

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2020
7:00 PM
MINUTES**

Due to Governor Cooper's Order in regards to the Coronavirus, the meeting was limited to 10 people. Additional seating was provided in the foyer for the media and attendees for the Public Hearings.

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:

Interim City Manager	Bill Zell
City Clerk	Gail Strickland
IT	Zach Garner
Public Works	Billy Stubbs
Police Chief	TL McMasters, Jr.

Others Present: Matthew Christian, Will Toler, Gavin Stone, Eddie Caulder, Stephen Brown and Michelle Brown

1. Call to Order

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

2. Moment of Silence

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 May 7, 2020 Special Meeting and Closed Session, May 12, 2020 Regular Meeting and Closed Session and May 14, 2020 Continued Meeting were approved by motions of Council Members Martin and Stuart. The vote was 5-0.

5. Comments from Attendees

Gerard Morrison, founder of the John Coltrane Music Edutainment, called in to the meeting. He commended Council on the recently painted mural of John Coltrane. Mr. Morrison announced the month of June is Black History Music and challenged Council, during their comment section, to discuss the importance of black music in their lives. Referring to the COVID situation, he advised he was asking

people to think of 3 positive things that have happened during this time. Mr. Morrison ended his comments by saying he is proud to be from Charlotte St. in Hamlet.

Old Business

6. Public Hearing #1: Alleyway Closing; off Champlain St.

Mayor Bayless opened the Public Hearing to the alleyway closing and announced the area is next to the old bank and Arlo's. He advised Council has affidavits signed by the surrounding property owners. The Mayor advised Council had given permission to temporarily close the alleyway and there had been no problems. No one presented to speak. The Public Hearing was closed.

7. Consideration of Order Closing Alleyway off of Champlain St.

Council Member McQueen motioned to adopt the Order to Close the Alleyway. The second was provided by Council Member Covington. The vote was 5-0.

New Business

8. Public Hearing #2: Fiscal Year 2020-21 Budget

Mayor Bayless opened the floor to the Public Hearing. The Mayor stated Council is very regretful having to increase taxes, but everyone understands what the County has done. No one presented to address Council. The Public Hearing was closed.

9. Adoption of the Fiscal Year 2020-21 Budget – Ordinance No. 2020-02

Council Member Covington motioned to adopt the Budget. Council Member Stuart provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

10. Approval of City Manager's Contract

Mayor Bayless reported Council has reviewed the document. A motion to approve the contract was made by Council Member Covington and a second provided by Council Member Martin. The vote was 5-0.

11. Approval of Tax Releases

Council Member Martin provided the motion to approve the tax releases. Council Member Covington offered the second. The vote was 5-0.

12. Adoption of Fee Schedule

City Clerk Gail Strickland advised the only change in the Fee Schedule was a reduction in Registration Fees for baseball and football to \$35.00 as discussed by Council at the Budget Session. Council Member Martin provided the motion to adopt the Fee Schedule. Council Member Stuart offered the second. The vote was 5-0.

13. Appointments to Hamlet Police Dept. Citizens Review Board.

Chief McMasters provided Council with documentation on the Citizens Review Board. He stated he would entertain any questions. Council Member Martin inquired if Council needed to officially approve the Board itself. The Mayor responded that was part of the consideration now. Council Member Martin congratulated the Chief for going out and doing something for the community and Police Department and made the motion to approve the Review Board that the Chief has asked to establish. Council Member Sellers asked the City Attorney if the Review Board was legal. Mr. Morphis answered it was legal but needed to be approved by the Board. He advised it is an Advisory Board; it cannot change standard operating procedures or perform a personnel review function. Mr. Sellers asked if the Police

Chief can establish it and the Attorney replied Council Member Martin has a motion to establish the Board. Council Member Sellers replied, according to the newspaper, the Board has already been established and they have had a meeting. Mayor Bayless stated Council is rectifying the matter now by officially appointing the Board. Mr. Sellers suggested Council abolish the Board and start new. Council Member Covington provided a second to Mr. Martin's motion to approve the Citizens Review Board. The vote was 4-1 with Council Member Sellers opposing.

Mayor Bayless reported Council has a list of people to be appointed; they have completed a City application. Mr. Sellers said 4 people have already been appointed and had background checks. The Mayor responded that Council had nothing to do with what happened previously; Council is considering the Board and the applications now. Council Member Sellers inquired if the Board was illegal. Attorney Morphis responded sometimes things are done with the correct intentions, but not the correct procedures. His perspective is there was no intent to do anything illegal. He explained the actions tonight are a ratification of a previous action. Mr. Sellers had questions regarding who makes the final decisions, applications for the Board, background checks and discipline. Mayor Bayless explained Council appoints members to City Boards and the City Manager handles all discipline. Council Member Martin stated the Chief makes recommendations to the City Manager. Mr. Sellers referred to a newspaper article in the Richmond County Daily Journal where the Review Board had met. He felt the information was correct in the article. The Mayor stated he did not give the information to the newspaper. Council Member Covington added Council and the Review Board do not make personnel decisions. Mr. Sellers felt it was a conflict of interest for Mrs. Covington to serve on the Review Board and Council. She explained she was on the Review Board prior to coming back on Council, but her name is not on the list of applicants for Council to consider for appointment. Mayor Bayless said the Police Chief has the right to make recommendations and have people complete applications but it is up to Council to approve them. Council Member Covington added the Review Board was intended to add a layer of communication between the police and the community; it had nothing to do with Council. The Mayor asked Council Member Sellers if he had a problem with the Citizens Review Board and Mr. Sellers replied he did not see a need for the Board. Mayor Bayless read the names of the 3 applicants: Joe Ingram, Tony Clewis and Lois Jones. Council Member Martin motioned to appoint all 3 to the Hamlet Police Department Citizens Review Board. The second was provided by Council Member McQueen. The vote was 4-1 with Council Member Sellers opposing.

