446.00. The former city attorney would be consulting for three to five months at a rate of \$35,000.00 a month; doing the math, this would be much more than the City keeping what it had; more transparency was desired. She asked Commissioners Hodgson and Campbell to tell her what the City's general budget amount was for fiscal year (FY) 2024/2025, and what the unemployment rate was in the City of Lauderhill. She yielded her remaining time to Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown remarked when the Commission rushed to vote on such items, it eroded the trust the Lauderhill public had in their elected officials; the people's input on any matter acted as checks and balances for local government and, in the present instance, there was no reason not to allow more time for more public input before voting on the subject matter.

Darrell Richardson, Lauderhill resident, yielded his time to Mr. Brown.

Mayor Grant stated five more speakers from the public would be permitted to speak, after which the public input portion would be closed.

Mr. Brown commented when the people lost trust in government and they felt their hands were tied, they mobilized, organized, and became watchdogs; they became highly politicized. When residents felt they were observing government practices that appeared to be, or were clearly, unethical, they had no choice left to them but to file ethics complaints with the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the State Attorney, all of which he had previously done. He stressed that the elected officials were not the boss; the people of Lauderhill were the boss, and the very people who voted the present members of the Commission in could vote them out, particularly if they had to sit through numerous commission meetings under a gloom of controversy. He urged the Commission to table the subject resolution and retain Ms. Rosenberg and her

firm for the next five months, then proceed with getting more public input, which was being cut out of the decision-making process; this was the public's concern. Mr. Brown restated his call for the Commission members present to support inclusiveness.

Emmanuella Telfort, Treasurer of the Haitian Lawyers Association (HLA), thanked the Commission for their service every day, and stated she emphatically, and enthusiastically supported the Ottinot Law Firm as the City's next city attorney. She said their firm exemplified qualities the City needed; they had a proven track record of leadership, they were results-driven, as well as them having an unwavering support and commitment to service. Specifically, Mr. Ottinot had a proven track record of leading with integrity and fostering collaboration to achieve impactful solutions. She believed Mr. Ottinot's firm had the ability to navigate complex legal challenges, particularly as it was a firm with over 60 years of experience; she worked personally with Mr. Ottinot on different agendas for the HLA and he was always available, willing to serve, and provide them with the resources they needed. She worked with another partner of his firm, Pamela Ryan, a Florida Bar certified attorney in the areas of city and government, so these were highly qualified, skilled, and experienced attorneys in this area. She echoed praises of Mr. Ottinot's dedication of service, noting he understood the importance of transparency, equity, and ethical governance, and he repeatedly demonstrated his commitment to not only the Haitian American community but the community he served in. Ms. Telfort believed the attorneys at Ottinot Law serving in the capacity of city attorney would benefit the Lauderhill City Commission and they would meet any challenges the City faced head on to ensure the Lauderhill community thrived.

Mayor Grant stated for the record that she just received a text from State House Representative Marie Woodson, who planned to attend the present meeting; as she was unable to do so, she emailed her a letter in support of the City of Lauderhill hiring the Ottinot Law firm. She read the letter into the record as follows:

I am writing in support of Ottinot Law, P.A. as the great City of Lauderhill's interim city attorney. I have personally known him, the managing partner, for many years and have witnessed his professionalism, his high ethical standards. Just as important, I have recognized his firm to be one of the best governmental law firms in South Florida. In fact, Hans was recognized by Florida Trend magazine as one of the top government attorneys in Florida. Together, the firm's attorneys have over 50 years of combined experience in governmental law, with each having served in various legal capacities in local government, included as city attorney in several cities, litigating cases, negotiating land deals, drafting ordinances and contracts, and giving solid legal advice to their elected officials, department directors, and advisory board members. Team members are Florida Bar Board Certified in City, County, and Local Government Law, having served as part chair of the Florida Bar City, County, and Local Government selection, and the certification committee of the Florida Bar. One member is now on the Bar's board of legal specialization and education, which oversees and assists over two dozen Florida Bar legal specialization programs throughout the State. The firm is also privileged to have an attorney serving as a Florida House of Representative minority leader. In addition, the law firm is



committed to the community, having contributed time, energy, and financial resources to several charitable and civic organizations in Broward County, including: the Island Space Caribbean Museum and the Broward County Black Chambers of Commerce. The firm is also active in local legal organizations, including: the Haitian Lawyers Association, various bar associations, the Virgil Hawkins Bar Association, and regularly speaks to these organizations on legal topics. I consider the firm to be a solid partner in our goals to promote and assist all Broward communities to be their best. And, in closing, I am confident that Hans and his entire team will be an asset to the City of Lauderhill, and will bring a high level of expertise, commitment, and competency to the City. I support and recommend this appointment. Sincerely, Marie Woodson.

