

3. Communications (9) received expressing opposition to a proposed reallocation of staff and resources from the Comptroller's office to the City Manager.

From: Adam Tauno Williams
Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 10:41 AM
To: City Clerk <cityclerk@grand-rapids.mi.us>
Cc: Mayor <mayor@grand-rapids.mi.us>
Subject: Proposed Accounting Staff Reallocation

Hello,

I am writing to express my opposition and concern regarding the proposed reallocation of staff and resources from the Comptroller's office to the City Manager's purview.

- The citizens of Grand Rapids voted in 2012 on a proposal to change the city charter regarding the Comptroller's responsibility and reporting; that initiative failed overwhelmingly (46,030 to 26,246). The citizens of Grand Rapids want **elected** oversight and accountability. There is a channel for approaching changes to the City Charter, the City Commission should use that channel, not attempt to bureaucratically circumvent it.
- The presentation of this as an agenda item on the Friday before the City Commission meeting, to be reviewed on Tuesday mere hours prior to the City Commission meeting, has terrible *optics*, **to put it mildly**. Overall this is a constant frustration with how the City Manager and Commission operates. That agendas become available only **two business days** before items will be reviewed and possibly decided is not transparent government. Agenda items often have the appearance of materializing from the ether and then almost immediately being decided. This may be in textual compliance with the Open Meetings Act, but it is performative compliance, and not in the spirit of the Act.
- The City Manager presenting this change to city staff as a fait accompli before the item had appeared on a public agenda raises questions about the oversight, or lack thereof, being exercised by the City Commission. Additionally it indicates the existence of technical violations of the Open Meetings Act. **How was this determined with such confidence when it had not been discussed at quorum outside of a public meeting?**
- The City Comptroller is an elected official, as the City Charter exists today it (1) clearly delegates financial operations to that office and (2) provides very little direct authority to those elected by the citizens of the city. The proposed change would further reduced the scope of elected representation. The city, as it grows, should be moving towards greater authority for those elected by the citizens. The proposed changes are not in the spirit of the issues identified by the 2019/2020 Task Force For Elected Representation (TFER); a report to which the City Commission still has made no response other than to oppose change.

If there is a practical issue this agenda item addresses that case needs to be made, a change of operation of this scope demands more process than this.

Perhaps in the future the City Commission could consider (1) a policy requiring that City Commission agendas be posted at least five business days prior to a meeting, and (2) placing the composition of the agenda in the authority of the **elected** mayor.

Over the years of attending all manner of city meetings I have heard innumerable and sonorous declarations concerning the need to respect process, observe process, have "difficult conversations", etc... In this case I hope the City Commission will follow through on its own declared values.

2nd Ward Resident,

Adam Tauno Williams

From: Dennis B Murphy

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 1:57 PM

To: O'Connor, Jon <joconnor@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Ysasi, Milinda <mysasi@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Perdue, Kelsey <kperdue@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Mayor <mayor@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Robbins, Drew <drobbins@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Goei, Bing <bgoei@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Knight, Lisa <lknight@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Frantz, Max <mfrantz@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Marshall Kilgore <marshallkilgore.mk@gmail.com>; AliciaMarie Belchak <aliciamarie.belchak@gmail.com>; City Manager <manager@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Subject: SAY NO TO DISMANTLING THE COMPTROLLER OFFICE

joconnor@grcity.us;
mysasi@grcity.us;
kperdue@grcity.us;
mayor@grcity.us;
drobbins@grcity.us;
bgoei@grcity.us;
lknight@grcity.us;
mfrantz@grand-rapids.mi.us;
marshallkilgore.mk@gmail.com;
aliciamarie.belchak@gmail.com;

I have been informed of a spurious attempt by the city manager to take over the Comptroller's office. This attempt not only appears to be violating the city charter, but is being done in a rushed manner in a lame duck session of the commission when we have two new incoming commissioners and a new mayor.

