

Item 23-0662: Resolution #5-R-23, Joining the Wisconsin Local Government Climate Coalition

Common Council

Wed, Jun 21, 2023, 7:00PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 22:58

This is item 23-0662. Resolution 5-R-23 Joining the Wisconsin local government Climate Coalition. We have a motion and a second to approve. We'll open the floor for discussion. alder Fenton.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 23:24

Thank you, Your Honor. I'd like to move to amend by substitution resolution number 5-R-23 to restore the original language submitted. I was asked to be a cosponsor of this resolution as a courtesy by Alder Firkus because of my work on the Task Force on Resiliency, Climate Mitigation, and Adaptation in 2020 through 2022. I did not contribute any of the language in this resolution. That came from city staff, particularly the sustainability manager.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 23:56

We talk a lot in this body about consulting staff and relying on their expertise so it was pretty amazing to me that in this instance, we were very quick to strip out all the language we were asked to submit, in effect leaving a resolution that said, we're going to have the city join the Wisconsin Local Government Climate Coalition, but we don't share the goals of the organization and we certainly don't want to talk about the threats to our citizens, our infrastructure, and our way of life posed by climate change.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 24:23

The "therefore be it resolved" clause, as we were reminded by Attorney Behrens last Monday, states the action that we want to take, but I think the "whereas" clauses are not just fluff as some might believe. I think that the whereas clauses give us important background and highlight the journey we've taken to get to the action we are taking. The text of resolution number 5-R-23 does a great job—the original text—does a great job of explaining why we are seeking to join with other communities to find ways to deal with the climate crisis together. The so-called compromise that resulted in the new resolution completely removes that stated goal. So, I would like to ask my colleagues to support restoring the original language. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 25:09

All right, we have a motion and a second to amend by substitution. So, we'll open discussion on the amendment. Alder Del Toro.

Alderson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 25:20

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I'd just like to—I prepared to a quick little statement in here, so I'll just read from that. The whereas sections of any given resolution partially serve the purpose of communicating the urgency and transparency. We want our community to know our reasoning behind the ordinance of this sort. By removing the language which my peers consider hyperbole, we send the wrong message to our community, while at the same time obscuring their voice and concern on the issue. There is nothing hyperbolic about this real—about the real threats and repercussions of inaction towards the most pressing threat to humanity in our lifetimes. So no, not hyperbole, I would argue that the language is appropriately tempered.

Aldersperson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 25:59

Alders have previously advocated to listening to the voices of city staff in making the best and most informed decisions for our community. Here, our city staff has unambiguously stated their full support for the resolution in its original form. Let's let them know that we hear them, and we trust their endorsement in its original form today by approving this resolution as is.

Aldersperson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 26:19

Finally, I actually appreciate Alder Croatt's comments, who shared that his level of support in joining the coalition was satiated once he heard he learned about what joining this group int—er entailed for our city. As stated before by alders and staff, this is a unique opportunity to build a statewide community, voice the urgency of this contemporary issue, and access resources that bring together the collective power of the state in caring for our communities and constituents. We have the full support of the action driven part of the resolution, the "therefore let it be resolved" section. Let's just vote in favor of this and stop the criticism of resolutions simply for the reasoning of "I just don't like how this sounds." Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 27:04

Is there any further discussion on the amendment? Okay, this is on the amendment. Alder Siebers.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 27:11

Thank you, Your Honor. From time to time, I've been asked by new alderspersons for some advice. And I've been willingly—I have willingly given it, of course, not always accepted. Tonight, I'm going to try something a little bit different. I'm going to give some advice, and nobody's asking for it.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 27:38

I think it's extremely important that we learn to listen, that we listen to learn, rather than listen to come up come up for a response to what is being said. I think it's important that we respect our fellow alderspersons and their position. I think it's important to learn to compromise—and this is extremely important—to work toward unity rather than division. I think it's important that we never forget what unites us is far greater than what divides us. And this is something that sometimes gets me in trouble. I think it's important to commit to governing, to action, and not just making statements.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 28:31

Having said that, at committee we had a good discussion on this resolution. One aldersperson in attendance spoke of her concern for at least one of the whereases, and she said that she could not vote for a resolution as it stood. Our city attorney reminded us that what we were voting on was really what comes after "therefore". Another aldersperson spoke of how we would like how he would like to see a unanimous vote on this. Committee members spoke about committee work being done in committee and the need to find common ground before taking a vote. And another person suggested a compromise and suggested eliminating the problem whereases. After all this was said and done four members present on the committee took a vote to amend the resolution to strike the problem whereases so hopefully to get a unanimous vote as one aldersperson suggested. Four to zero. After that a vote on the amended resolution was taken. And again, four to zero.

Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 29:56

Again, it's important that we not forget what unites us is far greater than what divides us. And that we commit to governing, to action, and not just making statements. I have—during the whole discussion at committee, I don't think anybody was pooh-poohing any of the whereases. All I heard was "I'm having a difficult time with this, whereas. I don't know if I can support that." You know, so I would encourage my colleagues to vote this amendment down. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 30:37

Alder Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 30:39

Thank you, Mayor. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend the Parks and Rec committee meeting. I suspect, if I had discussions may have gone slightly differently, and maybe we wouldn't have had those thoughts as you just recounted. I did watch the recording of the meeting, and it felt at times like I was watching a student government association meeting with the way we were conducting the process of trying to get to this final vote on a resolution. I just—I don't recall ever having to strip out so many, whereas clauses to satiate some of the desires from some of the members on our committee to get it passed, for the objective to pass the thing in the end and support essentially what the resolution is calling for.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 31:30

I'm not sure what else to add that alders Fenton and Del Toro have not already expressed, but I do think we did ourselves a disservice by the work that was done at committee which just didn't feel to me genuine to really the issue at hand and the things that have been expressed already that this is the primary challenge of our time, and I think—you know, I came on this Council in 2019. The first resolution I introduced was to establish the Climate Task Force. It's now 2023.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 32:06

We have challenges in this city to move things forward with the speed that is necessary to abate some of the most challenging things that are going to—that will evolve and hit us from a climate perspective. And this one opportunity here to gain some valuable partnerships with our communities and insights and information to move us a little bit quicker to those goals. I'm not sure why we were even negotiating this stripping of whereas clauses in a resolution that I think was, to me, a no brainer. So, I would really encourage my colleagues to go back to the start. Vote to approve the original language of the original resolution as it stands. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 32:54

Alder Doran.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 32:56

Thank you. Question for staff, I guess. With the resolution as amended that's before us, does that still meet the staff's sort of stated goal of joining this organization to help with the opportunities of, I guess getting access or assistance for applying for more grants? I guess I believe that's what the staffs goal was. So, if I'm if I'm wrong there correct me, but that's my understanding.

Mayor Jake Woodford 33:23

So, the question is...?

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 33:26

Does the resolution as amended still help the staff meet the goal of joining this organization?

Mayor Jake Woodford 33:31

In that committee?

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 33:31

Yes.

Mayor Jake Woodford 33:32

Okay. Because we're discussing the amendment to—okay, I just wanted to make sure we're clear. Yes, it does.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 33:38

Okay, thank you. I appreciate that. Because I also agree with my colleagues that I think words do matter. Obviously, there's a lot of who have already spoken passionately about how they feel about this this resolution, as it was written, and as it is amended, and their desires there. I join some of my other colleagues who had some concerns about the original language. I'm—I disagree, and I think there are a lot of other people in this community who disagree with some of the stated goals that the state has that that I think are, you know, potentially unreasonable, and maybe not even reachable as they're set. But if this resolution, as amended, still helps us meet what the staff was hoping for, which is to be able to apply for other grants we may not be aware of and get assistance applying for other grants, if we're passing the resolution as amended, I'm fine with that. I think it reaches the goal that I think we're all interested in which is helping the city further some of the goals that the city has, so I would urge us to leave it as is.

Mayor Jake Woodford 34:42

Alder Alfheim.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 34:45

Thank you. I am one of the coauthors on this and was also heavily involved in the discussion that made the changes. And I appreciate and I respect Alder Fenton's and Del Toro's passion for the issue.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 35:01

Please don't misunderstand stripping of exclamation points from the amendment as lack of passion on my part. I also served on the committee, I am also part of this Council, who chose to have and appoint a panel on sustainability, and our goal was to have their recommendations taken up by this Council to then pass in order to do good. That's what we've done.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 35:30

I think that the danger—and I will say, I think that committee was the best committee meeting I'd been to in two and a half years, because we worked at it. The goal was to pass the resolution, period. The other stuff I agree with, but it doesn't have to be there in order to say, "it's necessary and it's a good idea to do." And if by taking out the exclamation points of the whereas allow us as a body to agree, potentially unanimously and say, "This is good for our city; let's do it," then let's do it.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 36:13