Edna Pierre, Board Director of the HLA, spoke on behalf of the association and its president, Michael's Deborah Saint-Vil, who was stuck in traffic on her way to the present meeting. She stated it was a privilege to speak in support of the subject resolution, as she had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Ottinot through his leadership and unwavering commitment to the Haitian Lawyers Association, where he was known for his lifetime commitment, membership, and service to the Association. He was always a shining example of competence and integrity, both in his legal career and within the community; he was born and raised in South Florida, a true product of this vibrant region and a credit to its diverse culture. She noted that with Mr. Ottinot's extensive experience in government and business law, he brought an unmatched depth of knowledge and skill to the table and his track record of victories and satisfied clients spoke for itself in his work with numerous municipalities across Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties benefitting from his expertise. Tackling complex legal issues was second nature to Mr. Ottinot and he did this with legal precision and unparalleled work ethic; he was more than his resume. He was a leader, a mentor, and a man of great character who consistently rose to meet complex legal challenges with creativity and grace; whether navigating nuanced legal issues or mentoring aspiring attorneys, he exemplified the very best of the legal profession. In the HLA, Mr. Ottinot was a revered leader and one of their brightest stars, a model of competence and professionalism, as not only did he get the job done, he elevated those around him in the process. Ms. Pierre knew he would bring the same energy, skill, and vision to the City of Lauderhill as the City's interim city attorney and it was her distinct honor to stand alongside Mr. Ottinot and request the City Commission's support for the subject resolution, affirming Mr. Ottinot and his firm as interim city attorney. Lauderhill deserved nothing but the best and with Mr. Ottinot that would be exactly what the City would be getting.

Corey Shearer, Sunrise resident and former Lauderhill student, expressed support and admiration for Mr. Ottinot and for his work to empower communities. He mentioned Commissioner Campbell's experience in working in competitive environments, as evidenced by his years of involvement with the Caribbean American Soccer Association (CASA), and he would not cower before anyone, so no one should feel threatened. Vice Mayor Martin served the country, worked with the United Nations, and he would serve the City well. Commissioner Hodgson was well known by the community and great respect should be given to Mayor Grant was a hardworking lady and a great mom. He restated that the Lauderhill community would be okay, urging them not to

believe everything they read and hear, as Mr. Ottinot was a man in excellent standing and the Commission was commended for taking quick action for the City's benefit. Mr. Hobbs, too, had an exemplary work record with the City of Lauderhill and so the Commission should feel empowered to make the decisions they saw fit.

Dr. Jeanette Brookes-George, Lauderhill resident, sought to give clarity to some challenges being faced when going through these types of changes, there was the issue of losing institutional knowledge when experienced employees were removed who held critical institutional knowledge about the municipality's operations and history. Removing such employees abruptly created a knowledge gap that could hinder effective governance and disrupt ongoing projects and services. She noted another issue was the disruption of continuity, as government operations relied heavily on continuity to maintain services, meet deadlines, and follow through on strategic plans; sudden changes in personnel could derail initiatives, stall progress, and lead to inefficiencies that negatively impact the community. Dr. Brookes-George mentioned another problem was the erosion of public trust, as municipal staff often had established relationships with the population they served and abrupt dismissals could create a perception of instability, favoritism, or a lack of respect for competence and experience that undermined trust in the new leadership and the government as a whole. Lowered staff morale and retention issues was another problem, as employees might feel insecure, undervalued, and demoralized if they felt the leadership processes were being unpredictable and unsupportive. This could lead to high turnover and further loss of skilled professionals. She said another issue was the risk of partisanship over meritocracy if new leaders replace staff based on political affiliation or personal loyalty rather than the merit, leading to inefficiency, lack of accountability, diminished service quality, and set a dangerous precedent for the future leadership. Dr. Brookes-George stated municipal governments were directly responsible for essential services such as public safety, sanitation, infrastructure management, etc., and disruptions in staffing could delay or degrade these important services. Continuity enable the building of long-term strategies and policies without interruptions, while fostering public confidence through consistent service delivery; change and continuity needed to be balanced. While new leaders might wish to bring in fresh perspective and address issues, it should be done thoughtfully, consulting with the staff and the community and doing a phased transition. She said gutting the staff might seem to be a quick method of asserting authority and implement new visions, but, typically, research showed it caused more harm than good.

