

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT – August 8, 2013 Special Commission Meeting

Mayor Right, is this, this is not advertised as a meeting.

Azzolino No, just interviews.

Mayor Just interviews. Esther! Welcome, I am Chris Bell Mayor. I think the signs are out there. I understand that you are interested in the city clerk position. Thank you for coming tonight. We did want to learn a bit about you and would like you to step up and put you in the spot light. Have been dealing with the interviews and would like to ask you to tell us a little bit about yourself.

Coulson I have been involved with government on a local level for almost 30 years both in the UK and primarily in Florida for the most part. I started work as a secretary in the UK and then came over here to work my way up or promoted from secretary to working for elected officials in Broward County serving as their secretary, have been taking minutes for them for a good number of years and at that time learned how local governments work as well as state and federal government. So that is just putting it in a nutshell.

Mayor How much Florida experience you have?

Coulson 25 years.

Mayor That is in city government in Florida

Coulson City and county. County 20 years and I was loaned to establish a new city and I worked with them for about six years.

Mayor Okay, now I guess in your resume that some your jobs overlapped here. You worked as a fitness instructor at the same time

Coulson Yes

Mayor That is what I figured. So the last time you worked as city clerk was when?

Goldberg May 12

Coulson Up until May 1 last year. I did not disclose in my resume, I did not even update it. I am working for the Town of Hilton Head Island as a records administrator/town clerk I just recently acquired that position.

Mayor So you are currently employed as a clerk?

Coulson I am currently employed now yes. I did not update my resume. I'm sorry.

Mayor That's alright. How big a town as that.

Goldberg Hilton Head?

Coulson Yes, Hilton Head Island.

Mayor How big of a town is that?

Coulson I just moved there actually, they have approx. 40k residents in the winter months and now about two million people because of, of course, the holiday season, it has grown considerably. I am sorry I put my local address down, because I was living at both addresses and I still came to Florida and am closing today.

Cheshire So you just moved to South Carolina.

Coulson Yes

Goldberg You bought a house there?

Coulson No. I have a property down here.

Mayor I was going to say. You just started up there?

Coulson Yes.

Mayor But you're still interested in a job in Florida. . .

Coulson I'm homesick.

Goldberg Already?

Coulson The weather, it is nice now but I was mortified by the cold it could get and it is a different kind of politics up there, there is nothing wrong. I am learning new laws it is not a problem for me because I can get acclimated but I enjoyed the challenges of the position of the clerk as opposed to the records administrator. I am tasked to fix something that is 30 years old and I may not mind it and I miss where I come from.

Mayor We're not Fort Lauderdale though, we . . .

Gunter . . . We are a small town.

Coulson I worked for small and large. I worked for as I said the county with more than 3 million people, I worked for the smallest city which is 11,000, I worked for Cutler Bay 45,000 people. It is a broad spectrum with what I will be dealing with and of course, Miami-Dade laws are completely different, apart from one other county, the rest of Florida, so that is another level of experience.

Mayor Yes, I was going to say, that is a different, they have a

Coulson Yes, their home rules are different.

Mayor Do you have family here Florida?

Coulson Yes I do, my children are in south Florida and my son is in Illinois and my sister.

Mayor So Central Florida is okay for you, not south Florida.

Coulson Oh of course, the politics are, as I said a challenge why because if you (inaudible) . . .

Mayor Any questions?

Kelly What kind of minutes do you take? Do you take action minutes? Do you take, what's the other one called?

Goldberg Summary or detailed.

Kelly Yes, summary.

Coulson I have taken verbatim minutes on request, summary action agendas which is not as detailed and I have taken and anecdotal minutes summarizing leading up to the vote itself so I am very much aware of parliamentary laws, rules and procedures pertaining to minutes.

Kelly So what is the kind of minutes we do?

Azzolino We do sometimes, we do detail, it depends on what you ask me to do.

Kelly Yeah, more detailed than summary though right? We need a background to know what it is about. In case if someone has not been to the meeting wants to read the minutes needs to know what is going on. Just wanted to make sure that we are good that's all.

You know about the laws about disposing of the records and to maintain.

