

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM  
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345  
TUESDAY, JULY 14, 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.**

**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 Manager	Matthew Christian
City Clerk	Gail Strickland
IT	Zach Garner
Public Works	Billy Stubbs
Police Chief	TL McMasters, Jr.
Police Captain	Randy Dover

**Others Present:** Julianne Wooten, Joe Torkelson, Gavin Stone and Will Toler

**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 McQueen provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

**4. Approval of Minutes**

Minutes from the June 16, 2020 Regular and Closed Session Meetings were approved by motions of Council Members Martin and Stuart. The vote was 5-0.

**5. Comments from Attendees**

No one presented to address Council.

**New Business**

**6. Oath for City Manager**

The City Clerk administered the oath to Mr. Matthew Christian. The Mayor and several Board Members welcomed him.

**7. ESA Solar – Waivers for Special Use Permit.**

Julianne Wooten with Pine Gate Renewables, representing ESA Solar, addressed Council to request waivers for the solar farm. She noted they have materials in their packets and also provided video and pictures. Ms. Wooten gave an overview of the requests for waivers. In reviewing the as-built drawings, they discovered a minor encroachment of 3.4 ft. on one corner; therefore, not meeting the required 120 ft. setback. She advised the fence swap was to make the fence more thoughtful to the environment. The wildlife fencing has 6" squares that allow wildlife to pass through in the wooded area and it complies with the National Electric Safety Code.

Council Member McQueen inquired if the fencing installed was cheaper than the required fencing. Ms. Wooten reported it was less than \$1.00 per foot savings, but the motivating factor was not monetary. She continued by saying ripping up and replacing the fence is a lot of work; the company felt it best to request the waivers first. Mr. McQueen asked Attorney Morphis, from a legal standpoint, does not adhering to the policy as written, affect future permits. The Attorney answered granting a waiver here would not automatically give the same to another request. Council Member Martin asked at what point did they realize they were not in compliance and why they did not stop. Ms. Wooten responded when contact was made with Gail Strickland regarding the fence encroachment, it was determined they had installed the wrong fence. Mr. Martin asked if the fence had the required barbed wire and Ms. Wooten answered it did not. Mr. Morphis added the company is required to have the barbed wire from the permit issued. He explained the City's Ordinance was written from a model Solar Farm Ordinance.

Council Member McQueen stated the error should have been caught before and he felt the waiver would set a precedence. He made the motion to deny the requested waivers. Council Member Sellers offered the second. Council Member Covington inquired on the reason for the fencing, if it was required to protect people from the project. The Attorney stated, at the time the Ordinance was written and adopted, there was not specific thought of the fencing. Mr. McQueen stated he hated it happened, but the regular fence would keep people out. Ms. Wooten asked if they could add 1 foot of barbed wire to the existing fence. Mayor Bayless responded the motion on the floor is to deny the requested waivers. Council Member Martin stated, in a project this size, the fencing should have been in compliance as agreed. Council Member Sellers said it was poor planning. The vote to deny the waivers was 5-0.

**8. Consideration of Ordinance 2020-03 Demolition of 339 High St.**

Mayor Bayless asked Gail Strickland to provide information. Mrs. Strickland advised Mrs. Lyerly is now handling demolitions, but she originally started the fine process in 2011. The property owner has not made contact with the City since giving a plan of action in 2012 that was not followed. Staff is requesting Council issue the Ordinance to Demolish the deteriorated and abandoned structure. Council Members Covington and Martin provided the motion and second to approve the Ordinance. The vote was 5-0.

**9. Approval of Tax Releases.**

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

**10. Appointment to the Planning and Zoning Board.**

Mayor Bayless asked the City Clerk to provide information. Gail Strickland explained one of the Planning Board Members has moved out of the City limits and no longer meets the requirements to serve on the

Board. His term is scheduled to expire September 10, 2020. At the June meeting, the Manager announced the City was accepting applications. One application has been received. If appointed tonight, the applicant can be appointed for a 3-year term in September. Council Member Covington provided the motion to appoint Gerard Morrison to the Planning Board. Council Member McQueen offered the second. The vote was 5-0.

