Coon Rapids council agrees on new city manager

By Peter Bodley on August 22, 2012 at 10:01 am

Steve Gatlin will soon lose the word acting from his city manager title.

The Coon Rapids City Council at a work session Tuesday following the regular meeting unanimously agreed that Gatlin, who came to the city in March 1998 as public works director and is now public services director, should become the permanent city manager.

Formal action to appoint Gatlin as city manager will be taken by the council at its next meeting, Tuesday, Sept. 4, when it will consider an employment agreement which sets out the terms of the job, including salary and benefits.

The council named Gatlin acting city manager July 18 after it had asked for and received the resignation of Matt Fulton, former city manager.

Meeting in a work session Aug. 2 to begin the process of recruiting and selecting a new city manager, the council directed staff to seek proposals from four Twin Cities-based executive search firms to assist it.

At that time, Gatlin said he would not be a candidate for the job because he was too close to retirement, but he was fine with being acting city manager until a new city manager came on board, which under the council’s selection timeline would have been January/February 2013.

According to Gatlin, he reconsidered his decision after being asked to do so by some councilmembers, city department heads and other city staff.

At a special council meeting Aug. 10 to canvass the city primary election results, Gatlin informed the four councilmembers present that he had reconsidered and would be a candidate for city manager.

The four councilmembers discussed the city manager position and Mayor Tim Howe called for the work session Tuesday.

“In that discussion we felt it was important to move forward,” Howe said.

Gatlin told the council Tuesday that he plans to retire sometime in 2015 and he would be willing to be city manager until that time.

But he would not be merely a placeholder, Gatlin said.

“I would support the vision of the council and take a leadership role,” he said.

According to Councilmember Scott Schulte, appointing Gatlin city manager would be of great benefit to the city, boost staff morale and make city hall more citizen and customer friendly.

And, where possible, it is best to promote from within, Schulte said.

In Howe’s view, as city manager Gatlin would bring stability to the city and it would also enable him to
be directly involved in hiring his successor as public services director as well as to mentor that person.

“Steve will be a stabilizing factor and we would be getting the best of both worlds,” Howe said.

Councilmember Bruce Sanders said that with Gatlin as city manager, momentum would not be lost on the hot button issues facing the council, including new development.

According to Councilmember Paul Johnson, Gatlin brings continuity and excellent ideas to the job plus the fact that he knows the issues, both large and small.

Moreover, Johnson said naming Gatlin city manager would save the city some money.

Three proposals were received from the executive search firms that had been contacted by staff.

Appointing Gatlin as city manager is “positive” for the city, Howe said.

Born and raised in Duluth, Gatlin earned a civil engineering degree from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

In his career, Gatlin was city engineer for White Bear Lake for 14 years and city engineer in Roseville for six years.

Before coming to Coon Rapids, Gatlin was general manager for five years at the MSA consulting engineering firm in St. Paul.

In his position of public services director, Gatlin oversees not only the public works department, which includes parks, recreation, sewer, water, storm drain, facilities, fleet maintenance, forestry and recycling, but the engineering division as well.

As acting city manager, Gatlin said he has been continuing the council’s programs and initiatives that are currently under way.

With a lot of good department heads, the city is largely self-sufficient, he said.

Gatlin and his wife, Chris, have been married for 39 years. They have three adult children.

Outside of work, Gatlin likes to spent time at his lake home doing small projects, as well as playing golf and going fishing.

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