I think that that it's not necessary to ruffle feathers in order to do something good here. And my opinion is by removing some of the whereases, it settled down to those that would have challenged it and it allowed us to move forward together as a body. So again, with respect, I just want to pass it. That was the goal coming out of committee, and I hope that we have that. I don't think it's necessary—or if it challenges those being involved because of the extra whereases, then I stand with what came out of committee.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 36:51

If it passes, as is, fine. I'd like it to pass, and I think that the rest of the body would also. Let's use the method that is most likely to make that happen. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 37:06

I'm just gonna pause for a moment here in the discussion and note that this is not a time sensitive matter for the city in terms of joining this joining this group. And I'll also remind the Council of statements that have been made many times before about committee work. Happy to continue to indulge the conversation here, but I just want to make note of where we are in the discussion and also the other businesses on our agenda this evening. With that, we'll continue the queue. Alder Firkus, you're up.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 37:39

Thank you, Mayor. I'm just going to repeat real quickly one thing I said at committee. We're not going to get this resolution worded in a way that everyone agrees with it. No matter what, one version of this resolution is gonna come up for a vote, and some people are not going to like the wording of it. What I'm asking my colleagues is no matter what the wording says on this, if you think joining this coalition is a good idea, vote to join this coalition. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 38:05

Alder Hayden?

Aldersperson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 38:07

Yes, thank you, Chair. Um, I just want to express some concern with the anti-science tenor that is being expressed by removing this language from this resolution, and I find it particularly disturbing that we're three years removed from Covid, where we saw millions of lives lost because of a similar anti-science tenor around vaccines. We're seeing very similar anti-science language around flat earth today. Um, just this week, we saw anti-science language around people making claims that pollution in our water is causing kids to become trans.

Aldersperson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 38:47

It's disturbing in our country that we're seeing this all around. And I think that this language that we're stripping out, doesn't match what I see reflects the values of the city of Appleton. I see us as a city that respects education and respects science.

Aldersperson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 39:08

Along with that, I would like to address some of the things that we've said about our committee meeting. I don't believe it was a 4-0 vote to adopt this amendment. I know myself, I voted against this amendment by myself, so it wasn't a unanimous vote. And we're talking about a compromise. I don't see this language being stripped as a compromise at all. I saw it as, you know, as everyone just looking to placate those that didn't like the language and get out of committee as quickly as possible. So, I really take issue with those statements.

Aldersperson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 39:47

And—but the biggest issue I take with removing the language is the "therefore" clause. We removed the language after we said we wanted to join the coalition because we agreed with the principles or the goals of that coalition. If you don't agree with the goals of a coalition, what is the point of joining that coalition in the first place? It honestly does not make sense. So, I think the language needs to be added back to the resolution because I believe that really reflects the true spirit of our city.

Mayor Jake Woodford 40:20

Alder Fenton.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 40:21

Thank you, Your Honor. And I will try to make this brief because I do know that we have a lot of work to get to tonight. One of my first points was that I had attended the meeting. And I was just going to question—because I thought alder Hayden had indeed voted against the amended resolution. So that made three votes out of a Council of 15 that were supporting, stripping all of the language.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 40:45

And I have similar concerns with when we remove language, um, because some people are triggered by it. I actually heard a report on the radio today that science classes in India are removing the periodic table because people have issues with that. So, I feel like it's a really slippery slope. As I stated before, I understand that the "therefore be it resolved" other than, you know, taking out the reason we would be joining this, achieves the same result. But once again, I just urge people, my colleagues, to vote for this amendment, restore the language that city staff and the advisory panel that we created brought to us in this resolution, thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 41:52

Alder Meltzer.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 41:54

Thank you. So the--at committee, there was agreement that the action part of the resolution was supported. I don't understand the purpose of a compromise. If—is the unanimous vote so important that we want people to close their eyes and hold their nose while they're making that vote? That seems disingenuous. If people object to the preface, the author's note, the reasons for bringing this resolution forward, the goals and objectives of this coalition--if you object to that, then you should vote against the resolution. Dissenting votes are a sign of healthy democracy. An enforced unanimous vote with compromise does not seem like healthy democracy to me. It seems like theatrics. And I feel that the committee work done at committee that I watched from home—it was a very disappointing and surprising to me to see that much time spent bending over backwards around something that's not even the action that we're taking. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 43:01