Philippe Bien-Aime, former mayor of North Miami, echoed support for the appointment of Mr. Ottinot as Lauderhill's interim city attorney, stating he knew Mr. Ottinot for over 30 years; he was the founding city attorney for Miami Gardens and the first black city attorney for North Miami Beach and Sunny Isles Beach. He was an outstanding lawyer, who handled his cases with the utmost professionalism and care, so he recommended the subject appointment without any reservations.

Bob Schankweiler, Lauderhill resident, remarked on the subject meeting being called hastily and during a time when residents were out, worrying about where they were going to spend their money and how they would pay their bills. The

meeting seemed to be something that should not be. He objected to the subject appointment, yielding the rest of his time to Eula Murray-Hylton.

Eula Murray-Hylton, Lauderhill resident, noted reputation was everything and even though she admitted there was no doubt Mr. Ottinot was well qualified, but one did not get questioned or let go from a municipality due to overage on fees if there was nothing to it. People could pretend Mr. Ottinot was a good person, a good philanthropist, with extensive experience in municipal law, however continuity was important. She said Lauderhill was at a crossroads where the City was embarking upon several important, major economic developments and the goal was to want people to want to do business with the City and to come to Lauderhill. The City did not need any scandal or negativity on anyone that the Commission was putting in a position of trust and Lauderhill citizens had to have confidence in the person chosen. She commented all the great things Mr. Ottinot's supporters said about him could be said about Hall & Rosenberg, the City's current attorneys who served Lauderhill tirelessly for 26 years, who were ethical and who always answered the phone, whether at 6:00 a.m. or 10:00 p.m., and were always here for the City. As Mr. Brown stated, even if there had to be a transition, it need not be rushed and the City already had one of the best law firms and arbitrators who represented the City of Lauderhill proudly; for the Commission to ignore such details was like a slap in the face.

Mayor Grant closed the discussion to the public.

Commissioner Dunn asked Mr. Ottinot to speak to his current capacity; that is, who were his current municipal clients and how would he handle schedule conflicts, including if and when commission meetings overlapped.

Mr. Ottinot said most members of his firm were all inhouse city attorneys, so they could all serve in that position; he was the primary attorney in Tamarac and his partner, Pamela Ryan, who was present in the Chambers, was the primary attorney for Lazy Lakes, a small town near Wilton Manors. None of the cities they served would conflict with their ability to serve Lauderhill and as preparation for the current meeting, they looked at the calendar and their current workloads and they found no conflicts between meeting dates and, should any arise, the firm had competent attorneys to cover any of the City's legal needs. He made a commitment to the City that he would be the primary attorney, with Ms. Ryan as the secondary attorney, who would attend some city advisory board meetings. Generally, they divided the workload based on specialty and coverage; he usually covered commission meetings and Ms. Ryan would cover Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Board meetings, as she was certified in P&Z.

Commissioner Dunn wished to know if Mr. Ottinot had private clients.

Mr. Ottinot responded, at present, his firm had not represented any developer clients in Broward County, though he did in Dade County.

Commissioner Dunn asked if Mr. Ottinot provided staff with a list of his clients for the last five or ten years as part of the subject process to ensure there was no conflict of interest.

Mr. Ottinot replied that he would provide staff with that list; there were no conflicts to his knowledge.

Commissioner Dunn noticed that the proposed agreement did not stipulate any end date, asking what Mr. Ottinot's understanding was as to the terms of the agreement with the City, should the Commission vote to approve the subject resolution.

Mr. Ottinot replied, having served in the capacity of city attorney for a long time, he worked day-by-day and the end of his work with the City would be the Commission's decision.

Commissioner Dunn remarked, in doing her research on his background, she, too, came across some of the articles and negative media mentioned by Lauderhill residents who spoke earlier in the meeting, asking for some clarity on those matters. Specifically, some articles on Tamarac and the conflict taking place around billing practices; she saw a video of Mr. Ottinot fleeing from a reporter in North Miami over controversies regarding misleading commissioners about when meetings were occurring.

