

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021
7:00 PM
MINUTES**

Due to Governor Cooper's Order in regards to the Coronavirus, the meeting had limited seating. Additional seating was provided in the foyer.

Governing Body Present:

Mayor	Bill Bayless
Mayor Pro Tem	Jesse McQueen
Council Member	Eddie Martin
Council Member	Oscar Sellers
Council Member	Abbie Covington

Staff Present:

City Attorney	TC Morphis
City Manager	Matthew Christian
City Clerk	Gail Strickland
Finance Officer	Jill Dickens
Public Works Director	Billy Stubbs
IT	Zach Garner

Others Present: Mechelle Preslar, Gavin Stone, Charles Craven, Tim Brown, Howard Wallace and Margaret Williams

1. Call to Order

Mayor Bayless called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2. Invocation

A Moment of Silence was observed.

3. Adoption of Agenda

Council Member Covington motioned to adopt the Agenda. Council Member Sellers provided the second. The vote was 4-0.

4. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the February 9, 2021 Regular and Closed Session Meetings were approved by motions of Council Members Martin and Covington. The vote was 4-0.

5. Comments from Attendees

Mr. Howard Wallace came to Council to discuss the abandoned, dilapidated house located at 404 Pine St Hamlet, providing pictures to Council. He advised he had contacted the City of Hamlet and Richmond County and told the property is in foreclosure by the County. Mr. Wallace reported the chimney has fallen, hitting the fence and placing bricks on his property. He stated he is willing to invest money to

assist with the clean-up. City Manager Matt Christian advised he will contact Mr. Wallace to see if there are additional steps the City can take. Attorney Morphis added he will communicate with the Attorney that handles the County's foreclosures to see if anything can be done.

Mr. Tim Brown, who resides at 506 Entwistle St. approached Council to discuss his opposition to the development of International Tie Disposal. His research has shown the facility will pollute the water and air. He asked Council to oppose the industry and fight to stop it. Mr. Brown was provided information on Richmond Clean Air Coalition, a group that is petitioning and working hard to stop the company. Mayor Bayless reported the City has a lawsuit.

Mr. Gerard Morrison had requested to speak by phone. An attempt to reach him was not successful. The Mayor noted Mr. Morrison's 101-year-old Grandmother passed away.

New Business

6. Approval of Tax Releases

Council Member Covington motioned to approve the Tax Releases. The second was provided by Council Member Sellers. The vote was 4-0.

7. Presentation by Museum Manager

Museum Manager Mechelle Preslar announced, on behalf of the Hamlet Depot and Museums, the Depot Complex Virtual Tour is available on their website. She gave credit to Mr. Bill Matheson for his vision and work and thanked Zach Garner for his assistance in loading it onto the website. Mrs. Preslar recognized Mr. Matheson as a valuable asset to the Board, explaining he donated his camera, software and time to complete the project. Portions of the video were shown for Council. Mrs. Preslar invited everyone to visit the website, www.hamlethistoricdepot.org for the tour and then visit in person when the complex is open. Matthew Christian thanked Mrs. Preslar for the presentation and Mr. Matheson for his time and the incredible work product. The City will present him with a Certificate of Appreciation. In concluding, Mrs. Preslar invited every to become a Member of the Hamlet Depot.

8. Discussion of Joint Municipal Statement Regarding Sales Tax

City Manager Matt Christian explained a Joint Statement from all Municipalities was presented to Richmond County at their meeting last week. The highlights from the Statement are that the County predicted they would get a \$675,00 increase from the change in Sales Tax Distribution. He said, with certainty, the County will receive \$2 million more. In addition, based on the growth factor, they will receive an additional \$1 million, making the total increase the County receives \$3 million. He said the facts were grossly misrepresented, but it is fixable if the sales tax distribution method is changed back; it is up to the Commissioners.

