

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL  
BUDGET WORK SESSION  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM  
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345  
TUESDAY, May 23, 2023  
5:30 PM  
MINUTES**

**Governing Body Present:**

Mayor	Bill Bayless
Mayor Pro Tem	Jesse McQueen
Council Member	Maurice Stuart
Council Member	Abbie Covington
Council Member	Oscar Sellers

**Staff Present:**

City Manager	Matthew Christian
City Clerk	Gail Strickland
Finance Officer	Edna Miles
Incoming Clerk	Cindy Terry
Police Chief	Dennis Brown
Senior Ctr. Dir.	Sarah Locklear

**Others Present:** Matt Lamb and Chris McDonald

**1. Call to Order**

Mayor Bayless called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm.

**2. Adoption of Agenda**

Mayor Bayless requested the Agenda be amended to move Police Chief Dennis Brown's presentation to Item #4 and Senior Center Director Sarah Locklear's presentation to Item #5. Council Member Sellers motioned to adopt the Agenda with the Amendment. Council Member Covington provided the second. The vote was 4-0. Council Member McQueen joined the meeting.

**3. Approval of Minutes for May 9, 2023 Regular and Closed Session Meetings.**

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

**4. Presentation by Police Chief.**

Police Chief Dennis Brown provided two options to Council for new body armor for the Police Department. He also stated that new body armor is in the budget. Option 1 was the same material and style as the present vests. The downside of this option is that the officer cannot carry all of his equipment on his belt, i.e., pepper spray, tourniquet, etc. Option 2 was a vest with insertable ceramic trauma plates that would sustain multiple hits. These vests match the existing shirts and would be worn during certain threats. The current vests will not stop high velocity guns. Chief Brown then requested Council's input on the new body armor options. Council Member Martin stated he wants to have the best the City can provide, and the safety of the officers is most important. His opinion is that the City should purchase Option 2. Council Member McQueen asked about another possible option that would have a separate holder for the trauma plates. Chief Brown stated that he did consider that option, but it would not free

up space on the officer's belt to carry the required equipment. Mayor Bayless inquired as to whether the officers would continue to wear their 3-A's on a daily basis. The Chief confirmed that they will continue to wear their 3-A's daily but will use the formal uniform in certain circumstances. City Manager Christian advised that a vote was not needed on this matter, only a consensus of Council. Council consented.

**5. Consideration of Senior Trip Policies.**

Senior Center Director Sarah Locklear gave a presentation on the Policy for Senior Center overnight motorcoach travel. The next trip is to Niagara Falls and Canada June 4-10. There is also a trip to the Ark in Kentucky scheduled for November. Mrs. Locklear advised that 80 participants are scheduled to go on the Niagara Falls trip. She then discussed the selection of Group Leaders for the complimentary seats. Two part-time employees are confirmed as Group Leaders but four are needed. She has provided training, but they have expressed concerns if she does not accompany the group on the trip. The cost to the City will be \$23 per day per Group Leader for meals, plus the registration for the trip. She advised that every hotel provides breakfast, and lunch is provided by other means. Council Member Stuart highlighted the problem with the complimentary seats and advised that Council needs oversight. The proposed policy states that all Group Leaders will be selected and paid by the City. The bus company will then send a check to the City for the complimentary seats. Council Member Covington stated that the money comes from the Senior Center budget for these trips and should go back to the Senior Center budget when reimbursed. The Director then explained with the proposed new Senior Center Policy, she will make recommendations to the Manager regarding the complimentary seats, but the Manager will have the final decision. Discussion ensued regarding the complimentary seats being recorded as a fundraiser. Mrs. Locklear voiced personal concerns about the ethics of using the seats for a fundraiser. The Manager answered that the idea came from Mrs. Locklear to use the seats as a fundraiser; he advised that it does not have to be reported as such. Council Member Covington gave concerns that the City does not receive funding from the County when all other Senior Centers do. She stated that when seniors outside of Hamlet's City limits participate in the activities, it takes resources out of Hamlet's budget. Council Member Covington also suggested that someone needs to have an open conversation with the County regarding funding. Council Member McQueen agreed with Mrs. Covington's statements. Manager Christian questioned who would open the Center when all of the staff is on the Niagara Falls trip. Mrs. Locklear suggested that volunteers open the Center at least from 11:00 am-1:00 pm each day to serve lunch. The Manager expressed concerns of having volunteers operate the Center. It was consensus of Council to have two City employees on each bus as Group Leaders for the June trip and have the Center open. Council discussed hiring volunteers to serve as Group Leaders. Council gave consensus for Mrs. Locklear's husband to serve as a Group Leader. The Manager and Director will continue to work on the development of Policies.

