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City Manager: Barry Atkison

Date: November 3, 2016
RE: City Manager Announces Intent to Resign
For Immediate Release
Primary POC: Barry Atkison

During the Regular Session of the Hiram City Council on Tuesday evening, Barry Atkison announced his intention to resign as City Manager of Hiram. The terms and conditions of his impending departure have not been disclosed as of today. The Mayor & Council are in discussion to determine options related to setting the actual departure date.

During the meeting on Tuesday, Atkison gave a statement of the reasons for his decision. The context of that statement are as follows (with paraphrase): I first moved to Paulding nine years ago. I chose to move here because I wanted to be part of Paulding County Growth. I wanted to part of the Paulding County Leadership Core. I Wanted to bring my 33+ years of water experience and be a part of the Richland Creek Reservoir Water Initiative & Future. I Wanted to Serve in a local government capacity again. And, I wanted to build a team where employees would want to work.

During my first seven-months as City Manager, I have found a very capable and professional staff. Each Department has the expertise required to handle the City's complex business. Most of the budgetary cuts to date have been aimed at employment levels, employee training, and employee benefits. In the last seven-months, the City of Hiram has lost seven very capable and well-trained employees. These employees are not being replaced. Most employees have taken these reductions in stride and without complaint. However, these budget cuts have led to an air of uncertainty for the remaining employees. We are also feeling the impact of being short-staffed, which requires many employees to wear multiple hats. Even though we have experienced significant staffing reductions, each Department Lead still has a vision of the service delivery they will need to meet in the future. And, I share those same service delivery visions.

Some of that service delivery vision includes: An ability for the Police Department to fully and safely serve a daytime population of over 30,000 commuters and shoppers, in addition to the 3,500 residents of the City of Hiram. The vision of a modern Public Safety Complex located in the heart of the service delivery corridor. The vision of having and retaining the most well trained police officers possible. The vision of a modern municipal court complex that is actually designed for court use. With security. With privacy. The vision of building and retaining a municipal court staff that is well trained and well supplied. The vision of a fully functional Public Works operation which includes: Water and Water Distribution, enhanced capability for water and storm water infrastructure construction, a streets department capable of addressing the many potential projects around the City, a parks and facility support team to fully enhance the recreational offerings to our citizens and visitors, a building inspection ability, an enhanced planning and zoning function, and an enhanced project management function. And, finally, a vision that would allow an administration staff level where each person has a specific expertise to allow excellent service delivery, training accomplishment and absolute professionalism. It is very difficult to wear multiple hats and not lose something in detail and execution.

Currently, the City of Hiram has expenditures in excess of revenues at a level of approximately \$250,000 per year. This is in spite of the staffing reductions that have been made. We are also being advised that Employee Healthcare Costs will increase somewhere between 8%-20% this year. For every reduction we have made, we have had an offsetting increase in costs. Therefore, the choices are clear: find additional revenue sources in order to optimize

service delivery; or, continuing to reduce staff size / reduction in service delivery. There are no other choices. This Council has a daunting task ahead that will include the tough decisions as to those choices. It is time to make decisions as to Hiram's future that lead to our growth and development in a pace that keeps up with the overall development of Paulding County as a whole. Or, we will continue to reduce in size and service delivery ability and become a non-factor in the future growth of Paulding County. Hiram is a City with an Identity Crisis. It is time for a cohesive vision that lays out a clear direction for Hiram's future.

I, along with our Department Leads and Staff could take the City of Hiram in any direction the Council directs. We feel like the time is now to gain that vision and direction so we can plan accordingly, and while we still have the financial assets and the human assets to accomplish it. We need a future vision that is communicated clearly and consistently. Preferably, it is a plan that is also in concert with Paulding County's vision for growth and service delivery. Then, the City Manager and Department Leads can take that strategic view and formulate it into the tactical execution of service delivery in the future. There is a service delivery (target) and ability that should be plotted on a timeline for the future. Then, we have to plan to have the resources to meet that future service delivery requirement.

These are very challenging times to be sure. We are fully aware that we have to be financially conservative and execute service delivery professionally and efficiently with limited resources. The employees of the City of Hiram have been doing that. But, from an upper management and elected body point of view, we all need to embrace the fact that we are all writing the history of the City of Hiram one day at a time. It is a time for outstanding leadership. It is a time for outstanding vision. It is a time to embrace Paulding County and all of its member Cities as one entity. It is time to recognize that our ability to move ahead as a governmental entity is absolutely dependent on our relationships with our neighbors. It is time to remember our history and our experience in order to avoid past mistakes. But, more importantly, it is time to move forward without the biases and distrust associated with those past experiences.

Although it was my intention and desire to work with this elected body and with all of the City Staff to be a champion for positive change for the future direction of the City of Hiram, unfortunately, I have come to conclusion that intentions and desires are not enough. The reality has sunk in seven-months into this journey that my leadership style does not blend well with this elected body. And, although I wish this elected body the very best in consideration of the difficult decisions that lay ahead, I have made the choice not to remain the City Manager. I am choosing to seek a better fit for my leadership style and abilities where I can make a more positive impact on the organization. I truly desire an environment where it is ok to respectfully disagree and to always, always work for the betterment of the quality of life for our residents, our businesses, our employees and for future generations. This job is really bigger than any one of us. But, it would be a mistake to think that the decisions that are being made are not critical to the future of the City of Hiram and every stakeholder associated with it.

Thank you for allowing me to take a little piece of the journey with you. I wish all of you the very best for the future.