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## City Attorney Receives New Contract with 25 Percent Raise in 3-2 Vote <sup>[1]</sup>

Wednesday, June 19, 2019, 7:00 am

**By:**

Alice Dreger



*Above: Tom Yeadon at a meeting in April 2019.*

Indicating that they were extremely pleased with his services, East Lansing City Council members Mark Meadows, Erik Altmann, and Ruth Beier voted last night to extend City Attorney Tom Yeadon's contract, upping the total value of the contract by about 25 percent, taking it from

about \$520,000 per year to about \$650,000 per year for Yeadon and his firm.

Council members Shanna Draheim and Aaron Stephens voted against the deal. The two failed in an attempt to put the whole decision off to next week to allow more time for public discussion.

Last night, Council could apparently see the contract on which they were voting, but did not share it with the public. This comes on the heels of related decisions on the matter also being kept out of public view [2].

At a special meeting that started at 4 p.m. yesterday, Council interviewed representatives of three firms that had responded to an open call for applications for the position. These included Yeadon's firm (McGinty, Hitch, et al.), Secret Wardle, and Dickinson Wright.



Candidates from the three firms were asked about many topics, including protecting the City through development agreements, managing an activist Council, supporting renters when their landlords break the law, and more.

**But in the end, it appears Altmann, Meadows, and Beier had always intended to vote for Yeadon.**

The official vote came at the end of a second meeting as an "add-on" agenda item. A paper version of that meeting's agenda showed that Council had in their possession the contract that would be voted on. But the public versions contained no such attachment.

Stephens objected to all this, saying all of Council knew a decision was likely to be made at that meeting, yet the public had been kept in the dark.

Stephens said he "took issue" with how the Mayor handled this lack of advising the public,

calling it a "significant issue." Draheim "echoed" Stephens remarks.

Meadows said he found it "a little disconcerting" that these items had been "overlooked" from inclusion on the agenda.

The agenda is set by Meadows as mayor.

### **Yeadon's performance drew no serious criticism.**

In their public discussions yesterday, none of the members of Council alluded to Yeadon's key role in the retaining wall federal lawsuit [3], which focused on the failure to disclose Yeadon's financial conflict of interest [4] in an application for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding.

Nor did any Council member directly mention anything like the time Council had to vote to fix the Center City District redevelopment agreement [5] after ELi reported problems Yeadon had apparently not caught in the contract.

Yeadon has more recently come under public criticism for recommending that City staff threaten a man with arrest over a driveway construction [6] that was twice approved by City's staff. (Staff later offered the man the choice of cash from the City or arrest [7].) But no questions were raised about this strong-arm approach.

### **Altmann moved approval of the unreleased contract, saying the City is getting "excellent legal representation" from Yeadon "at a very fair price."**

Altmann praised Yeadon's work on rental overlay districts, the income tax proposal that passed last August, and the dangerous buildings ordinance which allows the ordering of demolition of derelict buildings.

Altmann noted that Yeadon's rates are very low for municipal attorneys in the state and said he was "proud that as a community we have decided to pay" more for Yeadon's services.

Beier called it "amazing" that she had just learned that the reason Yeadon wasn't earning more was that he had selflessly decided against asking for more money for years, as the City faced financial struggles. She said this spoke to his professionalism.

### **Meadows sees Yeadon as a "bird in the hand."**

Draheim, Stephens, and Meadows all praised much of what Secret Wardle had to offer. (Draheim first disclosed that Jim Bradley of Secret Wardle, below right, had given her a campaign contribution.)



But Meadows said the way he figured it, Yeadon's firm would cost about \$650,000 per year, Secret Wardle about \$738,000 per year, and Dickinson Wright about \$924,000 per year. (These figures did not reflect adjustments the firms were open to making and do not reflect what it costs to hire outside counsel for various lawsuits and other matters.)

Moreover, Meadows said, Yeadon "shows a tremendous dedication to the welfare of the City," something he couldn't be sure would develop in other applicants. Meadows preferred "a bird in the hand" to "two in the bush."

That said, he acknowledged the City might yet be best off going for external expertise for some matters, including downtown development issues.

Before it was all over, Altmann expressed irritation at Draheim and Stephens' idea of putting off the vote until next week. He said he saw no reason to drag out the process further and indicated that he was glad to have pushed through raises and contract extensions for City Manager George Lahanas and now also Yeadon.

### **Will this major split vote matter in November?**

Altmann, Meadows, and Draheim are up for re-election on November 5, and this now stands as another case where Altmann, Meadows, and Beier voted in opposition to Draheim.

Similar splits have occurred over building heights downtown [8], rental restrictions [9], parking rules [10], and a vote last year about Yeadon's contract [11].

But whether voters care about this or other issues that divide Altmann and Meadows from Draheim remains to be seen. As of now, only one challenger is running [12] for City Council, namely MSU student Warren Stanfield.

Once Yeadon's contract becomes available, we will post a link to it here.

**UPDATE:** The contract that Council voted on last night is now available. See it here. <sup>[13]</sup> Among other details, it shows the contract is for three years, with an expiration of June 30, 2022.

### Related reporting:

Council Making Decisions about City Attorney Out of Public Eye <sup>[2]</sup>

Released Documents Show Details Behind Search for Next City Attorney <sup>[14]</sup>

Feds Order City to Repay \$134K Over City Attorney's Conflict of Interest <sup>[4]</sup>

Council Renews City Manager Lahanas's Contract with Salary Bump <sup>[15]</sup>

### Related Categories:

City Attorney <sup>[16]</sup>

City Council <sup>[17]</sup>

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[2] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/council-making-decisions-about-city-attorney-out-public-eye>

[3] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/whistleblower-everyone-else-pays-their-own-sidewalk>

[4] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/feds-order-city-repay-134k-over-city-attorneys-conflict-interest>

[5] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/proposed-new-deal-center-city-released-confirming-elis-reporting>

[6] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/city-threatens-arrest-over-approved-driveway>

[7] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/city-now-offering-man-either-money-or-arrest-driveway-drama>

[8] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/another-3-2-vote-council-majority-indicates-desire-still-taller-buildings>

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[11] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/stephens-and-draheim-rebuffed-attempt-open-applications-city-attorney>

[12] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/calling-all-council-candidates-heres-411-running-office-east-lansing>

[13]

[https://eastlansinginfo.org/sites/default/files/file\\_called\\_yeadon\\_contract\\_posted\\_at\\_coel\\_website\\_on\\_june\\_19\\_2019\\_af](https://eastlansinginfo.org/sites/default/files/file_called_yeadon_contract_posted_at_coel_website_on_june_19_2019_af)

[14] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/released-documents-show-details-behind-search-next-city-attorney>

[15] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/council-renews-lahanas-contract-salary-bump>

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