

# Waukesha council appoints former Alderman Helgestad for District 11



Photo courtesy of Joe Pieper

Former Alderman Erik Helgestad is sworn in to fill the District 11 seat after being appointed to fill the vacancy during Tuesday's Waukesha Common Council meeting. The vacancy was due to Alicia Halvensleben being elected as mayor. It comes with roughly two years remaining in the term.

## Controversy surrounding previous motion to appoint Aaron Spencer discussed

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WAUKESHA — The Waukesha Common Council on Tuesday appointed former Alderman Erik Helgestad to fill the vacant District 11 seat.

The vacancy was due to Alicia Hal-

vensleben being elected as mayor. It comes with roughly two years remaining in the term. Other candidates considered included David Vincent, Aaron Spencer, Becky Fetters, Jaymz Touchstone, and former Waukesha aldermen Timothy Nekich and Leonard Miller.

Waukesha County Supervisor Darryl Enriquez spoke during public comment in favor of Helgestad. He said he has known Helgestad for 15 years.

"I knew Erik when he was a council member, and he was a much-respected council member, great demeanor, very curious, did his homework, very reliable person, and he's that way in his personal life, too. He's got a lovely wife and child. He's a taxpayer, great citizen. I lived in the downtown district for quite a number of years, and Erik always answered my calls, regardless of how big or small the issue was," Enriquez said.

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Enriquez also pointed toward looming financial concerns facing the city.

"As we know the city has the threat of a deficit, just as the county does, and I would like to see somebody of Erik's caliber being involved with that, because one of his strengths is that he's going to make the trains run on time, he's not going to throw a lot of politics at you," he said.

Council members asked the same questions to all candidates during the meeting. Helgestad said he currently serves on the library board as a trustee and is a liaison to the Friends of the Waukesha Public Library.

"I'm very thankful to be in front of you this evening for this opportunity, and I would love the opportunity to serve the city as a council member once again," he said.

Downtown business support became another major topic. Alderman Rico Camacho asked what Helgestad would do to

strengthen the district's business community.

"I think that's going to be re-engaging with the downtown businesses and the association downtown. ... As an alderman for the downtown district, you need to champion those businesses, you need to speak up for them, you need to speak out for them, but also then working with them to understand what are the actual core issues," Helgestad said.

The Fox River and flooding concerns also entered the discussion when Alderman Mike Chrisien asked about dredging.

"If I'm understanding it correctly, there's a study ongoing about the dam and the dredging, and trying to get some cost estimates around that. So, I think that's one thing we got to see what that study comes out with. Overall, I want to see that access improved, the river is a fabulous asset to downtown," Helgestad said.

## Controversy over April motion

There was controversy surrounding District 11. At the council's April meeting, Alderman

Dale Matthews surprised many by making a motion to appoint Aaron Spencer immediately, bypassing the traditional interview process. Alderman Rick Lemke seconded the motion, arguing Spencer had already earned credibility through two previous campaigns for the seat.

"My thought was to reward Aaron. He got the most votes ... but he's already shown an interest for the past two elections. I think that says a lot from constituents in the district. And I thought we could just end it now, but I'm willing to listen to discussion," Lemke previously said.

The motion failed, leading to the broader candidate search and interviews held Tuesday night.

During those interviews, Alderwoman Doreen Wigderson directly asked Spencer about the motion.

"I'd like to know what your reaction was, and any conversations that you might have made prior to that, and what your overall thoughts were about that and doing something that was typically not something that the council

has done in the past," Wigderson said.

Spencer admitted he had been caught off guard.

"I appreciate that question, actually. And I did find that a little shocking that I was even asked previously, and lucky I was there to witness this, and I did appreciate the process that went through. There was an actual motion made, and it was voted down, and that was due to not knowing exactly who you guys were voting for, and you wanted more information, and you wanted to go with the traditional system, which was fair, and I fully agree with that," Spencer said.

He explained that previous conversations with former aldermen mostly centered around understanding local government procedure and Robert's Rules of Order through his experience as vice president of Carpenters Local 231. Spencer also highlighted his efforts to become more involved in city affairs, including participating in the Police Citizens Academy and joining its alumni association.

"I was honored to be even nominated for a particular motion, I appreciate your process, and if it actually came up again, and which it probably will, there's a lot of aldermen here, and the process is the process. I would stand by repeating that process again," Spencer said.

Later in the meeting, Lemke defended his earlier motion and insisted there had been nothing improper about it. He said he was surprised by Matthews' motion.

"I was taken aback because I never expected it, so I seconded the motion. ... it wasn't to pull a fast one, it was because Aaron ran two races before, and my consistent thought has always been give the opportunity to the man who tried to win the office rather than just appointing someone who didn't go through (it)," Lemke said.

Lemke said he would be happy with any of the seven candidates.

He urged fellow council members not to hold the failed April appointment attempt against Spencer.