

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 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	Maurice Stuart
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
Police Chief	Dennis Brown
Police Captain	Anthony Moss
Fire Chief	Calvin White
Museum Manager	Mechelle Preslar

Others Present: Gavin Stone, Margaret Williams, Carole Griffin and Andy Grooms

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 5-0.

4. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the March 9, 2021 Regular and Closed Session Meetings and March 24, 2021 Budget Work Session were approved by motions of Council Members Martin and Covington. The vote was 5-0.

5. Comments from Attendees

Mr. Gerard Morrison spoke by phone to thank Council for the letter prepared for his grandmother, Ms. Dorothy Louise Strong Johnson, at her recent passing and recognized last month was Women's History Month. Mr. Morrison announced April 30th is National Jazz Day and the John Coltrane Edu-tainment will be held again virtually in October. He suggested that Council have their contact information available for citizens and asked Council to explore a district at-large system for Richmond County.

Ms. Margaret Williams addressed Council. She attended the March meeting to express her concerns regarding 11 – 12 vacant properties on Pine St., particularly 404 Pine St., next door to her home. Ms. Williams requested a follow-up from Attorney Morphis. He advised he had not been able to make contact with the Attorney handling foreclosures for Richmond County, but he will provide information to the City of Hamlet Staff when he obtains it. The Attorney provided an overview of the foreclosure process. Mayor Bayless asked Gail Strickland to provide the Code Enforcement history of 404 Pine Street. Council Members Sellers and McQueen empathized with the property owner, but explained the City has to observe legal issues on the State level. City Manager Matt Christian added the City has done all the administrative steps it can, up to the point of demolition, but he will visit with Ms. Williams to explore any options. Mayor Bayless inquired if the City could do anything if the property was in foreclosure. Mr. Morphis advised they could proceed with demolition and place a lien for any expenses incurred, but if the property is foreclosed, the lien is removed.

New Business

6. Oath of Office for Police Chief

City Clerk Gail Strickland administered the Oath of Office to Chief of Police Dennis Brown.

7. Consideration of Richmond County Interlocal Agreement and Resolution 2021-02 – Relinquishment of Portion of ETJ

City Manager Matt Christian reported when a parcel has 2 zoning jurisdictions, the owner can request that the planning and development regulations be assigned to one of the jurisdictions. In this case, the owners have requested Richmond County have the zoning authority. Attorney Morphis advised this is new, as a part of the changes in Chapter 160 D of the North Carolina General Statutes. Mayor Bayless provided the location of the lots. Council Member Covington motioned to approve the Agreement and Resolution. The second was given by Council Member Sellers. The vote was 5-0. Council Member McQueen added the City did not turn over all of its ETJ, in the past, as has been stated. Council Member Covington advised the County is aware of this agreement and are accepting it.

8. Proposed Agreement for Online Payment Services

City Manager Matt Christian stated he and Staff have met to discuss on-line payments. The proposal would provide customers with the opportunity to make water payments on-line. They have vetted 3 vendors. The service is at no cost to the City; the \$2.50 transaction fee is passed on to the customer. Council Member McQueen expressed concern of revenue loss in late fees. Finance Officer Jill Dickens did not feel the City would experience any loss. Council Member Stuart inquired if current drafts for water accounts would remain the same. The City Manager advised they would. Council Member Covington motioned to approve the agreement. The second was given by Council Member Stuart. The vote was 5-0.

9. Consideration of FY 2021-22 Budget Requests

Mr. Christian reported he invited the Department Heads to answer any questions Council has regarding their capital budget requests. He advised the next Budget Meeting is April 21st and he will have a water

meter presentation for Council to consider. Council Member Martin stated he thought the Department Heads would attend the Budget Meeting, not the Regular City Council Meeting. Council Member Stuart agreed. Council Member Sellers' understanding was they would be present at the Regular Meeting and had questions. His inquiry to the Police Department was the need for 2 Ford Explorers at a cost of \$81,600.00. Captain Anthony Moss explained the sports utility vehicles are used to carry equipment and evidence. He added the 2 Tahoes in the Police Department have over 150,000 miles and are constantly at the City shop for repairs. They plan to recycle the Tahoes within the Department. Mr. Sellers asked Fire Chief Calvin White if a F250 was large enough to meet the needs of the Fire Department. The Chief responded by saying the F250 has the needed towing capabilities and is large enough for fire fighters to use when attending training. He advised some of his department's vehicles are being aged out. They have 3 vehicles with mileage over 150,000 miles. Council Member McQueen was under the impression the Department Heads would attend the Budget Meeting. He asked that they bring an inventory of their fleet with current mileage. He advised the upcoming budget will be based on needs, not wants. Mayor Bayless asked the City Manager to email the lists to Council.

