

TO: DARDENNE PRAIRIE BOARD OF ALDERMAN
FROM: ALDERMAN KEITH WIDAMAN
SUBJECT: ADDRESSING AUDIO ISSUES FROM FEBRUARY 21ST BOA MEETING

Members of the Board,

During the March 6th Dardenne Prairie Board of Alderman (BOA) Meeting several residents accused members of the city staff of altering/editing the Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) recording from the prior meeting on February 21st. The implication was this editing was done by city staff to censure certain residents. As a result, I committed to act and investigate this matter. I personally looked into this issue, and I would like to report back to the BOA what I found.

My actions include the below:

- I reviewed the original recording of the February 21st meeting.
- I requested another member of our community who uses MS Teams regularly in his job to also review the original recording (Mr. Marcos Jovert).
- I engaged the members of the city staff who were involved with recording the meeting. Mr. James Knowles and Mr. Tom Weis.
- I sought information regarding the ability to edit a MS Teams meeting recording.

It is my assessment that there was no editing done to the MS Teams recording of the February 21st BOA meeting. Furthermore, I discovered there were issues with connectivity that inhibited some speakers from being heard in the MS Teams recording and this was based on a faulty/malfunctioning microphone. I will elaborate below.

APPROXIMATE TIMELINE OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING IN QUESTION

- Meeting begins and James Messages Tom to start teams recording 7:02
- Pledge allegiance 7:02-7:03
- Carla Detweiler 7:03-7:06
- Joel King 7:06-7:09
- Cheryl Bratton 7:09-7:12
- Carl Maus 7:12-7:15
- Arnie Dienoff 7:15-7:18
- David Miller 7:18-7:21
- James Cook – Begins speaking on a bill concerning his company several minutes later.
- Rest of the meeting per the agenda

To begin, there was an oversight to initially click record on the MS Teams recording. Based on my review of recording and engagements with city staff as well as reading text messages between the city staff, I understand that Mr. Knowles texted Mr. Thomas Weis to turn the MS Teams meeting recording function on at 7:02 as the meeting started. Mr. Weis texted back at 7:12 and indicated he had turned the recording on but was late in doing so. The time stamp of this text from Mr. Weis to Mr. Knowles coincides with the timestamp when the recording begins and is when Mr. Carl Maus begins speaking. This established that there was no editing of the beginning of the MS Team recording as it coincides with a text message indicating the delay. Mr. Weis admitted this mistake and apologized for his oversight in the past meeting.

Next, to address the concern that there was editing to the middle of the MS Teams recording as the speakers after Mr. Maus seemingly became inaudible. I would like to note that the Microsoft website related to Teams editing Microsoft indicates “there is no way to directly edit the middle of a Stream recording. You can only trim the beginning or end of the recording.” This being said when the sound went off during the recording as Mr. Arnie Dienoff spoke it was not a MS Teams’ issue nor an edit to the recording. It is my assessment that this loss of sound in the recording was due to a malfunctioning microphone.

At the end of his speech, it appears Mr. Dienoff’s microphone cut off as he was stating his final comment because before he places it down on the podium as he was still speaking the sound was cut off. It is my assessment that he turned off the microphone at this point, or the microphone malfunctioned at this time.

When Mr. David Miller picks up the microphone the microphone remains silent during Mr. Miller’s speech except at a specific moment where he briefly turns around to face the crowd while speaking (thus changing the angle of the microphone to the receiver) and at this point a brief, audible but unclear sound from his microphone is heard. At the end of the speech after he sets the microphone on the table there is again a change in the angle of the microphone to the receiver and another brief, audible but unclear sound is emitted from the speaker’s microphone indicating this was likely a microphone malfunction.

When Mr. James Cook approaches the podium, the microphone remains on the podium as he speaks. During this time Mr. Cook’s microphone intermittently transmits choppy audio for the first couple minutes of his presentation, while the wired microphones from the board members transmit clear audio. Notably for the majority of Mr. Cook’s speech there is no audio being captured from the speaker’s microphone. This further indicating a problem with the connection from the speaker’s microphone to the receiver. The microphone on the podium completely stops transmitting for any speakers thereafter.

It is my assessment that the MS Teams recording was initiated at the beginning of Mr. Maus commentary due to an oversight. Mr. Wies clearly admitted his oversight, took ownership of it during the meeting on March 6 and apologized to the residents whose comments were not captured. This is further evident through time stamped text messages between him and Mr. Knowles. This administrative error coupled with a malfunctioning microphone created a false appearance of editing or censorship. Based on this information, I am confident no editing of any manner was applied to the MS Teams recording of the February 21st of the Dardenne Prairie BOA meeting. With that in mind I recommend the BOA reconsider the upgrades to the Audio-Visual system used to record the BOA meetings.

Respectfully,

Keith Widaman

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