

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING & REORGANIZATIONAL MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2019
7:00 PM
MINUTES**

Governing Body Present:

Mayor	Bill Bayless
Council Member	Jesse McQueen
Council Member	Eddie Martin
Council Member	Maurice L. Stuart, II

Staff Present:

City Manager	Jonathan Blanton
City Clerk	Gail Strickland
City Attorney	TC Morphis
Finance Officer	Jill Dickens
Public Works Director	Billy Stubbs
It	Zach Garner
Police	Chief McMasters and Officer Capel

Others Present: Terry Moore, Oscar Sellers, Nancy Norton, Linda Bayless, Glenda Hampton, Jere Ludlum, Robert Singletary, Sr., Keshaw Ingram, Annie McNair, Bernice Owens, Bobbie Williams, Kerry Jones, Sheila Sellers, Will Felhman, Lu Wallace, Shavonda Chance, Audrey Stuart, Helen Richardson, Cheryl Streeter, Bunny Wall, Barbara Wall, Kate Gibbons, Don Norton, Johnny Washington, Kay Cavendish, Tim Nevinger, Andrew Fehlman, Jessica Paone, Amy Guinn, Sally Stewart and Butch Stewart

1. Call to Order

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

2. Invocation

Dr. Allison Farrah, Pastor of First Baptist Church, offered the Prayer.

3. Adoption of Agenda

Council Member Martin motioned to adopt the Agenda with the addition of Item 15a, Discussion of Employee Christmas Bonuses. The second was provided by Councilman Stuart and the vote was 3-0.

4. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the November 12, 2019 Regular Meeting were approved by a motion and second from Councilmen Stuart and McQueen. The vote was 3-0.

5. Comments from Attendees

No one presented to address Council.

6. Audit Report from Ken Anderson

Mr. Anderson was not in attendance when Council reached this Agenda item. It was consensus of Council to move along with the Agenda and allow Mr. Anderson to have his presentation when he arrived. The Auditor arrived and provided his findings after Agenda Item 12. Mr. Anderson made

reference to a 2-page summary he provided to Council. He explained the City has two funds: the General Fund and Water/Sewer Fund. Over the past 6 years, the Fund Balance has increased to its current rate of 47.1%. The Auditor called attention to the increase in the Water/Sewer Fund explaining the increase of half a million dollars was due to the rate changes implemented. Next, Mr. Anderson discussed the Tax Collection Rate. The City's rate, excluding vehicle taxes is 95.01%. The State average is 97%. He suggested the City may need some improvement in that area. He added he had received good information from the City Staff. Moving on to the General Fund, the revenues exceeded the expenditures by \$202,679.00 and in the Water/Sewer Fund the revenues exceeded the expenditures by \$62,390.00. In reviewing the City's debt for both funds, the Auditor stated the City should not have any debt after this year. In conclusion, Mr. Anderson reported the City had no budget expenditures and the audit report was submitted to the Local Government Commission and accepted.

The Mayor added the City is in great financial shape and thanked Mr. Anderson for his work.

Reorganization of Board

7. Oaths of Office to Bill Bayless, Terry Moore, Oscar Sellers & Maurice Stuart, II

City Clerk Gail Strickland administered the oaths to Mayor Bill Bayless and Council Member Terry Moore. The two took their seats on Council. Councilman Moore removed his nameplate provided by the City and replaced it with his own. Mayor Bayless advised Mr. Moore he could not do so and Mr. Moore disagreed. At 7:07 pm, the Mayor called for a recess of the Meeting. The Mayor, City Attorney TC Morphis, Mr. Moore, City Manager Jonathan Blanton and Chief McMasters exited the Council Chambers. At 7:09 pm, all returned and the Mayor called the Meeting back to order.

City Clerk Gail Strickland administered the oaths to Oscar Sellers and Maurice Stuart, II. The two took their seats on Council.

Mayor Bayless asked that Council add Item 8a to the Agenda to discuss and vote on Mr. Moore's use of his personal nameplate. Councilman McQueen stated, for the purposes of uniformity and to prevent future issues on nameplates, Council should be uniform in the nameplates used. Councilman Sellers was in favor of allowing the personal nameplates. Councilman Moore inquired if the nameplate was offensive. Mr. McQueen replied that he did not know what was on the nameplate and Mr. Moore responded, "Citizens of Hamlet", the ones he was representing. Councilman McQueen continued by saying, if permitted, anyone could put anything on a nameplate. He stated he was not referring to Councilman Moore. For uniformity, Councilman McQueen motioned to only allow City issued nameplates. The second was offered by Councilman Martin. The vote was 3-2 with Councilmen Moore and Sellers voting in opposition.

8. Nomination and Appointment of Mayor Pro-Tem

The Nomination and Appointment took place after Item 12. Councilman Martin motioned to appoint Councilman Jesse McQueen to continue to serve as the Mayor Pro Tem for another term. Councilman Sellers motioned to appoint Councilman Stuart as the Mayor Pro-Tem. Councilman Stuart offered the second to Mr. Martin's motion to appoint Mr. McQueen as Mayor Pro Tem. The vote was 3-2 with Councilmen Moore and Sellers voting in opposition.

