

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
TUESDAY, May 11, 2021
7:00 PM
MINUTES**

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 Attorney	TC Morphis
City Manager	Matthew Christian
City Clerk	Gail Strickland
Finance Officer	Jill Dickens
IT	Zach Garner

Others Present: Gavin Stone, Will Toler, Margaret Williams, James Wall, Thomas Wall, Jean Douglas and Howard Wallace

1. Call to Order

Mayor Bayless called 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. The second was offered by Council Member Stuart. The vote was 5-0.

4. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the April 13, 2021 Regular and Closed Session Meetings and April 21, 2021 Budget Work Session were approved by motions of Council Members Martin and Covington. The vote was 5-0.

5. Comments from Attendees

No one presented to address Council at this portion of the Meeting. After the Mayor's Comments, Ms. Jean Douglas spoke to the Board regarding abandoned houses on Pine St.

New Business

6. Manager's Presentation of the Budget Message (Attachment A)

City Manager Matt Christian reported the Budget process started in March and the Budget Message and Proposed FY2021-22 Budget along with the Draft Budget Ordinance were submitted to City Council on

April 29th. The last Budget Session was held last week on May 6th. The submitted Budget balances at \$8,423,660.00. The Manager gave remarks from the Budget Message. It maintains all existing services and is balanced without any property tax or utility service increases. All Capital Purchases have been eliminated for the second year in a row following Richmond County's surprise decision to change the Sales Tax Distribution Method. The impact of the change was grossly miscalculated and misrepresented to the citizens of Richmond County. The City will continue to advocate for the citizens, tax payers and customers by any means necessary. The Budget is designed to survive as long as possible, until something changes. Following the Public Hearing the City has met all the requirements to adopt the Budget. He thanked Council for their input and Staff for their assistance, specifically Finance Officer Jill Dickens.

7. Public Hearing: Fiscal Year 2021-22 Budget

Mayor Bayless opened the floor to the Public Hearing. No one addressed Council. The Public Hearing was closed.

8. Adoption of the Fiscal Year 2021-22 Budget – Ordinance No. 2021-02

Council Member Covington thanked Staff for their hard work in preparing the Budget. She motioned to adopt the Budget Ordinance. The second was offered by Council Member Sellers. The vote was 5-0.

9. Fourth Quarter Budget Amendments

Council Member Covington inquired on the Credit Card Fees. Finance Officer Jill Dickens explained with COVID, more water account payments were made by credit card. The amendment off sets the credit card fee that the City recoups. Mrs. Covington motioned to approve the amendments. Council Member Stuart provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

10. Consideration of Special Revenue Fund

Mayor Bayless reported the City will receive \$1,850,000.00 from the American Rescue Plan. Mr. Christian clarified the City is setting up a Special Project Fund for any stimulus money received to separate it from the General Fund. Council Member Covington motioned to approve the Special Fund. Council Member Sellers gave the second. The vote was 5-0.

11. Approval of Audit Contract

Council Member Stuart inquired if the City Manager had reviewed the Contract. When Mr. Christian confirmed, Mr. Stuart motioned to approve the contract. The second was offered by Council Member Sellers. The vote was 5-0. Council Member Covington inquired if the City's auditing requirements would change with the reporting to the Local Government Commission, and if the additional reporting would increase the Audit Contract. The City Manager replied he did not think it would change the Audit Contract.

12. Appointment to Hamlet ABC Board

Council Member McQueen motioned to re-appoint Mr. Steve Mercer to the ABC Board. The second was offered by Council Member Sellers. The vote was 5-0.

13. Appointment to Hamlet Depot Board

Council Member Covington motioned to appoint Mr. Richard Steen to the Hamlet Depot Board. The second was offered by Council Member McQueen. The vote was 5-0.

14. Approval of Tax Releases

Council Member Covington motioned to approve the Tax Releases. The second was offered by Council Member Stuart. The vote was 5-0.

15. Discussion of Animal Ordinances

The Mayor reported some questions have been asked regarding animal ordinances. Council Member Martin provided information of a situation a Hamlet resident is experiencing with a neighbor's barking dog. The police responded numerous times and charged the dog's owner. The case was postponed several times, but when it was heard in Court, the Judge dismissed the case citing the City's Ordinance indicates a barking dog is a nuisance only if it disturbs the neighborhood, not one individual. Mr. Martin was told, but could not confirm, the Judge stated the Ordinance was unconstitutional. He asked Council to consider changing the Ordinance and to also consider changes to the types of animals allowed in the City limits. Currently, hogs and fowl are not allowed, but the Ordinance does not address pigs, goats, and other animals. The Mayor asked the City Attorney to look into the matter. Council discussed if there would be a difference if the acreage was larger but no final determination was made. Implementing tiered fines was discussed. The Attorney will gather more detailed information from the Police Chief and provide possible revisions to the Ordinance. Council Member Covington added another issue is the tethering aspect.

Other Business

16. City Manager's Report

City Manager Matthew Christian announced he finalized the submission to USDA for the Waste Water Expansion Project; hopefully, next month he can report their feedback and possible funding. He reported City Hall is open with masks and social distancing. The Depot, Museum and Visitors Center are open and the volunteers are staffing on the weekends. The Senior Center is open with limited activities. This Friday is Food Truck Friday with food vendors and crafts. Also announced was free COVID vaccines will be available at the Memorial Park Gym Parking Lot on Monday, May 17th from 2 pm – 5 pm provided by the Health Department.

17. Comments of Council

Council Member Covington commented she rode down Boyd Lake Road and was glad to see the City is in the recreation business.

Council Member Sellers thanked the City Staff for working on the budget and keeping the City going. He stated he would like to see more of the community come to the meetings with their concerns.

Council Member Stuart stated he was glad to see the citizens at the meeting. He added Council is here to serve and advocate for them. He expressed his appreciation to the City employees.

Council Member Martin concurred with previous comments.

Council Member McQueen reported he went to the baseball park and observed kids and families having fun. He said the baseball program was positive for the community. He offered special thanks to Staff for the Budget and to the Council and Mayor for their time invested with special meetings and positive feedback. Mr. McQueen thanked Mr. Morphis and his team for their work with the City the past 7-8 years and the extensive knowledge they bring.

18. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Bayless thanked the dedicated staff for their hard work. He said he has received good comments on the baseball program. He discussed the issue of trash on the side of the roads and encouraged everyone to help remove the trash. Mr. Bayless announced this is Law Enforcement Week and encouraged the citizens to thank an officer for all they do.

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

Mayor Bayless asked for a motion to go into Closed Session per NC General Statute §143-318.11 (a)(3) Attorney – Client Privilege. At 7:42 pm, Council Member Sellers offered the motion. Council Member McQueen provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

Return to Open Session

At 9:13 pm, Council Members Sellers and McQueen motioned to return to Open Session. The vote was 5-0.

Closed Session Action

Mayor Bayless reported a personnel matter was discussed during Closed Session.

20. Motion to Adjourn

At 9:14 pm, Council Members McQueen and Covington provided the motion and second to adjourn the meeting. The vote was 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Gail M. Strickland, City Clerk

