

City Council

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advantage of a domestic partners benefit package if one was offered. In August and September the Personnel Committee held discussions about the issue. The discussions focused on how domestic partner would be defined as well as how potential "abuse" of health care benefits could be avoided.

At that point Mahoney asked the City Attorney's office to draft language and to compile information on other cities which had enacted similar packages. In early October the committee finalized a draft which was approved by a two to one vote and forwarded to the full City Council for consideration.

The issue of domestic partner benefits is a single page in a sixty-two page personnel policy. Public hearings were held in November. Approximately 30 people testified, some in favor, some opposed and some suggesting that the issue of domestic partner coverage be set aside from the rest of the policy for further discussion. Mahoney, who has been very vocal in his support of the coverage, refused to separate the issue from the rest of the policy manual. "I believe this is a logical extension that benefits will be provided for non-traditional partnerships." He also pointed out that the basic issue is Burlington's non-discrimination policy which is clearly stated at the beginning of the 62 page manual and which includes sexual orientation.

The full City Council is scheduled to address the issue in mid-December. Although several citizens have requested that domestic partnership coverage become a referendum issue, Mahoney feels this should not happen for at least two reasons. First, the Personnel Policy itself is an internal document of the City Council and as such should not be treated like a bond or tax issue. Secondly, Mahoney emphasized that he has "grave concerns there would not be discussion of Personnel Policy and benefits but a vote of approval or disapproval of a minority lifestyle. I have real fears that could be the real tyranny of the majority."

Mahoney has been consistent in stating his concerns about health care costs. "If, for example, fifteen city employees entered into traditional marriage contracts, there would be no concerns expressed about costs...I feel I have to do what I think is right. I know when my Irish great grandparents arrived in this country, there were signs saying, 'No Irish need apply.' I am sensitive to issues of discrimination." ▼

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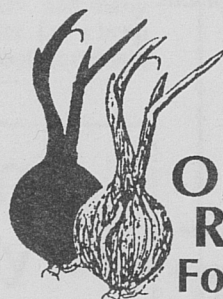
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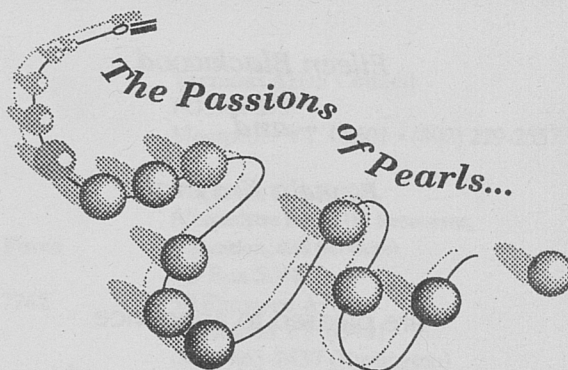
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