Alder Croatt.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 43:05

Thank you, Mayor. I was the one that was hoping that we could do the committee work at committee and bring this to Council in a form that we could all support. I think supporting it unanimously would send a message that we're all behind it, that we want to join this coalition. I think there's a lot of value in Appleton joining this coalition to be honest. I said this at committee, or I said—I'm the non-voting member. I was there. "I'm surprised we're not already a member." If you look at the list of members, I'll just read them quick because I did this on at the meeting Milwaukee, Madison, Eau Claire, Green Bay, Racine, LaCrosse, Middleton, Stevens Point, Wauwatosa, Sun Prairie, the village of MacFarlane, City of Wausau, Whitefish Bay, Baraboo, and the counties of Milwaukee, Dane, Eau Claire, and LaCrosse

Mayor Jake Woodford 43:48

Point of order. Do you have a point of order?

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 43:52

Yeah, I'm encouraging defeat of the amendment.

Mayor Jake Woodford 43:54

I want to let the alder get to his point.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 43:57

Thank you. Um, my point is that the committee did committee work, and I commend the committee for their work. They did work to bring something to the Council that hopefully we can all get behind. That's committee work. I knew we were going to do committee work tonight. I knew this was going to happen. I was hoping that anyone that had felt strongly about the resolution maybe would attend the meeting and express some of their concerns then. I'm going to support it no matter what because for me the only part that really matters is that "therefore it be it resolved" part, and that's the actionable part. The whereas as part, don't commit the city to anything. It is a bit of a feel-good part of the resolution I think, but the bottom line is the "therefore be it resolved" part which is a very simple one sentence on this resolution. So that was my reason for suggesting voting for the amendment. Not the amendment that's presented—the amended version that was brought forward to Council. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 44:59

Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 45:02

Thank you, Chair. In committee, I did dissent to some of the statements in the preface. The whereas statements that were amended out at committee. And I don't consider that theatrics. I consider that being true to myself and many of my constituents.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 45:27

I do, however, think there's value in the city joining this coalition. So, I think the amended version—not the proposed amended now, but the amended version that came out of committee satisfies the requirements that I would see as acceptable. But this new amendment to return just to return to the original language does not. And again, I don't see that as theatrics. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 46:00

Alder Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 46:02

Sorry, to drag this on. Let's consider Attorney Behren's insight here that—lets us forget all the whereas clauses, and what we've heard a number of times already is the most important thing is that "Now therefore, be it resolved" and this notion that we want to join this Climate Coalition. What we did at Committee, which I was not present for was strip out the last three words about that be it resol—that very simple, very straightforward, action item, action clause, "in their efforts" we took away. Why would we want to join the Council—er join the government the Climate Coalition if we didn't support their efforts?

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 46:43

It's—to me I think that's what we're hearing here is this is the nonsensical part of this. Ignoring all the whereas clauses I don't care if they're there or not. But we took some action, that committee to strip away three words from a very simple clause which asked the city to join, but we're not going to support their efforts. It makes absolutely no sense. I would just strongly encourage us to go back to the original language. Let's get this voted because we all want the same thing. And those three words are very important in my mind. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 47:17

Alder Del Toro.

Aldersperson Israel Del Toro (District 4) 47:19

Start by supporting alder Schultz's comments there, and in responses to my colleagues' comments, I believe that there is a time and a place to compromise on language, but when removing language decreases transparency and obscures intention, that is not the time or the place to do that, or compromise. This is the situation before us today. Unanimous decisions are secondary to transparency. Support the amendment to restore the original language and let's achieve this.

Mayor Jake Woodford 47:50

Alder Fenton.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 47:51

Call the question.

Mayor Jake Woodford 47:53

You're the last in the queue. So, we have a motion, motion to call the question. Is there a second? We have a motion and a second to call the question. All those in favor calling question please signify by saying aye. Any opposed? Hearing none the question has been called.

Mayor Jake Woodford 48:10

With that we have a motion to amend by substitution restoring the original language. We have a motion in a second to do so. Please cast your votes. Motion passes nine to six. So, the item has been amended by substitution to restore the original language.

Mayor Jake Woodford 48:42

We're back now to the item as amended. Is there further discussion on the item as amended? Any discussion? Hearing none we have a motion in a second to approve the item as amended. Please cast your votes. Motion passes 13 to 2, and the item has been approved.