9. Appointment of City Clerk

Councilman Martin motioned to appoint Gail Strickland as the Clerk. A second was provided by Councilman McQueen. The vote was 5-0.

10. Appointment of City Attorney

Councilman McQueen motioned to appoint the Brough Law Firm and TC Morphis to continue as the City's Attorney. A second was provided by Councilman Martin. The vote was 5-0.

11. Appointment of Council Representative to Hamlet ABC Board

Councilman Martin motioned to appoint Councilman Stuart to the ABC Board. A second was provided by Councilman McQueen. The vote was 5-0.

12. Appointments of Council Representative and Alternate to Lumber River COG

Councilman McQueen motioned for Councilman Stuart to continue as the Representative to the Lumber River COG. A second was provided by Councilman Martin. Councilman Sellers suggested Mr. Stuart may have too many obligations and someone else should serve as the representative. City Manager Jonathan Blanton advised Council had a motion and a second they should address. Mayor Bayless called for the vote for Councilman Stuart to serve as the LRCOG Representative. The vote was 4-1 with Councilman Sellers voting in opposition.

Councilman Moore motioned for Councilman Sellers to serve as the alternate to the Lumber River COG. The second was provided by Councilman McQueen. The vote was 5-0.

Item 8, Nomination and Appointment of Mayor Pro Tem was discussed at this time.

New Business

13. Adoption of 2020 Regular Meeting Schedule

Mr. Blanton displayed the calendar on the projector and advised the dates are the normal second Tuesdays of each month. Councilman McQueen motioned to approve the schedule. The second was provided by Councilman Martin. The vote was 5-0. Mr. McQueen suggested Council set the date for the Mid-Year Budget Review Meeting. Several Council Members proposed having the meeting prior to the January 14, 2020 Regular Meeting. It was consensus of Council to meet at 5 pm on January 14, 2020.

14. Approval of Submitted Tax Releases

Councilman McQueen motioned to approve the Tax Releases. The second was offered by Councilman Martin. The vote was 5-0.

15. Discussion of Christmas Decorations for the Section of Hamlet Avenue from Hwy 177 (Marlboro St.) to Raleigh St.

Mayor Bayless reported several years ago the City purchased Christmas Decorations with the Seaboard Festival for Hamlet Avenue from the Dairy Queen to Raleigh Street. The decorations did not work well and were placed on Main St. Due to questions the City has received, they need to look at placing decorations on that section of Hamlet Avenue. Councilman Stuart asked if the decorations would be different. The Mayor explained he was asking the City to look at the situation and bring suggestions back to Council. He added the decorations cannot hang over the street due to the large trucks. Also suggested was having citizens' input. Councilman Sellers asked if the money was budgeted for that location. The Mayor replied part of the money was paid by the Seaboard Festival Committee. Mr. Blanton explained the City bought the decorations for \$2,500.00 and the Seaboard Festival reimbursed the City \$1,000.00. Mr. Sellers asked if they were any private donations from the citizens of Hamlet. The Manager said none that he was aware of. Councilman McQueen asked, with the donation, if there were any stipulations of what was to be done with the decorations. Mr. Blanton replied the donation

was given with the spirit they would be on Hamlet Avenue, but during conversations with then City Manager Marcus Abernethy and Seaboard Festival President Kim Lindsey, it was specifically said the donation was given with no strings attached. The City placed the decorations at the location a few years but they did not work and the City received many complaints. City Staff then combined the strands of garland together to improve the appearance and put them up at the Library and City Hall since it was a thoroughfare for the parade and City Hall had no decorations. Councilman Martin stated the placement of decorations was at the discretion of the City Manager. Mr. Blanton said he took the position if something was donated to the City and the City maintains it, puts it up and takes it down, that it could be used as the City sees fit, specifically since he has documentation stating there were no strings attached to the donation. Mr. Sellers asked if the donation was from a private citizen and Mr. Blanton stated it was not. Councilman Martin stated the total purchase price was \$2,500.00; the City paid \$1,500.00 and they put them up and take them down. Mayor Bayless said the issue is the City needs to find something that will work for that area. It was consensus of Council to have Staff look for decorations they can purchase to make that area of the City look as good as the other parts of town.

