

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2022
6:00 PM
MINUTES**

Governing Body Present:

Mayor	Bill Bayless
Council Member	Jesse McQueen
Council Member	Eddie Martin
Council Member	Abbie Covington
Council Member	Maurice Stuart
Council Member	Oscar Sellers

Staff Present:

City Attorney	Al Benschhoff
City Manager	Matthew Christian
City Clerk	Gail Strickland
Police Chief	Dennis Brown
Public Utilities Dir.	Robert Brown

Others Present: Linda Ross, Don Norton, Charlie Melvin, Donald Drake, Mary Drake, Howard Wallace, Margaret Wallace and Josephine Wallace

1. Call to Order

Mayor Bayless called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

2. Invocation

Pastor Allison Farrah of First Baptist Church offered the invocation.

3. Adoption of Agenda

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

4. Adoption of Consent Agenda

Council Member Sellers motioned to adopt the items on the Consent Agenda. Council Member Stuart provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

5. Comments from Attendees

Linda Ross, candidate for County Commissioners, addressed the Board to advise she is looking forward to serving Richmond County and she would be available at the end of the meeting to meet the attendees or answer any questions.

Donald Drake reported to Council on an aggressive pack of wild dogs. He has concern for the children in the area. Mayor Bayless asked Police Chief Brown to respond. The Chief advised Hamlet Animal Control has caught an estimated 300 dogs and about the same number of cats. They have eliminated part of the pack. He will have the Animal Control Officer set traps on Mr. Drake's property.

The Chief also advised the Animal Control Officer is only working 1 day each week at this time. He has spoken with the Manager to have alternatives. Council Member Sellers suggested the Chief speak with CSX about placing traps on their property; many of the wild dogs come from that area.

Mary Drake spoke on water issues at her home. She stated she received a notice that the water is condemned. Mrs. Drake reported her laundry is brown, her commodes have black rings, her dishes have a foul odor and the water has black particles in it. She is upset the City knew in May but did not send notices until July. She has spoken with the City and was told they would have results in October but no one has kept the public informed. Mrs. Drake is very concerned with her health issues. City Manager Matt Christian advised he appreciates her concerns and he and the Public Utilities Director will have a presentation during this meeting that will answer Mrs. Drake's questions. Council and the Manager assured Mrs. Drake they would do all they could to alleviate her problem and would be available to meet with her at any time.

New Business

6. Discussion of Parking on Washington Avenue

City Manager Matt Christian advised the City has heard many concerns on Washington Avenue. He and Chief Brown are requesting Council prohibit public parking in the first block of Washington Ave from Hwy 177 to Seaboard St. to help address some of the issues in the area. Mayor Bayless asked if an Ordinance was required. The Manager replied he intends to discuss with the City Attorney an Ordinance that will be more broad, rather than one for each street. The request tonight is to prohibit parking on Washington Avenue from Hwy 177 to Seaboard St. Council Member Sellers inquired if loitering should be included in the motion. Mr. Christian answered the request is specific to parking; any other crimes or complaints would be addressed through the laws that are available. Council Member Covington motioned to prohibit parking on Washington Avenue from Highway 177 to Seaboard St. The second was given by Council Member Stuart. The vote was 5-0. Council Member McQueen inquired on any progress with the store and apartments in the area. Council Member Covington asked if the new owners have provided their plans. Mr. Christian answered the new owner has been in contact with the Police Chief regarding improvements. Regarding the store, the Manager stated the City has been in contact with them and there have been some minor improvements. The Police Department has been coordinating with ALE on possible violations of their license so they understand the City will do everything they can to make positive change in the area. Chief Brown added the Police Department is taking a multi-faceted approach to deal with the matter. The apartment owner is going through the eviction process to remove the tenants from the inhabitable apartments. He will secure the area with fencing and give the City power of attorney for any trespassers. The previous owner had been sent nuisance abatement letters and one was sent to the store as well. The officers are patrolling the area to have persons congregating clear out. New cameras have been installed that will assist with crime prevention. Chief Brown reported the number of crime reports have reduced the last several months. They have identified a suspect in the last shooting, and they have a meeting with the District Attorney for possible charges from the murder at the Speedway. The Mayor asked about the crime activity in Briarwood. Chief Brown answered the Police Department has identified individuals in the neighborhood with repeat crimes and have partnered with ATF and US Marshalls to get some of the people out of the community. The number of calls to Briarwood has reduced.