10. Discussion of July 4th Festivities

The City Manager stated, due to the hardship on the revenues, the July 4th festivities were removed from the current year's budget. They are not included in the proposed budget, but the firework's vendor has reached out to him and he needs to give an answer soon. Mr. Christian added the festivities include not only the fireworks' cost, but also costs associated with police and fire safety, and sanitation. REV Federal Credit Union has expressed interest in sponsoring the event. Council discussed the revenue loss has not changed since last year; if anything, it will be worse. Council Member Martin felt money for fireworks should be given as bonuses to City employees or to purchase needed equipment. Councilmen McQueen and Stuart agreed. Mr. Martin suggested contacting Richmond County to inquire if they will pay for the event. Council Member Covington felt the City should consider the corporate sponsorship. After discussing and hearing from the City Attorney, Council decided they should have a policy in place before accepting sponsorships. Council Member McQueen made the motion to not have the fireworks this year and to have a policy in place before accepting corporate sponsorships. Council Member Martin provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

Mr. Christian stated the City is being respectful to COVID with the phased re-opening of facilities. Administration is now open and the plans are for the utility side to open next month. He has received inquiries for facilities' rentals, but is not renting anything indoors.

11. Approval of Tax Releases

Council Member Martin motioned to approve the Tax Releases. The second was offered by Council Member Stuart. The vote was 5-0.

Other Business

12. City Manager's Report

City Manager Matthew Christian addressed Mr. Morrison's comment regarding Council's contact information. The information has been added to the website with Council's approval. He welcomed Chief Brown and thanked the Department Heads for attending the meeting. He reported our employees have been at work every day during COVID. Mr. Christian advised baseball registration was well received with 200 children registered. There are teams in every age group. He announced the next Budget Session is scheduled for April 21, 2021 at 3:30 pm. In regards to the WWTP, the City received comments from USDA; they were revised and returned. Next, the City should get information on grants and loans.

Council Member Sellers asked if the Budget Meeting was open to the public and Mr. Christian confirmed.

13. Comments of Council

Council Member Covington welcomed Police Chief Brown and thanked Interim Chief Moss for his service. She thanked the Department Heads for attending and commended Mechelle Preslar for work on the successful food truck event. Mrs. Covington expressed excitement for the upcoming baseball season and thanked Ms. Williams for her interest in her neighborhood.

Council Member Sellers welcomed the new Police Chief. He thanked the Department Heads for coming in and thanked them for all they do. He stated he is proud the baseball program is on-going and offered his condolences to the Mayor and his wife for her father's recent passing.

Council Member Stuart welcomed Chief Brown. He stated that Hamlet has set the tone by offering baseball this spring. He thanked the Department Heads and City employees for all they do and thanked the citizens for attending the meeting and giving concerns.

Council Member Martin congratulated the new Chief of Police saying he is looking forward to meeting and talking with him. He is pleased to see the baseball program in place for the children.

Council Member McQueen welcomed Chief Brown and said he looks forward to what he can offer to the City. He invited Ms. Williams to the next Council Meeting and said, hopefully, they can get results for her. He apologized for the condition of the neighborhood in which she is living. Mr. McQueen thanked Captain Moss for managing the Police Department as Interim and thanked him for serving as a Mentor to kids.

14. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Bayless reported he has received inquiries on the opening of the Library and announced the City does not have that control; Richmond County does. He stated he is glad to have the baseball program with over 200 participants. Mr. Bayless expressed appreciation to Captain Moss for serving as Interim, welcomed Chief Brown and thanked Fire Chief Calvin White for all his work.

15. 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 8:09 pm, Council Member McQueen offered the motion. Council Member Covington provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

Return to Open Session

At 9:18 pm. Council Members McQueen and Sellers motioned to return to Open Session. The vote was 5-0.

Closed Session Action

Mayor Bayless reported Council discussed a Tolling Agreement with Richmond County. Council Member Covington motioned to approve the Agreement. The second was offered by Council Member Martin. The vote was 5-0.

16. Motion to Adjourn

At 9:20 pm, Council Members Sellers and Covington provided the motion and second to adjourn the meeting. The vote was 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Gail M. Strickland, City Clerk