Per the background information the citizens rejected such a move 10 years ago. If the city manager believes that needs to be changed- take it to the citizens in the democratic process rather than lame duck sessions of the commission! What is being attempted is an action resembles what has been going on in Ottawa County the last two years and widely ridiculed!

It is vital to transparency and good governance to have an entity such as the comptroller's office oversee the finances which are set by the city commission. Oversight by the manager's office reduces transparency and can lead to avenues for corruption. This is the kind of action we see in corrupt bigger cities and MUST NOT PASS.

Background information:

Grand Rapids residents and leaders have requested information, and context from me regarding Mark Washington's Dec. 17th proposal to defund 81% of the personnel resources in the Grand Rapids City Comptroller department. This plan is being presented to the GR City Commission and includes Mark Washington placing himself in control of City accounting functions and other duties prescribed to the Comptroller in the City Charter. Specifically, 13 of our 16 FTEs/employees who

primarily perform accounting work in the Comptroller department will be permanently removed from the department leaving just 3 employees in our office. I do not support nor was I as City Comptroller or any Comptroller dept. personnel at the City of Grand Rapids involved in Mark Washington's plan – I learned of this proposal on Friday Dec. 13th and that Mark Washington had put this on the City's agenda for next Tuesday the 17th. Please see below for additional context and answers to questions that have been requested from me by various community stakeholders.

What the City Charter states: The duties and responsibilities Mark Washington is seeking to remove from the City Comptroller include all of our accounting personnel and all of our employees that issue checks and payments for the City in the Comptroller department.

The authority for the Comptroller to perform all accounting of city funds for the City is stated in Title VI: Section 90 City Comptroller (see attachment)

The authority to issue and sign all payments of money from the city treasury is stated in Title VI: Section 90 City Comptroller (see attachment)

The Charter prescribes these duties to a City Comptroller and not a City Manager or a new department that the City Manager has created to report to him (and further does not exist in the Charter). Mark Washington's plan to direct the Comptroller's duties, responsibilities and team into his own department reporting up to him will make it unfeasible for any City Comptroller to perform and complete their charter prescribed work that Grand Rapids voters elect them to perform.

Voters already weighed in: As recently as November 2012 the Grand Rapids public voted and voiced their clear opposition to a ballot proposal that would allow the City Manager to appoint and oversee the City Comptroller and its functions. The Grand Rapids public overwhelmingly voted this down - All 77 Grand Rapids voting precincts rejected this proposal with 64% of the Grand Rapids public voting against it. Mark Washington's plans disregard the direction given to the City of GR by the majority of Grand Rapids voters. Defunding the City Comptroller dept. is not just an attack on our City's financial oversight but a blatant disregard of our democracy and election results made clear by Grand Rapids voters. If our residents rejected the City Manager appointing the Comptroller, they will certainly be opposed to the City Manager directly taking over the Comptroller's accounting and payment responsibilities and functions.

Questions around oversight of the City Comptroller Dept: The City Comptroller department is subject to and undergoes the same annual audit conducted by an independent licensed auditing firm similar to all city departments and public entities. Myself and my team members are interviewed by 3rd party external auditors and our dept. controls, accounting and activities are open to independent auditors to review each year in the same manner as any City department during the annual audit. Plante Moran, the city's current licensed independent auditor has not issued any audit finding pertaining to Comptroller dept. personnel, duties or our internal controls. Plant Moran has also not issued any findings in previous years indicating that the City Comptroller's responsibilities, duties and structure in the Charter are presenting "risk" to the City – contrary to Mark Washington's assertion in his proposal.

Well-intentioned plans in local government begin with transparency and adequate time for community input and feedback from a diverse array of stakeholders. There has been no public

engagement, awareness or community feedback on this matter. Equally concerning is that Mark Washington and his team have already instructed City employees on Dec. 14th that these changes will be made and the Comptroller dept. will be largely dismantled despite the fact that his proposal has not been brought before and voted on by the public body for approval. I do not believe these plans demonstrate transparency or represent the type of community ethics, values and collaboration that have made West Michigan the great place it is today. I ask that you please consider bringing awareness of this pending issue to your colleagues and constituents for the benefit of public transparency.

