

CITY COUNCIL PREVIEW #9: APRIL 14, 2025

AHRC, Counsel set for discussion

It's a packed agenda for City Council this week. There will be updates from the recipients of the Opioid Grants, highlighting important work being done in the community, often sight unseen. Thanks to all those involved in this endeavor, especially Councilmembers Domer and Anderson.

In recent weeks we've seen the City Council continue to exercise its powers as an independent branch of government, co-equal to the mayor's executive branch. Most recently, City Council passed Ordinance #6 to extend the existing Responsible Bidders' Ordinance despite having met with the mayor's disapproval (but no veto.)

The trend continues. Earlier this year Council approved the appropriation of funds for independent counsel for itself, in recognition of the city attorney's role as advocate for the city's executive branch, not the legislative branch. This week the Council will take up for consideration Resolution #5, authorizing the actual engagement of a city council attorney. This measure implements the intent of the earlier appropriation and provides City Council members with some needed resources when questions inevitably arise about interpreting state statutes and such. Council can't and shouldn't be reliant on the same source of advice as the mayor, pure and simple.

The Valparaiso Advisory Human Relations Council (AHRC) is a 10-person body appointed by the mayor. Ordinance #8, drafted by Councilmember Hunt, would amend how the body is appointed, from 9 members appointed by the mayor to 3 members appointed by the mayor and 6 appointed by City Council (the chief of police would remain as a non-voting member.) The proposed change in AHRC makeup comes after we've seen the head of the AHRC appear before City Council to discuss why it has until recently appeared dormant. While some program ideas for the near future were broached, there wasn't any clear indication that the AHRC would become a more active advocate and presence in the city. Perhaps a change in its composition will yield greater visibility than the current composition has allowed. Stay tuned for a possible chance to get involved with the AHRC!

What we're seeing this week is increasingly independent action taken by City Council, irrespective of the mayor's agenda. The mayor has resisted Council independence in the past. We'll see how he responds to these latest Council actions.