7. Water Distribution Presentation

Robert Brown, Public Utilities Director, addressed Council and the community regarding water violations at the Water Treatment Plant. He reported the water violations, requiring public notices, are from quarterly samples from 4 sites. Mr. Brown explained the violation for Total Trihalomethanes (TTHM) and

Haloacetic Acids (HAA) are bi-products that form when chlorine interacts naturally with chemicals in the water. He provided a graph that showed the averages for the 4 quarters and explained due to the high levels in January of 2021 and the way the State does the reporting on averages, it takes a full year for the one high number to rotate off the averages. No other samples in 2021 exceeded the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL). The high number was the result of a failure of one of the clarifiers that had to be taken out of service and it took 3 months to get it repaired and back in service. To ensure safety of the water, the Plant took extra samples throughout the year, but could not report them to the State. Mr. Brown discussed methods being used to correct the issues: treating algae growth in the City Water Lake and clarifiers, adjusting the copper-sulfate application, inspection and cleaning of clarifier #2, hired divers to clean out clear wells 1 & 2, and have scheduled cleaning for clarifier #1. Council inquired if the notice to the public could have provided more information. The Utilities Director explained he has to follow state guidelines, or he would be in violation for not reporting correctly. To assist with the Blakes' problem, Mr. Brown will meet with the Distribution employees to see if they can flush their lines and retrofit the pipes. Council Member Covington stated the situation corrects itself quicker than the State notifies the water department; they operate 2 months in arrears. She added the State's notification makes you think the water could be detrimental to your health, but you would have to drink numerous amounts for this to happen. Mr. Brown announced, in an effort to inform and educate the public on the water issues, the City will have an Open House on Tuesday, October 18th. The meetings are scheduled for 2 pm – 3 pm and 6 pm – 7 pm. The City Manager reported the City has applied for grants to assist with the Water Treatment Plant issues; they will do all they can to make the corrections. Council inquired if the educational meetings would require advertisement as special meetings. Attorney Benschoff advised you could advertise as special meetings or could attend with no action that would not require advertisement.

8. Consideration of Change of Meeting Date for November 2022 Council Meeting

Mayor Bayless announced the next Regular Council Meeting is scheduled for November 8, 2022, the same day as the Election. Council Member Martin motioned to change the November Meeting to November 9, 2022 at 6 pm. The second was given by Council Member Sellers. The vote was 5-0.

Other Business

9. City Manager's Reports

City Manager Matthew Christian announced several public events for the month of October. Food Trucks will be at the Depot October 14th and 28th, Yoga in the Park is October 20th, the last Boxcar Series is October 23rd, and the Seaboard Festival is October 29th. A new event planned for October 31st is The Boo Bash Trunk or Treat on Main Street from 5:30 pm – 8:00 pm and the Richmond County Agriculture Fair will be at the Fairgrounds October 13th – October 16th.

10. Comments of Council

Council Member Sellers thanked the attendees and asked the citizens to notify Staff or Council of any concerns. He thanked Robert Brown for his presentation and encouraged the citizens to attend the fair and Seaboard Festival. He announced the Masonic Lodge will serve breakfast the day of the Seaboard Festival.

Council Member Stuart thanked the citizens in attendance. He announced early voting will begin October 20th and Election Day is November 8th. Mr. Stuart provided information on a meeting that will be held in South Hamlet on October 25th at 6 pm to discuss issues at the park.

Council Member Covington reported several recent ribbon cuttings for a new coffee shop and food truck. She said it is encouraging to see all the October activities and urged everyone to stay informed and participate. Mrs. Covington thanked Robert Brown for his presentation and stated she feels safe drinking the water. She asked anyone that has concerns to attend the meetings.

Council Member Jesse McQueen encouraged the citizens to volunteer with the Seaboard Festival and to support the new businesses in the area. He reminded the Hamlet residents of the importance of the upcoming election. He urged the voters to remember who caused the 10-cent tax increase and created such a hardship for the smaller municipalities that they would not be in existence without the Covid money they received. The City of Hamlet would not have been able to fund some of their projects without the money from the government. He added that voters should choose wisely for new leadership.

11. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Bayless announced the Hamlet Food Lion now has Food Lion to Go. He gave information on the fair; the barn is full of local animals and artistic items, and the rides will be Thursday – Sunday. Thursday is Student and Senior Adult Day with free admission to the fair. The Mayor reported Chazy Gifts located on Highway 74 will have a grand opening next week. He mentioned he has received calls from persons interested in the Opera House.

12. Motion to Adjourn

At 7:15 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

