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By:

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Above: City Attorney Tom Yeadon, photo courtesy City of East Lansing.

City Attorney Tom Yeadon will continue serving as the City of East Lansing's counsel.

That decision was made when East Lansing's City Council held a special non-televised session ^[2] on March 31 to interview three candidates for the advertised opening ^[3] for City Attorney.

Of those firms that applied, the three finalist candidates chosen by Council were:

- Secrest, Wardle, Lynch, Hampton, Truex and Morley, P.C.
- Thrun Law Firm, P.C.
- McGinty, Hitch, Housefield, Person, Yeadon & Anderson, P.C. (the services of which the City has retained since 1969)

Secrest, which is based in Troy but has offices in Lansing and Grand Rapids, was the largest firm represented, with a roster of over seventy attorneys. With one of its specialties being municipal law [4], Secrest serves as general counsel for both Bloomfield Hills and Auburn Hills, the latter of which includes a sizable student population (from Oakland University) and a council-manager government similar to East Lansing's. Of the three representatives present from Secrest at the interview, the lawyer who would function as the potential point of contact for East Lansing wasn't locally-based. However, he assured that the commute for Council meetings wouldn't be an impediment should the firm be selected.

East Lansing-based Thrun Law Firm, which also has offices in Novi and Grand Rapids, services many public sector clients, representing the vast majority of school districts in Michigan. [5] Local clients include the City of Grand Ledge and Lansing Township. Thrun has worked with the latter on the Eastwood Towne Center development. The firm's three representatives included Thrun's president. They made a point of saying that they do not represent developers.

At the Council meeting, Mr. Yeadon, along with fellow senior partner Thomas Hitch, represented McGinty et al., an East Lansing firm [6] with approximately ten attorneys. Dennis McGinty, the firm's namesake, became the City of East Lansing's Assistant City Attorney in 1969 and then the City Attorney 1973-2012. (McGinty is now retired.) Yeadon became Assistant City Attorney in 1985 and has been City Attorney since 2012. During the interview, Yeadon commented that he would take direction from Council, and he offered appreciation for the city's residents who investigate and bring data to Council.

Council then deliberated in the same meeting after the interviews. Considering the City's decades-long relationship with McGinty, strong consideration was given to the matter of familiarity versus a new perspective.

Overall, Thrun, despite being local, was considered the weakest of the three candidates, as it wasn't clear that there would be a single consistent representative from the firm for the City (as Yeadon currently is for McGinty, and as Secrest provided). Mayor Pro Tem Beier called Thrun "ham-handed," though she didn't elaborate.

Secrest was a strong contender because it offered a full-service, "deep bench" firm with a single point of contact. That representative, however, wouldn't be local. Secrest proved to be a close second in the deliberations.

Ultimately Council opted to negotiate a new contract with McGinty, retaining Yeadon as City Attorney. Reasons named included location and singularity of representation, with at least one

councilmember saying she had learned more about Yeadon during the interview process. Councilmembers also said that Yeadon had provided good counsel in the past.

When asked by ELi for further comment today, Mayor Mark Meadows said that the McGinty firm had the best value and response [to our questions], and that the other applicants may be used as outside counsel down the road if their particular expertise was called for.

Similarly, Mayor Pro Tem Ruth Beier praised the history of success of [McGinty], especially on issues important to . . . residents such as ordinance 900 [7].

Councilmember Erik Altmann called Yeadon a responsive and skilled attorney with strong institutional memory, praising Yeadon's work towards closure on the park district buildings.

Going further, Altmann wrote, Mr. Yeadon and his firm have taken heat from the community [regarding developers]. But . . . the City Attorney and the City Manager really do take their direction from the City Council. If you don't like what they're doing, [citizens should] blame the Council and vote accordingly, which the City did last November. That was the accountability moment.

Councilmember Susan Woods responded to ELi's inquiry today that she had no comment, and Councilmember Shanna Draheim did not respond before we went to press.

According to the call for applications by the City, the City Attorney is expected to provide counsel in land use, zoning, growth management, election law, Tax Increment Financing, Environmental Law, Inter-Local Agreements, Municipal Authority Agreements, Public Works, Employment Law, and other Municipal matters.

The City of East Lansing currently spends about a half-million dollars on outside Council from the McGinty firm.

UPDATE: An audio recording of the meeting is now available at this page [2].

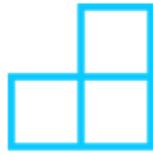
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