14. Fourth Quarter Budget Amendments

Council Member Covington provided the motion to approve the Budget Amendments. Council Member Martin offered the second. The vote was 5-0.

Other Business

15. City Manager's Report

Interim Manager Bill Zell said, in June, the Fire Tax Fees were increased for the next fiscal year; they were doubled. He recommended Staff get together, on an annual basis, to provide a budget of the costs to provide the services outside the City limits. They need to give justification for the budget and send it to the County. He stated it is the County's responsibility to determine how to fund the service and added the fire tax fees have not been increased since 1996.

Mr. Zell reported the John Coltrane mural is finished. The artist has received comments from Australia and Japan. Mayor Bayless inquired on the cost to the City for the project. The Manager responded the City paid \$5,000.00 from the current year's budget.

The Manager advised the Department Heads are working on plans for re-opening the public buildings. Plexiglass has been installed and supplies are in stock. He asked for Council's direction on re-opening. Several Council Members indicated it was best to keep the buildings closed at this time to keep employees safe.

Mr. Zell announced the City is taking applications for the Planning and Zoning Board. Applicants must reside in the City limits. Applications are available on-line or at City Hall.

The closing of City buildings for Friday, July 3rd, in observance of Independence Day, was made by the Manager. Mayor Bayless remarked the City regretted having to cancel the fireworks due to the County's change in sales tax distribution.

Council Member McQueen stated the adopted budget stripped things from the citizens and employees. He felt Council needed to find ways to keep good morale moving forward. The employees were scheduled to get a raise that would still have them below the average of the other municipalities. To show appreciation to the employees for coming to work on regular schedules when others are not, Mr. McQueen motioned to give the employees Monday, July 6th off. He has checked with Public Works Director Billy Stubbs and it would not interfere with garbage collection and it would not cost the City any money. The employees that were required to work would be given another day off. Council Member Sellers provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

16. Comments of Council

Council Member Covington discussed comments she has heard from citizens regarding the City employees. Many have expressed their appreciation for the employees and the little, extra things they do and empathize with Council being placed in a position that they could not give a raise. Addressing the Hamlet Police Department Citizens Review Board, Mrs. Covington said the Police Chief is attempting to bridge a divide between the law enforcement community and the community as a whole and Council needs to support them anyway they can.

Council Member Stuart stated the employees are doing a phenomenal job in the midst of the COVID issue. He thanked Mr. Zell for his assistance with the John Coltrane mural. Mr. Stuart said he has watched, in horror and anger, the unfolding of events in Minneapolis. He acknowledges and celebrates there are differences and he appreciates open and honest conversation. The Councilman continued by saying it is disheartening, in 2020, that there is still injustice and he appreciates the Chief of Police for putting policies and procedures in place. Mr. Stuart said we all see color and there is much work to be done in the areas of inclusion, equity, and diversity. He expressed his appreciation in being able to serve on Council and thanked his constituents for voting and all of Council for conversations as he is learning. He asked everyone to help in the fight of equities all over the country.

Council Member Martin said Chief McMaster's idea for a Citizen Review Board was a good thing to help bring the community together. He thanked Matthew Christian for arranging his schedule to attend the meeting. Mr. Martin advised he has heard all positive comments on the John Coltrane mural. In response to Mr. Morrison's challenge for Council to give comments on black music and musicians, Mr. Martin named several black musicians and stated he enjoyed their music and they had an influence on his life as a teenager.

Council Member McQueen called the John Coltrane mural stunning and said it was impressive that such a talented musician was immortalized by such a talented artist. Mr. McQueen thanked Bill Zell for his

idea to have the project completed in this fiscal year. He was afraid the City would not be able to complete the mural due to the County's change in sales tax distribution. He advised, since 2005, Gerard Morrison has been an advocate of John Coltrane and he is proud for him to have the mural completed. The Council Member stated he wanted to thank Chief McMasters for his leadership and his forethought and vision to create a Board to enable the City of Hamlet Police Department to be one step further in community policing and community relations. He feels the citizens will appreciate the Board once they realize the functions. He added that hopefully, it will never be needed, but if so, it is in place. Mr. McQueen said the City is ran by great people. He thanked Matthew Christian for his interest in Hamlet and advised it will be a challenge with the budget and the County taking money from the City. Hopefully, things will be put in place where the City can get the monies back.

17. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Bayless announced this will be Bill Zell's last meeting with Council and thanked him for his term as Interim City Manager. He thanked the employees for working in the midst of COVID – 19. To the citizens, he thanked them for backing Council in the loss of revenue and understanding the tax increase. The Mayor thanked Chief McMasters, saying he has brought the Police Department into the 21st century. Mr. Bayless expressed appreciation to Gerard Morrison and wished everyone a Happy July 4th.

18. Motion to go into Closed Session per NCGS§ 143-318.11 (a) (3) for attorney-client privilege.

Mayor Bayless called for a motion to go into Closed Session and stated the Statute. At 7:42 pm, Council Member Covington motioned to go into Closed Session. Councilman Stuart provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

At 7:49 pm, Council Members Covington and McQueen provided the motion and second to return to Open Session. The vote was 5-0.

19. Motion to Adjourn.

At 7:50 pm, Council Members Sellers and Martin provided the motion and second to adjourn the meeting. The vote was 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Gail M. Strickland, City Clerk