Council Member Covington stated when she went to the County Commissioners' meeting, she had no prior communication with the Commissioners. She said Chairman Smart was very receptive. She read the Statement at the Meeting, acknowledging Ken Anderson, who prepares the audits for all the municipalities, had prepared the audited numbers. They were able to provide 8 months of actual numbers and 4 months of projected showing the County's numbers were a gross miscalculation. The County had requested numbers from an objective 3rd party. She noted, at the Commissioners' meeting, Vice Chair Mr. Dawkins reported he had the same numbers. The municipalities are asking the County to change the sales tax method back. Mrs. Covington called attention to what she called the Morbidity Table, saying it shows more about the impact of the decision. The Table shows, based on each

Municipality's Fund Balance and the loss for each Municipality, the number of years until each one will become insolvent. The Table shows a range of 2 years – 6 years.

The City Manager stated it is important for the public to know if the County had not made the change, they would have received more than they projected. Council Member Covington reported they would have received an additional \$773,000.00 from growth.

Council Member Sellers asked how the miscalculation could be so much. Mrs. Covington replied they have not received an answer to that question.

Council Member McQueen stated, whether intentional or not, if you heard the presentation and you do not make a motion to go back to the previous sales tax distribution, you are derelict in your duties. He said the information cannot be disputed and it was time for someone to step up and make the motion.

Other Business

9. City Manager's Report

City Manager Matthew Christian acknowledged the Fire Department on their Fire Suppression Rating, going from a 5 to 4. The change will affect home insurance rates, beginning June 1, 2021. The Manager recognized Water Plant employee, Darrell Gibson, who will be retiring soon after 19 years of service to the City.

Mr. Christian reported the City has been engaged in the International Tie Disposal process. The public hearing and public comments were held. NC DEQ now has 30 days to respond. The City Manager has reached out to other departments in DEQ regarding additional permitting.

The City Manager asked for comments from Council on opening City offices. Council Members discussed the numerous requests they have received to allow sports. After discussing that other towns are allowing recreational sports and parents plan to take their children to those locations to play, Council considered starting with the baseball program. All activities will be outside and safety measures will be taken. If things go well, they will consider opening other sports. Council Member Sellers motioned to open the baseball program this Spring. Council Member McQueen provided the second. The vote was 4-0. Council Member McQueen commended Dr. Tommy Jarrell for the tremendous job he has done during the COVID Pandemic.

10. Comments of Council

Council Member Covington thanked Matt Christian and Jill Dickens for their help with the sales tax issue. She stated Jill and Jennifer Lambeth, from the City of Rockingham, provided excellent information. She commended the City Manager for his involvement and guidance on both the sales tax and International Tie Disposal issues. Mrs. Covington expressed her appreciation to the Public Works' employees for their safety checks on older adults and stated the City has great employees.

Council Member Sellers expressed his agreement with Mrs. Covington and the need to have the baseball program. He thanked the City employees and stated he would like to see more citizens give their input.

Council Member Martin concurred with Council Member Covington regarding the Sales Tax and International Tie Disposal. He reported seeing an article that recognized Mrs. Covington's achievements. He thanked her for her years of service and stated she is an asset to the City and County. Mrs. Covington

responded by saying community service is an opportunity, not an obligation, and thanked Council for appointing her last year.

Council Member McQueen thanked Council Member Covington for her presentation to the County Commissioners and thanked Staff for their work. He stated he is appreciative of the relationship that has formed between the Cities and feels change will come from the City leaders working together.

11. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Bayless expressed his appreciation to Council Member Covington, City Manager Matt Christian and Finance Officer Jill Dickens for their work on the Sales Tax issue. He advised the City is doing the best they can to get back to normalcy.

12. Motion to go into Closed Session per NC General Statute §143-318-11(a)(3) (6) Attorney-Client Privilege and Personnel.

Mayor Bayless asked for a motion to go into Closed Session per NC General Statute §143-318.11 (a)(3) (6) Attorney – Client Privilege and Personnel. At 8:02 pm, Council Member Martin offered the motion. Council Member Covington provided the second. The vote was 4-0.

Return to Open Session

At 8:51 pm. Council Members Sellers and Martin motioned to return to Open Session. The vote was 4-0.

13. Motion to Adjourn

At 8:51 pm, Council Members Covington and Martin provided the motion and second to adjourn the meeting. The vote was 4-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Gail M. Strickland, City Clerk