**6. Budget Work Session**

**Personnel Policy**

The City Manager provided information for future updates to the Personnel Policy.

- Market Pay Plan – Update to Market Pay
- Probationary Employment – need clearer language regarding the probationary period of employment. The Manager will contact the City Attorney for edits.
- Compensatory Time – Update the Policy to support the practice that is in place at this time.
- Travel – Update to include clear prior approval and per diem, that would pay upfront fixed to IRS rates
- Transfer of Sick Leave from other Employers - need language in the Policy regarding the scope of sick time from other State and Municipal organizations. Currently, it is used for retirement

purposes to participants in the Retirement System. Mr. Christian advised that we need clarity on who can transfer the sick time, whose we will accept, and how it will be used.

- Bereavement Leave – Update for employee to receive 3 bereavement days. The definition of family members for Bereavement Leave are mother, father, sister, brother, child, grandchild, aunt, uncle, mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law and grandparent.
- Random Drug Testing - The Manager then discussed random drug testing for employees. Council Member Covington asked if there was random drug testing before COVID, to which the Manager answered yes. Finance Manager Edna Miles advised that random drug testing is resuming. The manager also stated that we need to add a form to the present Policy for any suspicion of drug use.
- Tobacco Product Usage – Update the Policy to add vaping, chewing tobacco and tobacco product usage.

### **Budget**

Police Department Salaries - Since the Manager's Budget Message, it was discovered that there is a disparity in salaries, particularly for the Officers in the Police Department. The Police Department was not included in the latest market study. In order for the Officers to receive a salary that reflects the Market Pay Plan, the total budget Impact would be \$102,250.00. Council also discussed police positions, openings, and incoming employees from BLET Program. The Manager advised that the Budget Message will not have to be updated for the changes in the budget, but a copy will be available for the public.

Health Insurance –City Manager Christian advised that Blue Cross Blue Shield will not sell us the same pharmacy policy. The new prescription plan will require a 2% increase but will have a better benefit. There are no other changes to the health insurance policy.

### **Christmas Bonus**

The Manager suggested, and the budget includes a \$217.00 Christmas bonus for employees which will result in each employee receiving \$200.00. The total for all employees would impact the budget by \$12,250.00. It was agreed that the Fund Balance Appropriation will cover this expenditure.

### **ARPA Funds**

The City's ARPA Fund has over \$1 million. Council needs to advise how we should spend it. It has been rumored that the government may call back any unspent monies. The deadline for use of this fund is in 2026. The Manager stated that new water meters are the largest tangible expense. To cover all of the City's area, it would cost \$2 million and the City would have to come up with the balance after the ARPA Funds are exhausted. Another option that the Manager suggested would be a pilot project. He gave details of 500 meters which would cost approximately \$245,000.00, with an option to add large meters greater than 1 inch for an additional \$150,00.00. Mayor Bayless stated that it will cost more in the long run if we don't do the entire project. Council Member Covington suggested that the City have a pilot project to do no less than 1,000 meters. She also stated that the City is losing a phenomenal amount of water. Council Member McQueen wants to see data and look at the last 3 years of the budget. There are 206 meters that are not monitored and have unaccounted City water usage. Mr. Christian advised that other purchases to consider with the ARPA Funds are heavy equipment. The City could purchase an additional knuckle boom or leaf vac. The cost of each would be approximately \$150,000.00. The Manager explained that the pilot program for the meters is expandable. He also stated that the loss of treating the water and no revenue compounds the City's loss. Council Member Covington suggested that the City invest \$500,000.00 for water meters, and \$500,000.00 for heavy equipment. Mr. Christian suggested that we could possibly install more than 1,000 meters because the software and other entry

costs would be a one-time expense. Mayor Bayless reiterated that the old meters are not reading correctly. Council Member McQueen again advised that he would like to see data before moving forward on the water meters. Council Member Martin stated that he would like to move forward with the water meters. Manager Christian stated he would select two companies to submit proposals for the RFP.

Council Member Sellers then made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Council asked him to withdraw his motion in order to decide on the water meter project. Council Member Covington motioned that the City move forward with the ARPA Funds for water meters, with a pilot project of 1,500 meters. Council Member Martin seconded. The vote was 4-1 with Council Member McQueen assenting.

**7. Motion to Adjourn**

At 7:42 pm, Council Member McQueen provided the motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Council Member Sellers. The vote was 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Terry, Incoming City Clerk