Suggestions to the City Council Concerning the Creation of a Committee to Recommend the Organization and Policies for an Independent Police Oversight Commission

I commend the City Council for its commitment to create an Independent Police Oversight Commission and to establish a Committee to provide recommendations to the Council in no more than 12 months. I wish to share suggestions about these matters, drawing upon my experiences with the East Lansing Financial Health Review Team, my earlier experiences as a Staff Economist to the U.S. House Public Works Committee, and my professional work in team and organization development.

My suggestions are intended to be helpful as you consider the Resolution before you and take actions. I do not intend to dive into the words and phrasing of the Resolution. Hopefully the suggestions I share will aid in any redesign of the Resolution as you proceed. Here are the seven suggestions that I urge you to consider.

1. **Make sure that the objective for which the Committee is being created is manageable within the time frame of 6 or 12 months that you seek.** The first month will be consumed in scoping the work and getting organized, and the last month will be consumed with deciding on the specific content to report to the Council and preparing the report. So, make sure the objective can be adequately researched and deliberated on in the intervening months.

2. **Refine and make specific the objective you want for the Committee’s research.** As currently written, the objective of the Resolution appears much broader than necessary to achieve your ultimate objective. I recommend that you target the suggested study on the best practices performed by other selected jurisdictions (in Michigan or beyond) that have an Independent Police Oversight Commission or its equivalent. I strongly recommend that you not charge the Committee with researching the current East Lansing and MSU law enforcement agencies to discern what they might do better. That can be left to the Independent Police Oversight Commission once established.

3. **Name the committee in a way that clearly communicates its purpose.** This can help people decide whether to apply and also remind the Committee, the Council, and the public of the Committee’s objective. The current title of “Police Community Relations Review Commission” is unclear and potentially confusing. One possibility might be “Study Committee on an Independent Police Oversight Commission.”

4. **Maintain a liaison relationship with the Study Committee that will permit all members of the Council to receive the Committee’s report and act on it.** For that to happen, the Council should name one of its members to function in a customary liaison role, not direct the research efforts of the Committee or vote with the Committee members to determine the contents of its report.

5. **The Study Committee should be constituted, to the extent possible, with two types of members—(1) persons with life experiences relevant to the abuses being considered and**
(2) persons with professional experience or skills relevant to the objective of the Committee. The Committee’s deliberations and recommendations need to be informed by the insights of people from communities who have experienced the abuses to be remedied by the future Independent Police Oversight Commission. The East Lansing Financial Health Review Team demonstrated the value of having people with relevant skills to achieve the Council’s objectives and to do so within the requested time line. Relevant professional skills and experiences for this Committee might include legal research, police oversight, criminal justice policy, and ethics. Additionally, the Committee needs the expertise that it can obtain from independent legal counsel and should be supported for it.

6. Plan to appoint a non-City Council Member and non-City employee to serve as Chairperson of the Committee. If possible, select someone who is familiar with the subject matter and who is capable of establishing trust within the Committee. Such a Chairperson would engender trust from the community, as well, and be vital in seeing that the Committee’s work leads to a viable and timely report to the Council.

7. Community trust must deliberately be strengthened in this Committee design and creation process, possibly more so than for any other the Council may undertake. Trust will be enhanced by improved clarity about the ultimate objective of the Study Committee, by the special manner and care in which the membership is selected, by the diligent search for a Chairperson with the capabilities required, and by a helpful but not controlling city liaison relationship. Each of these will demonstrate “trust enhancing behavior”. However, an overly broad and ambiguous set of objectives, the simple use of customary practices for soliciting City committee membership, not carefully selecting the most capable chairperson, and maintaining a City relationship with the Committee that appears controlling will demonstrate “trust diminishing behavior”.

I believe that if the City Council embodies these suggestions in its design of the Resolution, it will show that the Council places a high priority on the successful launching of actions that will lead to an effective Independent Police Oversight Commission. Thank you.

I will be pleased to respond to any questions Council members may have. And, if requested, help the Council modify the Resolution to embody these seven suggestions, and help draft an application form for Study Committee membership.

Respectfully submitted on May 18, 2020 for the City Council Work Session of May 19th:

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