Mr. Ottinot addressed the issue of billing practices with the City of Tamarac, stating his billings were accurate, as they were reviewed by the city manager and staff for approval; his billing practices and those of his partners were consistent with their firm's contract with the City of Tamarac. None of their attorneys had ever been found to be in violation of any procedures or laws with respect to any client they worked with. He said when in the business of being a city attorney, there were always opposition forces that sought to disparage your integrity in some manner; if an analysis of his billing practices was conducted and the same was done of the former law firm that worked with the City of Tamarac, a comparison would show that his bills were much more reasonable of any other law firm that worked with Tamarac. Mr. Ottinot responded as to the issue in North Miami, it was heavily covered by the media; the then mayor decided he did not want to follow that city's charter and he moved to Davie, having bought a home and became the president of the community association. There were documents in the public record from his partner and he that said the mayor's action was a clear violation of the city's charter. His ethics and integrity were more important than politics, so he knew he and his firm would be attacked personally if he decided to investigate that mayor, but he had to make the right call and that was to protect the city's charter, which was its constitution. He led an investigation that eventually found and determined that this mayor violated the city's charter and as a result of the investigation he was later vilified, attacked by reporters, and the commissioners at that time who chose to listen to him were later vindicated. The then state attorney of Miami-Dade County ended up arresting that mayor for violating election laws. Mr. Ottinot stated the facts would show that the decisions he made were based on the law and ethics.

Commissioner Dunn thought it interesting that Mr. Ottinot stating he was vilified for leading an investigation against the mayor in the City of North Miami, as she believed some of that was taking place in the City of Lauderhill. In terms of transparency and accountability, how would his law firm provide regular updates

to the Lauderhill City Commission and the public to ensure transparency, particularly on ongoing legal matters and budget usage.

Mr. Ottinot responded, having served as an in-house city attorney and knowing the experience of his firm's members, one of the practices they implemented to ensure they remained very responsive to their clients was a work order system, whereby, a city manager and their staff, if they required legal services from the firm, they would send the firm a work order via email, whether it was for a legal opinion or a contract review. The work order, therefore, would document his firm's work throughout the process and his firm favored documenting their work, as it provided evidence to the public of the work that they were doing for their city and it provided a track record to city administration of the firm's work. He said the system was created not just for transparency purposes but to help the firm be more responsive to clients; they remained available to respond to their clients 24 hours a day.

Commissioner Dunn questioned, with the work order system Mr. Ottinot had in place, what was the typical turnaround timeframe for responding.

Mr. Ottinot reiterated the firm's goal was to meet the needs of their clients and if an immediate response was needed, such as for a contract review, there were sufficient lawyers available to provide a very quick turnaround on matters that required a speedy response. Generally, clients were asked to state the timeframe in which they required a response to a work order and if the firm was unable to respond in the requested timeframe, this would be communicated immediately to the client. Their firm was comprised of four lawyers and a real estate lawyer who worked for the firm as a special counsel.

Commissioner Campbell stated he was the happiest person at the present meeting with most of what had been said in the meeting, as four years prior when he sat on the dais, he stated that in the City's changing its city manager, a public discussion and transparency was needed. There should be a process in which the community could participate and he was told no at that time and that there was a tradition in the City where the person in line would be promoted to the position, so there was no need for a public discussion. He found it puzzling how some members of the public who came to meetings prepared to speak only had some information on a matter, while lacking other information on the same matter, noting he begged for a public discussion on the status of the City and he was told that such a discussion would be divisive, so it was better to negotiate, which was not his call; he wanted a public discussion on the subject of the proposed resolution. Commissioner Campbell stated the City had salaries that were some of the highest in the State of Florida, with cases of city employees receiving half a million dollars a year, something the City could not sustain. He urged everyone coming to city meetings to speak to wake up and not just speak on only a portion of the information, leaving out the part they preferred not to deal with, as this was not doing justice to the City of Lauderhill. It was important to understand that once there was a decision to negotiate, there would be matters that could not be spoken about publicly as the negotiation continued and this pertained to the parties leaving the City, particularly if the City Commission was not supportive of some of the terms of the negotiation. In the subject instance, the negotiation continued and reached