#### **11. Discussion of Conard Properties**

Mayor Bayless reported Mr. David Conard made contact with the previous Interim City Manager Bill Zell and offered to give the City 2 properties he owns, one on Main St. and one on Bridges St. The parcel on Bridges St. abuts the Memorial Park all the way around. He suggested the City accept that parcel and recommend Mr. Conard donate the Main Street property, that is zoned Residential, to Habitat. Council Member Martin felt that if the offer is for 2 properties the City should accept both. He made the motion to accept both. Council Member Sellers inquired if the City would pay County taxes. The Mayor answered they would not. Council Member Stuart provided the second to the motion. Council Member Covington asked about the maintenance and upkeep. Public Works Director Billy Stubbs informed Council that City employees cut the parcels now. The vote was 5-0 to accept both properties.

Attorney Morphis suggested the City have a local Attorney provide title searches. It was consensus of Council to have the searches completed.

#### **Other Business**

#### **12. City Manager's Report**

City Manager Matthew Christian thanked Council for the opportunity to serve the City of Hamlet. His first week was spent getting to know Staff and the facilities. He is currently getting up to speed on a variety of issues. Starting Monday of this week, he began systematically meeting the business owners. COVID makes it challenging, but through time he will get to know everyone. Concluding, he asked Council to contact him as need. For the public, he looks forward to getting to know everyone.

#### **13. Comments of Council**

Council Member Covington congratulated the new City Manager and commended him for the improvements she noticed to the Town of Mt. Gilead where he was previously Manager. She also mentioned she had seen the Hamlet Police Department video about the welcoming, expressions of diversity and how Hamlet felt about that; it was a great service, very well spoken for the Department and the community. The video was paid for by a group of private citizens. To the City employees, she said to stay safe.

Council Member Sellers thanked Mr. Christian for coming to Hamlet. He also commented on the loss of Educator and Coach Jason Norton. Born and raised in Hamlet, Jason was an outstanding person. Mr. Sellers expressed his sympathy to the family.

Council Member Stuart added that Jason Norton was a fine man and will be missed. He thanked the Police Officers for stepping up to create the video. He expressed appreciation to the City employees for their assistance in the COVID situation. Mr. Stuart recognized Mr. Cromartie who recently retired after 50 plus years as a business owner in Hamlet. He told Matthew Christian that he likes his vision and to call for any help needed.

Council Member Martin welcomed Mr. Christian as City Manager and said he is doing a great job.

Council Member McQueen stated Jason Norton did a lot for the kids in Hamlet and he will miss seeing him. He added Mr. Cromartie will be missed as well. Also announced was the caboose at City Lake has been painted. He thanked previous City Manager Jonathan Blanton for his vision and the Cole Foundation and Community Foundation of Richmond County for partnering with the City to bring the funding for the project. It will be difficult for the City to move forward now with the changes made by the County with the Sales Tax Revenue. Mr. McQueen stated, personally, he will not vote for anyone that will not go on record to say they will vote against the change in the sales tax. He thanked the employees for their work and said it does not go unnoticed. Council Member McQueen reported he has had students from across the state comment on the Police Department video. He added a Police Department is effective when they are representative of the community they serve.

**14. Mayor's Comments**

Mayor Bayless commented the painted caboose looks great; the park is the best it has been in some time. He thanked Police Chief McMasters for making improvements in his department. The Mayor expressed appreciation to the City employees and stated he wished the City could give them more money. He asked the citizens to wear face masks when they are out and thanked them for their co-operation.

**15. Motion to**

At 7:40 pm, Council Members Sellers and McQueen provided the motion and second to adjourn the meeting. The vote was 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Gail M. Strickland, City Clerk