15A. Discussion of Christmas Bonuses

Councilman Stuart began the discussion by saying he values the City's employees and would like to see them receive appreciation in a bonus. Mayor Bayless inquired on the amount of bonus given last year and Mr. Blanton replied \$200.00 for full-time employees and \$100.00 for part-time. Councilman Sellers asked for the total amount it would cost the City and taxpayers to cover the bonuses. The City Manager stated \$20,000.00 – \$25,000.00 for approximately 90 full-time employees and 10 part-time employees. Mr. Sellers asked if the money was in the budget. Councilman McQueen stated the employees have helped with special projects this year and he felt it would be a good gesture. He added the budget is in good shape. He considers the bonus a tool to use to keep the employees doing what they are doing. Councilman Sellers said he is not against the bonuses, but if it is not in the budget it is not a good idea to spend the money; it should be included in the next budget. Councilman Moore asked if this was the way the City has handled bonuses in the past. Mr. McQueen replied it was last year and he thought the year before. The reason to consider bonuses in December is to see where the City is at financially. Councilman Martin asked the City Manager if the City could absorb the cost of the bonuses. Mr. Blanton explained the City did not budget for bonuses the last 2 years. Mr. Anderson comes in December to provide the Audit Report and Council and Staff look to see if the City can sustain an employee bonus. He pointed to the Findings of the Audit where the City added money to both the General Fund and Enterprise Fund. The City is in a healthy financial position; \$20,000.00 - \$25,000.00 in an \$8.5 million - \$8.7 million budget would not break the bank given the strong financial position of the City Mr. Anderson has reported. Mr. Moore asked what line item the funds would come from. The Manager replied from the Employee Benefit Salary Line Item for each department, but it would require budget amendments to increase the line item. Council Member Moore asked if the expense would cause the City to go over budget. Mr. Blanton explained, since it was not budgeted, they will have to do budget amendments to come back to Council. Councilman McQueen added some of the funds would come from vacant employee positions. Mayor Bayless explained the budget amendment process to Councilmen Moore and Sellers saying throughout the year, Council will see budget amendments on the Agenda where changes are needed due to emergency purchases. Mr. McQueen added that last year employees did not receive a pay raise, only a small Christmas bonus. He stated the bonus is a way to show appreciation for hard work but it is not a continuing expense for the City. Council Member Moore inquired if it was factored in the employees' salaries and Council Member McQueen confirmed it was not; it is a one-time payment. Councilman Stuart provided the motion to give full-time employees a \$200.00 Christmas bonus and part-time

employees a \$100.00 bonus. Councilman Martin provided the second. The vote was 4-1 with Councilman Sellers voting in opposition.

Other Business

16. City Manager's Report.

Mr. Blanton congratulated the new Council Members and expressed his appreciation to their families for attending the meeting and supporting the Board Members. The Manager announced Old Fashion Christmas will be Friday, Dec, 13th 5:30 – 8:30 on Hamlet Ave. He also provided the dates City offices will be closed and the garbage schedule for Christmas and New Year's. The information will be on the City's website and Facebook.

17. Comments of Council.

Councilman Martin congratulated the new Council Members and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Councilman Sellers thanked the voters and pledged that any concerns or complaints the citizens have they can get in touch with him and they will see what can be done. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Joyous New Year.

Councilman Moore thanked the voters for the opportunity to be on Council and stated he will be serving the citizens of Hamlet. He welcomed citizens to contact him if they have items to discuss. He hopes they can have a productive year and feels the City is headed in a good direction based on the audit report that was given tonight. The Councilman has heard some good ideas from the citizens as he campaigned and the group can get together and discuss them. He wished everyone a Happy Holiday season and looks forward to working with everyone.

Councilman Stuart thanked the attendees and asked the citizens to let them know of any issues. He thanked Terry Moore and Oscar Sellers for stepping up and running and becoming public servants. Mr. Stuart said hopefully the Board would become a unit and they will do all they can for the citizens of Hamlet. He expressed his appreciation to City Staff. Mr. Stuart announced the Senior Center is having a Holiday Luncheon on Friday, December 20th and a Kwanzaa Celebration of December 30th and encouraged the citizens to attend.

Councilman McQueen suggested the City include Mrs. Owens in the discussion of Christmas decorations on Hamlet Avenue. He also asked the Chief of Police on the status of the Police Department's training for dogs. Chief McMasters responded it is still in progress. Mr. McQueen welcomed the new members to the Board and stated he is looking forward to the future. He wished the citizens and employees a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Councilman Sellers added the discussion of Christmas decorations should be open to all residents and business owners.

18. Mayor's Comments.

Mayor Bayless stated we are coming to the end of the year; it has been a good year for the City. He announced the City has many things to look at, one in particular is the expansion of the sewer plant to 2 million gallons. At this point, the City cannot take new industry. The engineering job has been completed and the Manager is currently looking for grants. He thanked Mr. Blanton for the work at the City Lake and the grants he has obtained. The Mayor wished everyone a Merry Christmas. He also welcomed Mr. Moore and Mr. Sellers to the Board and said he thought they would work together and

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get things done. The Mayor said he would like to hear from the citizens regarding the Christmas decorations. In closing, he asked everyone to remember Councilman Moore's mother-in-law and the family in their prayers.

19. Motion to Adjourn.

At 7:47 pm, Councilman McQueen motioned to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Sellers provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Gail M. Strickland, City Clerk