its conclusion and unless the parties decided to put everything on the table and reviewed what took place in those negotiations, the City could not disclose what transpired. Commissioner Campbell pointed out the present discussion was about hiring an interim city attorney, which meant the City had a timeframe in which to discuss which persons would be replaced, terminated, or retained; it was not a closed door, it was an open door for the first time and the Lauderhill public would have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process for the first time in some 20 to 30 years with regard to the final decision on permanently filling the posts of Lauderhill's city manager and city attorney. This was exactly what the process should be like when making such decisions and it would include public input. He would vote to approve someone to serve in an interim position to allow the Commission and staff time to assess. In a democratic society, he understood that newly elected persons should be given a chance to govern, rather than to challenge them shortly after an election; when he lost his seat on the Commission in 2020 and his bid for Lauderhill mayor in 2022, in both instances he stayed away from City Commission meetings, giving the newly elected officials time to govern. This continued to be his understanding and practice and it was very early, considering the November election took place just over a month ago, for residents to be making judgments on the performance of the newly elected Lauderhill City Commission. He asked for the Lauderhill public to give the Commission a little breathing space and then make a judgment. Commissioner Campbell remarked there were times when members of the public spoke, throwing numerous negative comments out and others listening thought there must be some truth, even if no facts were given. When the Supreme Court, many years ago, approved unlimited contributions to political candidates could be made by corporations, he was opposed to the practice, but it was now the law of the land and political candidates throughout the country received millions of dollars in campaign contributions from corporations; it might seem wrong, but it was the reality. Yet, based on earlier comments made by some members of the public, fingers were now being pointed at some members of the Commission that they might not like, stating they received contributions from legitimate businessowners, making it seem that this fact made the elected official untrustworthy. He said this was a common practice at all levels of government but, in a city as small as Lauderhill, there was a need to done down such language, as the next election was in 2026 and campaigning for the 2024 election had ended and the next national election was in 2028. He urged the Lauderhill public to give themselves, the members of the Commission some breathing space and help city administration focus on moving the City forward.

Mayor Grant observed change, in itself, was never easy; sometimes it happened due to the involvement of others, while sometimes it did not, but it was inevitable. She asked the Lauderhill community to give the City a chance and to work together collectively to ensure the success of Lauderhill, which was what the City Commission was elected to do. She thanked everyone for their participation in the present meeting, understanding the scheduling of the meeting was not the most appropriate for everyone, but it was the time given to the Commission to meet and as a quorum of the elected officials could be achieved, the decision was made to proceed with the special meeting.

Vice Mayor Martin asked if public discussion was taken as yet.

Mayor Grant stated public input was taken and it was now closed.

Commissioner Dunn asked to speak.

Mayor Grant indicated no further public discussion would be taken on the agenda item.

Commissioner Dunn pointed out she was member of the Commission, not the public.

Mayor Grant asked Commissioner Dunn to be in order. She reviewed, for Vice Mayor Martin's benefit, that the discussion was opened to the public and input was received and it was now closed.

Vice Mayor Martin apologized for arriving late to the meeting, thanking the members of the public who spoke, as he understood the transitions taking place appeared to be moving very fast. He provided his opinion on the subject matter, first giving an overview of how he arrived at his position, stating during the previous week, he received a phone call from Mr. Hobbs indicating that the present city attorney was resigning. At that time, he thought it was imperative that the City Commission and Mr. Hobbs needed to address the matter immediately, at which time Mr. Hobbs asked if he would be available to attend a special City Commission meeting on December 16 and not wanting the City to be without a city attorney, he agreed to meet on that date. Since that day, Ms. Rosenberg, the present city attorney, submitted a resignation letter he received via email, from which he then learned that her firm proposed a five-month transition process, but he was not a part of the negotiation that decided on that transition process. Had he been aware of the proposed five-month transition period, this would not have been as rushed a process as it appeared to be. Vice Mayor Martin understood Ms. Rosenberg recommended her firm's replacement, along with a transition plan, which he would support, keeping in mind all he was speaking about happened in a very short timeframe. The process of selecting a permanent city attorney did not have to be rushed, but the City needed legal coverage and he was not interested in getting into a debate on how and/or why the present city attorney decided to resign. Again, he acknowledged and understood that it might seem to the community that the subject for consideration was being rushed, but the Commission only there to support what was best for Lauderhill.

Commissioner Dunn again asked to speak.

Mayor Grant stated all members of the Commission were already given a chance to speak.