Coulson Of course, yes, they are quite detailed as it comes to records management in comparison to other states. That is one of the challenges that the clerks find.

Kelly I can understand that the other day, I was in Sue's office and she gets tons of boxes and stuff that need to be got rid of and she could not find the schedule on the computer, it is different for each thing. Accounting records have to be kept so long and minutes at a different time.

Not only do we maintain records, also for elections which is a separate retention schedule.

Cheshire You have experience in municipal elections.

Coulson Yes.

I think what Mayor Bell was kind of alluding to is that we are trying to look for someone who has been here a while with us. We don't want someone coming here for a couple of months or a year and leave, we are looking for a long term.

Coulson Florida is where I would like to be. With respect to the elections, I have worked very very closely with the SOE at the county level and depending upon whether if we are stand alone or piggyback with the county itself. So depending on the costs involved and work involved, I have been privy to working with them.

Gunter We changed all our procedures on elections a year ago so that we would fall with the cycle as the county and the presidential to save our . . .

Coulson cost effective.

Kelly If we have a run-off well . .

Gunter Cost effective exactly. So you became a certified municipal clerk in 2009?

Coulson Yes.

Gunter You've got a very impressive resume here. With all the things you have been dealing with.

I like the position assistant to the consulate of the British Embassy. If we need foreign policy, sometimes I think we need foreign policy the way these meetings are going.

Kelly Esther, do you mind me calling you "Esther"?

Coulson Oh of course.

Kelly Do you have experience with employees working under you that you supervisor?

Coulson Yes

Kelly How many?

Coulson Well there were six of us, at the county I had to coach them and I did not have that time, I supervised about

Kelly How many?

Coulson My maximum was three.

Rick Esther in the opening comments, you mentioned you had property to buy.

Coulson Sorry, I close today.

Conner I thought implied, I wanted to clarify that it was property in this area area.

No, south Florida.

I have to ask. You stated that you work for HHI, did you indicate to them when you went there that you were interviewing here and you might be leaving soon.

Coulson Not yet, no, I have not given that indication.

I am still in probationary period, still early days yet, me to feel them and them get used to me. It is just like a relationship, it is a perception. I am not saying that there is anything is wrong with that really, it is a different culture. I enjoy my job, I love what I do. It is just different.

Conner Side question, are you a member of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks.

Coulson IIMC?

Conner Yes

Coulson Yes I am

Conner Are you familiar with Meridan Strader of Texas? It is just a chance question. I think it has been asked, it is important to this commission that they get someone here, stays here, interest is here is not a stepping stone getting into Florida and not get ready for the right job to open up. Morally, legally there is no opportunity, morally you have no problem making a commitment of a term of years.

Conner I intend to stay as long as I can.

Cheshire You mentioned that you are homesick, being from the south Florida area, different in central Florida. Lifestyle, pace, there is still more activity, lots of things to do.

Coulson Where I am from, I don't want to start anything new yet. I still teach because it is my passion. I would like to maintain a sound and healthy life-style, there more opportunity to do that as opposed to up there as the laws are different and I have to respect that.

Conner I understand that you have a closing on a house.

Coulson Yes, a condo, my condo.

Conner A property

Coulson I sold it today.

Goldberg You sold it not bought it. I was just thinking that you are buying it and why you are coming here.

Coulson I can acclimate rather quickly as the weather is not extreme to me extreme is less than 60 degrees.

Kelly Good opportunity now for buying.

Mayor It has kind of chilly here on occasions.

Coulson At least it is on occasions and not six months.

Kelly Two days out of the year.

Cheshire This a little different from south Florida. Here, this is a wonderful place to live, lots of things to do, a great community and a great area to live in.

Mayor We have got The Villages. I don't know you are familiar with the Villages.

Coulson I'm familiar with Ocala and another place southeast, there is another village and spent some time.

Mayor This is a retirement setting right next door to us.

Coulson Oh, I'm not young.

Mayor When you came to us, did you come to us on the interstate.

Coulson I came on 441?

Kelly She missed it. The Villages. They are new, how old are they five years six years.

