

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2020
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 Clerk	Gail Strickland
City Attorney	TC Morphis
Finance Officer	Jill Dickens
IT	Zach Garner
Public Works	Billy Stubbs
Interim Police Chief	Anthony Moss

Others Present: Amy Guinn, Charles Craven, Gavin Stone, Ken Anderson 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 Stuart provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

4. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the November 10, 2020 Regular and Closed Session Meetings were approved by motions of Council Members Covington and McQueen. The vote was 5-0.

5. Comments from Attendees

No one presented to address Council.

6. Audit Report from Ken Anderson

Mr. Anderson had not arrived to the Meeting at this point. Council continued with the remaining Agenda Items; the Report was given after Closed Session. Mr. Anderson began with the Fund Balance stating it is

stable with a slight decline of the General Fund. At 45.3% it is strong; the State requires 8%. The number takes into account the loss of \$100,000.00 for the months of May and June with the change in sales tax distribution. The Water and Sewer Fund is solid with a 47.1% Fund Balance. Mr. Anderson advised the Property Tax Collection Rate is not where it needs to be at 94.90%, it should be around 97 -98%. Council Member Covington inquired if the Governor's dispensation for utilities included taxes. The Auditor did not know, but advised he would research and let Council know. Mr. Anderson continued saying the City received an unmodified opinion that was a good report. The General Fund revenues exceeded expenditures by \$2074.00, but the Water and Sewer Fund had a loss of \$61,142.00. The City has no debt and there were no budget over-expenditures. The Report was submitted to the Local Government Commission and was accepted. Finance Officer Jill Dickens does a good job and provided all information that was requested.

Mr. Anderson called attention to 2 notes in the report. They are required to add a COVID note that gives the potential impact that COVID could have. He has found that the sales tax numbers for the County have not changed. What has changed, as is noted on page 49, is the County's change in the sales tax distribution. He is estimating a loss of \$600,000.00 annually for the City due to the change. The City went from receiving 10% of the collected sales tax to approximately 5%. Council Member Covington responded Council had predicted \$650,000.00 - \$700,000.00.

Mrs. Covington inquired if there were any other issues other than the impact of the sales tax. Mr. Anderson mentioned issues with Hamlet EMS a few years ago. He had recommended the City have an audit for the EMS, but if you are going to have an audit, you need to have a Manager who is keeping his hand on the situation. The Auditor has advised the City Manager that he does not need to back off.

7. Proposed Utility Adjustment Policy

Mayor Bayless asked, in the absence of City Manager Matt Christian, to postpone the item until the January 2021 Council Meeting. Council Member McQueen provided the motion to postpone and Council Member Stuart gave the second. The vote was 5-0.

8. Approval of 2021 Regular Council Meeting Calendar

Council Member Stuart motioned to approve the calendar. The second was provided by Council Member McQueen. The vote was 5-0.

9. Approval of Submitted Tax Releases.

Council Member Covington inquired on the refund to Core Logic. Finance Officer Jill Dickens explained the refunds resulted in accounts that were paid by the property owner and mortgage company. The City refunds in the order the account was paid. Council Member McQueen motioned to approve the Tax Releases. Council Member Sellers offered the second. The vote was 5-0.

Other Business

10. City Manager's Report

City Manager Matthew Christian was not present.

11. Comments of Council

Council Member Covington remarked here at the end of 2020 things are not better. She wished all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, adding the City was able to give the employees a longer Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday. She sent her condolences to the family of Don Paul.

Council Member Sellers wished everyone a safe and healthy holiday and sent love to all the people that have lost loved ones this year.

Council Member Stuart advised COVID is hitting hard with the high numbers from gatherings. He asked people to please be mindful and recommended zoom calls. He called attention to the Governor's new Executive Order. Mr. Stuart wished everyone a Merry Christmas and thanked the City of Hamlet employees for all they do.

Council Member Martin reiterated the comments of the previous Council Members.

Council Member McQueen wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. He thanked the employees for all do and thanked Council for their accomplishments in tough situations. Mr. McQueen stated the past year has been tumultuous and he thanked Council Member Covington for serving the citizens of Hamlet again. Referring to the legal issues with Richmond County, the Councilman thanked Council for their agreement and stated, until the citizens of Hamlet are represented fairly, he hopes Council continues to move forward. Mr. McQueen expressed disappointment in some of the comments made at the County Commissioners' meeting the night before. He felt the Commissioners could have communicated rather than calling out City leaders. He told the employees he wished the City could do more for them financially and explained there were items in the budget that did not work out due to the changes in sales tax distribution. Council Member McQueen ended his comments by saying he will continue to support the employees and represent the citizens of Hamlet.

12. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Bayless wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New. He stated this has been a tough year and he hopes things will be better next year. He expressed his appreciation to the Council for keeping the City running smoothly. He also thanked the employees and City Departments for all they do. The Mayor stated he had hoped the change in the County Commissioners would change the line of communication between the City and the County, but it appears that will not happen.

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

At 7:13 pm, Mayor Bayless asked for a motion to go into Closed Session per NC General Statute §143-318.11 (a)(3) (6). Council Member Covington offered the motion. Council Member Sellers provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

At 7:18 pm. Council Members Covington and Sellers motioned to return to Open Session. The vote was 5-0.

Mr. Ken Anderson had arrived to the Meeting and gave the Audit Report at this time. (Item 6 on the Agenda).

14. Motion to Adjourn

At 7:30 pm, Council Members Covington and Sellers provided the motion and second to adjourn the meeting. The vote was 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Gail M. Strickland, City Clerk