If you oppose this proposal as I do, I ask and encourage you to please contact City Commissioners and express this before it is voted on next Tuesday at 8:30AM in the City's Fiscal Committee followed by the 2:00PM City Commission Meeting. While this is being presented to the public as a routine budget item, it is anything but that. I have served as your City Comptroller for nearly 5 years now and never anticipated I would need to inform the public of something of this magnitude so urgently. This is an unusual and unprecedented move to drastically impair financial oversight and diminish the ability of myself as your Comptroller, our talented team members and all future officers elected to this role to perform the duties the GR public entrusts and expects of us. I am fully committed to upholding this level of trust and expectations that the people of Grand Rapids voted for and that our City Charter requires of me.

Dennis B Murphy

616-318-2390

dennis.b.murphy@gmail.com

@dennisbmurphy

Twitter / Strava / LinkedIn / Facebook /

Snapchat / WeChat / WhatsApp / Signal / Telegram / Discord /

Skype / Zoom / Slack / Hangouts /

"Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishments." -Jim Rohn

"You don't get to the finish line faster by coasting downhill." -Dennis B Murphy

From: Brian DeVree

Sent: Tuesday, December 17, 2024 12:27 AM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Subject: Opposition to changes to the Comptroller office

Dear Grand Rapids City Commission,

I am writing to vehemently **object** to the changes proposed to the City Comptroller department detailed under City Commission agenda item titled "Ordinance amending Section 1 of the Budget Ordinance 2024-23 for Fiscal Year 2025 (Amendment No. 5)" which is listed as item number XI.2, Attachment M. These changes are in clear contradiction to the City's Charter and would reduce the office to such a small size that it would hinder its ability to carry out its Charter mandated responsibilities.

The City Charter sets out very clearly in Title VI, section 4, items b-e, that the Comptroller is responsible for the "Account of Moneys Due.", "Account of Moneys Received.", "Account of Funds and Disbursements.", and that they "Prescribe [a] Uniform System." for the keeping of accounts. This is the practice of Accounting, and it is to be done NOT by the Treasury Department, City Manager, or any other city department, but by the Comptroller's office. The staff that Attachment M is proposing to reassign are exactly the staff that are currently carrying out this responsibility in the office of the Comptroller, **where they belong**.

I also would like to address the statement made in Attachment M that one of "The primary functions of the Comptroller [is] to sign all checks on authorized amounts," and then claims that even with the changes, the Comptroller can still legally perform the whole of their duties. **This claim is disingenuous**, as even though the Comptroller would have the LEGAL right to do so, after these changes, they would no longer have the PRACTICAL means to do it. The City Charter has anticipated this, and requires that the Comptroller "shall not issue or sign any draft, check or warrant until he has verified the correctness of the account for which the same is issued," in Title VI, section 4, item f. The standard that the City Charter demands is NOT that the Comptroller blindly rubber-stamps every check set before them, but rather to know with certainty that the check is correctly authorized and written to the correct amount from the correct account.

These changes are being made in a hasty and non-transparent way, with only an extremely small window of time for evaluation both the Comptroller's office themselves and the public in general. **This is not appropriate and I urge the commissioners to reject the changes** and ask the City Manager to present their findings on the issues and proposed solutions in a manner more

accessible to the public and with full detail on why they view that the current organization presents, in their words, "additional risk to the City."

Thank you for your consideration,

Brian DeVree

Ward 2 Resident

From: AM Frantz

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 10:32 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Subject: Washington's Power Grab Must End I For the Record

To Whom It Concerns & For The Record From A Concerned Resident:

Having just completed an excellent read produced on December 16th 2024 one has to question the mental condition of Mr. Washington under self his imposed stress- to undermine the integrity of the voting citizens of Grand Rapids, & the Fathers of our city charter- how dare he call himself..Washington..in his haste to create a clear power grab, he's managed to embarrass our entire City! , and seriously tarnish our outgoing Mayor's legacy!Perhaps it's time to learn about Mr. Washington and ask him to respond to the public in OPEN DOOR MEETINGS.. I graciously request & encourage everyone involved downtown not to miss this fine piece of hard hitting journalism so few have a backbone to produce today. -A. Frantz