Mayor The villages are at least 20 years, grown to almost 100,000 people right next door and are interacting with us and it is a growing area.

Coulson How do you balance that with historical?

Mayor That is a big question. That is a challenge that we are going through. It will keep the clerk a little busy for the next few years anyway. As long as you are not coming to kick your shoes up.

 Any other questions? Council, John?

Gunter Can't think of anything. What type of salary range you are looking to get into? The most you can get?

Coulson That's not fair to the public. I am not even looking at that. I'm getting now 60. My last salary was 65, I suppose in that ballpark and also keep it even with what other municipal clerks are getting in this area.

Kelly Yeah.

Gunter I can tell you that the cost of living is cheaper here is lower than Hilton Head and south Florida. Broward County and West Palm Beach kind of the highest.

Conner He asked if I find the rent a little cheaper here.

Goldberg From south Florida, most definitely most definitely.

Mayor If we don't have any additional questions, last chance.

Gunter I think of something when she leaves.

Mayor We appreciate you coming joining us. Is there anything additional you would like to say in closing?

Kelly How soon could she start, that's a question, two weeks, a month or what?

Coulson About a month.

Kelly About a month?

Conner This is an open public meeting and you are by law, certainly welcome to stay we can go to the lobby, you can visit, it is your call.

Coulson It is entirely up to you. Thank you. It was a pleasure.

Commission Thank you!

Kelly She's a keeper.

Goldberg From, when I saw her resume, you saw what I gave her, just from her history and what she has done and it is like everything we need to that we have done here, she has done and touched. She obviously is well versed in Florida laws

Kelly Right

Goldberg and how to manage that and she presents herself very well.

Kelly Yes she does.

Cheshire Very well.

Gunter If you noticed what I gave her on . . .

Kelly . . . Yeah we did. . . .

Gunter . . . and my thinking was, apparently I am wrong cause a disaster that she was making way more than what we could afford to pay and she is working and paying way more and working at Hilton Head and only making 60,000.

Mayor . . . she is not doing clerk but records keeper.

Kelly Records.

Cheshire I must say Mr. Gunter looking at your scores, I would not want to have you as a teacher.

Goldberg Oh no, yeah, you definitely start on this side of the curb.

Gunter Mayor Bell he write one person on . . .

Goldberg You make two on the city clerk. What is the scale for that?

Kelly What Scale are you talking about?

Goldberg Pay scale, 60 for the clerk and 80 for the treasurer. That is what we did in the budget.

Rector Pointing out in the contingency. Has Marie talked to her?

Azzolino On the phone only yes.

Mayor What is your impression?

Azzolino I liked her from the first conversation we had, she knew everything we were talking about threw a couple of questions in it about public records requests, she knew everything.

Gunter You just want to give her the job.

Azzolino Absolutely. She said a month, I like what's the matter with two weeks.

Goldberg If she is probationary, she can go back up there and say "I can't basically" it is like no fault divorce but it does not look good and it is not professional.

Kelly Because the cost of living is different, hey they are going to pay me 60,000 an extra 10, I am going there. We have a motion?

Mayor We have a motion.

Kelly I motion to tentatively employ her after review do a background and I mean offer her so that we can do background and all that stuff.

Mayor Got a motion.

Cheshire I second, give her a second chance.

Goldberg I tried. Believe me I tried.

Mayor All in favor. Propose that we allow our negotiator to get in touch with her.

Kelly Who is our negotiator, John?

Mayor John seems to do alright

Kelly Just remember what our interim city manager said. *You are going to get what you pay for. Okay?* Keep that in mind. You are talking about a professional position here.

Cheshire That is why he brought her out there. Bring her in.

Mayor Do you want to talk to 60 or 65.

Commission \$60.

Cheshire We don't have 65 in the budget.

Mayor 55?

Goldberg She will walk out.

Kelly She is well worth it she has enough experience.

\$60 is fine.

Cheshire We have great benefit package, free . . .

Goldberg Life insurance, all that and plenty of homes to purchase.
What is her name?

Commission Esther. Esther Lewin-Coulson

Mayor Lewin-Coulson. Try and remember all these names.

Goldberg The city manager is talking her into being an interim. That's all.
What?

