

Muskegon's new mayor shifts city into fast lane

Donald E. Johnson, the only remaining member of Muskegon's old-shoe city commission, appeared slightly discomfited, as well he might: the occasion was the seating of a new, potentially hostile commission and the official transformation of Marguerite Holcomb into Madam Mayor.

The installation last week of the city's first woman mayor was marked by a procession of well-wishers (mostly from women's groups) bearing roses. Twenty minutes into the meeting Mayor Holcomb had collected so many roses that she might have been the Queen of Hearts — as benign as Lewis Carroll's queen was mad — about to suggest croquet.

The appearance was deceiving. It soon became evident that on its first outing the new city commission would not be playing games.

Heading the agenda was a list of objectives pertaining to financing, human rights, environment and land use, neighborhood improvement, personnel policies, possible consolidation of city departments, public participation, and charter revision.

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And then, after a half-hearted protest from new commissioner Richard Freye, the commission reversed itself and voted 5-2 to boycott conventions in states that have not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment.

It also mandated an update of its affirmative action program, put out a call for new candidates for city boards and commissions, and set an election on key changes in the city charter.

Clearly, this commission is in a housecleaning mood. We suppose it is too early to tell exactly where that will lead, but it is not too early to advise caution against change merely for the sake of change, lest the housecleaning become a purge.

At the end of the night's agenda was an item — an afterthought, really — recognizing the service of retiring city commissioners John E. Medendorp, Bernard G.

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Naturally, times change. If there is a goal of equal weight and importance for the new commission to tackle, it probably involves money. In the face of rising costs and dwindling revenues, the policy makers of today will have their hands full just keeping Muskegon from going broke. It is appropriate that "finances" was the top item on the list of objectives for the city.

In their rush to turn things around, this new group should realize that the day-to-day problems of running a city will not go away. The new commission might be well advised to borrow a page from the old, and realize that there are few rosebeds in city government, and nothing is as easy as it looks.

We wish the new mayor and all the commissioners the best possible luck. They'll need it.