Commissioner Dunn stated it was customary that even if prior questions by the Commission on the matter for consideration took place over several rounds of discussions, a commissioner with an additional question or comment would be given an opportunity to speak. She wished the opportunity to make a statement before the vote.

- There was a Commission consensus to allow Commissioner Dunn to speak.

Commissioner Dunn said she was even more confused after hearing the statement made by Vice Mayor Martin, as it made it seem Ms. Rosenberg resigned out of thin air and it was her resignation that prompted the matter now before the Commission; additionally, it made it seem Ms. Rosenberg and her firm were recommending Mr. Ottinot. She asked Mr. Hobbs to clarify the timeline of events and how Mr. Ottinot and his firm came to be considered for the interim city attorney position.

Interim City Manager Hobbs replied there were discussions between Ms. Rosenberg and he with regard to conversations she had with her firm's partner in relation to serving as Lauderhill's city attorney; they also discussed conversations between her firm's partner and Mr. Ottinot and he understood this was how matters were now as they were.

Commissioner Dunn sought clarification that Ms. Rosenberg and her firm voluntarily resigned.

Interim City Manager Hobbs responded that he could not speak to exactly what took place with regard to how Ms. Rosenberg reached the point of resigning, but she spoke to him on the matter of resigning, after which he contacted the members of the Commission, relating the contents of his conversation with Ms. Rosenberg and then the decision was made to call the special meeting.

Commissioner Dunn wished to go on the record that she did not believe Ms. Rosenberg voluntarily resigned; she believed she was forced to resign or be fired by the City and, perhaps, in light of that pressure, Ms. Rosenberg and Mr. Hobbs were able to come to a mutual separation agreement, as detailed in the document Mr. Hobbs emailed the Commission for them to review in making the subject decision. Ms. Rosenberg's firm's monthly salary covered both a city attorney and deputy city attorney, for which they were paid \$97,900.00 and the City of Lauderhill was their only client; she wished to put this on the record in light of Commission Campbell's comments on the salary of Lauderhill's previous city attorneys. The City did not have to share the services of their city attorneys with other municipalities. Secondly, the proposed agreement for Commission consideration would be for \$85,446.30, for which the City would be sharing Mr. Ottinot's firm's services with two other cities; additionally, the consulting agreement with Ms. Rosenberg's firm amounted to \$35,000.00 a month to ensure there was continuity and transparency; she appreciated her willingness to remain for five months to ensure a smooth transition. The total cost to keep both attorneys simultaneously would be \$120,000.00 per month, a full \$22,000.00 more per month than what Ms. Rosenberg's firm currently received.

Commissioner Campbell commented, barring a complete disclosure of the City's financial obligations to Ms. Rosenberg's firm, it was not possible to pick bits and pieces out of the legal services provided. Ms. Rosenberg's firm could not have the privilege of privately negotiating, but in the public only bits and pieces were being heard. He was not in agreement with a number of the issues leading up to this point, but where the City was restricted was the Commission



could not disclose how and why things reached their current state. Both Mr. Hobbs and Ms. Rosenberg were present and if they were not willing to fully disclose all that transpired so the public would have a clear understanding of what took place, then giving only bits and pieces on the matter served only to confuse the public.

Mayor Grant thanked the members of the Commission for their input, urging the members of the public continuing shout comments to adhere to the City's meeting protocol.

**A motion was made by Commissioner R. Campbell, seconded by Mayor D. Grant, that this Resolution be approved. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Yes:** 4 - Commissioner R. Campbell, Commissioner J. Hodgson, Vice Chair S. Martin, and Mayor D. Grant

**Absent:** 1 - Commissioner M. Dunn

**Abstain:** 0

Commissioner Dunn stated had she been present, she would have voted no on the matter, she recommended some follow up actions by Mr. Hobbs and Mr. Ottinot:

- Provide clarity around the agreement's duration
- Establish reporting practices
- Mr. Ottinot to provide the Commission with a list of his firm's current municipal clients, their meeting schedules and the workload to ensure Lauderhill received proper legal attention
- Mr. Hobbs should ensure residents were communicated with openly regarding the interim attorney's appointments, costs and Commissioner's plan to ensure transparency and accountability.

Commissioner Dunn observed everyone got up and left the meeting, so she wished to state that she vehemently opposed what took place at the present meeting. It was wrong.

#### **IV ADJOURNMENT - 4:48 PM**