Mayor Esther, we talked about you everyone was pretty much impressed, we took a vote here to offer you the job and it passed unanimously. We have currently in the budget \$55,000.

But you could go up as the position has been vacant at that salary. Would you consider 55 at this point? Let us see how sharp negotiator at this point.

Esther 58?

Mayor 58. Health care, dental life insurance good package, a paid vacation.

Goldberg And it is closer to south Florida, three and a half hours, I drive it all the time.

Cheshire Benefits all paid for by us and don't pay anything for health and life insurance nothing is taken out of your check and the cost of living is better here.

Goldberg She is a terrible negotiator.

Mayor Okay. What about moving?

Coulson Two months' notice with my lease. I have to come up with that \$1,000.

Goldberg A month?

Mayor You would be out a month's rent?

Coulson Yes, \$900.

Mayor All your stuff is up there and

Coulson Most of it is, I still have stuck in storage.

Mayor Furniture up there.

Coulson It is with my family.

Mayor I did not ask about your family.

Coulson Furniture you said.

Mayor Are you by yourself.

Coulson By myself yes.

Mayor Just moving you.

Coulson Yes.

Mayor I am thinking and throw this out there. I am going to accept her 55 and throw in 3,000 to move her down here which would cover the \$900 for extra month's rent.

Kelly What did you say for your month's wages?

Coulson I get 59 now.

Kelly She gets 59 now and what was your counter offer.

Coulson 58.

Kelly I did not hear that part okay and three thousand.

Mayor In October, we start a budget year and have to vote basically again on you at that point. We can talk about something different at that point.

Coulson Okay.

Kelly. Sounds good.

Cheshire It looks good.

Goldberg Can we get some type of longevity agreement?

Mayor If we put out the 3,000, you are going to give us 90 days? We've got that on tape, more than 90 days.

Gunter Not at least two years.

Cheshire Some places do \$1,000 and \$2,000 for renting and moving expenses.

Conner It is a very common thing to give moving expenses, you sign an agreement if you leave before this period, you'll owe us back this much.

Gunter That will work for me.

Mayor Can you work that out?

Conner Certainly.

Mayor Do you need the full month?

Coulson Are you desperate?

Kelly Yeah.

Gunter She is desperate.

Mayor Yes. We will not put you on the spot at this point, if it all works out and get you a little quicker, Marie will appreciate it. How about that?

Coulson Yes.

Goldberg Do you want Rick to work the details?

Conner I'll be glad to work . . .

Gunter Whatever is common practice.

Conner Typically two years, seems to be the industry standard. That will work.

Mayor Does that sound good to you?

Coulson Yes.

Kelly You sound good to us.

Cheshire On paper anyway.

Coulson Thank you. I look forward to working with each of you.

Goldberg We as well.

Mayor Very good. Thank you very much

Kelly Welcome aboard.

Mayor We will let Rick get in touch with you.

Conner I'll get her the information, contact information.

Rector She should know it is unanimous

Mayor I told her.

Goldberg We got, yes.

Commission Thank you very much.

Azzolino Thanks Esther.

Conner I'll give her the contact information.

Commission I like her on paper.

Goldberg She is even better in person.

Commission Yeah.

Cheshire Soon she will start being prizzy.

Goldberg You are giving her how much?

Mayor 60.

Goldberg She is a shrewd negotiator.

Azzolino I guess she does not like negotiating.

Mayor She was a little surprise I think.

Goldberg She understood that the compensation package is a big part of it and she was a little surprised that it is not coming out of her check.

Marie Absolutely.

Cheshire That is a good benefit for people, I mean, that's a big deal.

Goldberg A lot of people would work for less for a salary if the benefits were there to compensate that out.

Gunter Charlie just hired somebody for \$19 an hour for \$12 an hour. Just for the benefits.

Goldberg Just for the benefits. That's right he did say that. He did say that. It is a bit further, the overall package. I don't mind making a little bit less if I had this to back up other things. I would not tell that to my boss though.

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This is to certify that the above is the verbatim written excerpt of the proceedings.



Esther Coulson,
City Clerk
April 9, 2014