From: Dustin Keena

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 8:49 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Subject: Letter of opposition for the 12/17 city commission meeting

In full transparency I have read the opinion of my GVSU classmate Nathan Biller and can't find any points that I disagree with, and I fully support his attempt to make known the highly questionable (and possibly illegal, or at the very best completely unethical) action regarding the Grand Rapids Comptroller responsibilities. You can read Nathan's full opinion here:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nathanbiller_illegal-clandestine-restructuring-attempt-activity-7274120048393220096-ckOs?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_android.

Respectfully,

Dustin Keena

Dear Commissioner,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed amendment on the agenda for Tuesday, December 17th, which seeks to reassign 13 of the 16 staff members of the City Comptroller's Department to the Fiscal Services Department. This proposal undermines the critical oversight function of the Comptroller's Office and contravenes the plain language of our City Charter.

The City Comptroller is elected by the People to ensure transparency and accountability in our City's accounting function. This amendment would significantly weaken the Comptroller's ability to perform these vital duties, jeopardizing the integrity of our financial oversight.

Furthermore, **voters have already decided:** a 2012 ballot initiative to change the City Comptroller from an elected position to one appointed by the City Manager was defeated 46,030 to 26,246. This proposal seeks to achieve the same outcome and is antithetical to our democracy. It's an audacious attempt to subvert the will of the majority of Grand Rapidsians.

I urge you to vote *against* this proposal and maintain the independence of the Comptroller's Office. It is essential to uphold the checks and balances our city relies on to prevent fraud and abuse.

If you are unwilling to vote against it, I urge you to *at least* table the proposal. Effective local government starts with transparency and ample time for community input and feedback from diverse stakeholders. Unfortunately, there hasn't been the slightest attempt at public engagement, awareness, or community feedback. Grand Rapids is better than this.

Thank you for your consideration.

From: Amanda Browne

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 7:33 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Cc: Ysasi, Milinda <mysasi@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Knight, Lisa <lknight@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Subject: Letter of opposition regarding the 12/17 city commission meeting

Amanda Browne

Ward 2

12/16/2024

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed amendment on the agenda for Tuesday, December 17th, which seeks to reassign 13 of the 16 staff members of the City Comptroller's Department to the Fiscal Services Department. This proposal undermines the critical oversight function of the Comptroller's Office and contravenes the plain language of our City Charter.

The City Comptroller is elected by the people to ensure transparency and accountability in our City's accounting function. This amendment would significantly weaken the Comptroller's ability to perform these vital duties, jeopardizing the integrity of our existing financial oversight.

Furthermore, voters have already decided on this matter: a 2012 ballot initiative to change the City Comptroller from an elected position to one appointed by the City Manager was defeated 46,030 to 26,246. The proposal for tomorrow's meeting seeks to achieve the same outcome and is antithetical to our democracy. It's an audacious attempt to subvert the will of the majority of Grand Rapidsians.

I urge you to vote against this proposal and maintain the independence of the Comptroller's Office. It is essential to uphold the checks and balances our city relies on to prevent fraud and abuse.

If you are unwilling to vote against it, I urge you to at least table the proposal. Effective local government starts with transparency and ample time for community input and feedback from diverse stakeholders. Unfortunately, there hasn't been the slightest attempt at public engagement, awareness, or community feedback. Grand Rapids is better than this.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda

From: Christopher Browne

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 7:23 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Cc: Ysasi, Milinda <mysasi@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Knight, Lisa <lknight@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Subject: Letter of Opposition for the 12/17 City Commission Meeting

Christopher Browne

Ward 2

12/16/2024

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed amendment on the agenda for Tuesday, December 17th, which seeks to reassign 13 of the 16 staff members of the City Comptroller's Department to the Fiscal Services Department. This proposal undermines the critical oversight function of the Comptroller's Office and contravenes the plain language of our City Charter.

The City Comptroller is elected by the People to ensure transparency and accountability in our City's accounting function. This amendment would significantly weaken the Comptroller's ability to perform these vital duties, jeopardizing the integrity of our financial oversight.

Furthermore, voters have already decided: a 2012 ballot initiative to change the City Comptroller from an elected position to one appointed by the City Manager was defeated 46,030 to 26,246. This proposal seeks to achieve the same outcome and is antithetical to our democracy. It's an audacious attempt to subvert the will of the majority of Grand Rapidsians.

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If you are unwilling to vote against it, I urge you to at least table the proposal. Effective local government starts with transparency and ample time for community input and feedback from diverse stakeholders. Unfortunately, there hasn't been the slightest attempt at public engagement, awareness, or community feedback. Grand Rapids is better than this.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Christopher

-----Original Message-----

From: Allyson Fea

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 7:12 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@grand-rapids.mi.us>; O'Connor, Jon <joconnor@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Ysasi, Milinda <mysasi@grand-rapids.mi.us>; Perdue, Kelsey <kperdue@grand-rapids.mi.us>; City Manager <manager@grand-rapids.mi.us>; lknight@grcity.com; bgoei@grcity.com; drobbins@grcity.com

Subject: NO TO CITY COMPTROLLER CUTS

Hello,

I am a resident, homeowner and business owner in Grand Rapids, and I was very disappointed to hear about the proposed cuts to the city comptroller office. This seems to be a violation of the city charter.

In no way do I support this, I feel there has been no transparency in this change, this should most definitely be a ballot item that residents vote on. There should be more transparency about city finances and the fact that I am just hearing about this now and also that it's already being voted on tomorrow.

I am requesting that this matter be either denied or tabled to be placed on the ballot to be voted on.

From: Laura Cesa

Sent: Monday, December 16, 2024 3:45 PM

To: City Clerk <cityclerk@grand-rapids.mi.us>

Subject: Opposition to proposed changes to City Comptroller Department

City Commission:

I am writing to object in the strongest terms to the proposal on the December 17th agenda to reallocate 13 of 16 staff members of the City Comptroller Department to the Fiscal Services Department under the City Manager (City Commission agenda item XI.2, attachment M). This proposal would defund 81% of the personnel resources in the City Comptroller Department and directly contradicts the City Charter.

Specifically, the City Charter prescribes the following duties to the **elected** City Comptroller, and not to the **appointed** City Manager: A. Issues and signs all checks B. Keeps the Account of Moneys Due from any and every source C. Keeps the Account of Moneys Received D. Keeps the account of funds and disbursements E. Prescribes the Uniform System for tracking the money F. Audits any and all accounts and reports findings to the City Commission G. Balances the books H. Has access to all books, records, and documents kept by any officer, employee, or department of the City. I. Audits and reports to the City Commission any claims against the city J. Presents detailed financial statements to the City annually or whenever required K. Provides all of the following for the Board of Education as well L. Performs other duties as required by the City Commission.

Simply put, the City Comptroller cannot perform these duties without the staff assigned. Furthermore, I find it alarming that this unprecedented change was added to the Fiscal Committee and City Commission agenda by the City Manager only two business days before being slated to be voted on, without the knowledge or consent of the City Comptroller and in the absence of public engagement. As recently as 2012, the citizens of Grand Rapids voted overwhelmingly against a proposal to amend the City Charter allowing the City Manager to appoint and oversee the City Comptroller Department. The proposed agenda item would seek to subvert the will of a majority of Grand Rapids voters. It is equally concerning that the City Manager and his team have already instructed the affected city employees that they will be reassigned before the proposal was even brought before and voted on by our elected officials. This is not transparent government, and frankly, gives the impression that there is something to hide.

I urge you to vote **against** this proposal and maintain the independence of the Comptroller's Office. It is essential to uphold the checks and balances our city relies on to prevent fraud and abuse.

Thank you for your consideration,

Laura Cesa

Ward 2 resident