

**HAMLET CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2023
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	TC Morphis
City Manager	Matthew Christian
City Clerk	Gail Strickland

Others Present: Pastor Eddie McLean, Jordan Alexander, Chaz Sessoms, Chip Gordon, Don Norton, Howard Wallace, Margaret Williams, Jo Wallace and Rachel Tillman

1. Call to Order

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

2. Invocation

Pastor Eddie McLean of Kings Gate Church offered the Invocation.

3. Adoption of Agenda

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

4. Adoption of Consent Agenda

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

5. Comments from Attendees

Ms. Rachel Tillman addressed Council after Comments from Council.

New Business

6. Presentation: American Legion Baseball Program

Mr. Chip Gordon reported to Council that he submitted a bid for a state tournament in Hamlet but did not get the bid. It was deemed the playing surface was not to state level. He advised he has spoken with the City Manager about needs that will bring the park to the state standards. Mr. Gordon reviewed a list of items needed. The list included: Home Dugout Benches \$1600.00; 1 pallet of Turface and ½ pallet of mound clay \$1224.94; infield renovation and year-long field care \$16,270.00; 1 – 5 gallon bucket of yellow paint \$350.00; 20 bags of concrete \$112.00; 2 window ac units \$1000.00; replace light bulbs, cost

unknown and hot water in concession stands, cost unknown. Mr. Gordon discussed he and volunteers could provide some of the labor. Council responded the City could assist. Council Member Covington inquired if Hamlet Post 49 could hold community fund raisers for some of the larger priced items, such as the batting cage. Mr. Gordon said he could discuss it with them. Council Member McQueen asked the City Attorney if the City could get sponsorships for the program. Mr. Morphis advised the City can get sponsorships, but they would be well served to have a policy in place and meet zoning regulations. The City Manager responded he will bring a policy for Council's consideration. After discussing each item and the urgency to start the work, Council Member Covington motioned to designate \$18,000.00 for the benches and in-field renovations. Council Member Martin inquired on the other needs. Mrs. Covington amended her motion to designate \$20,000.00 for the renovations. She inquired of the City Manager where funds were available. Mr. Christian responded they could allocate from the Fund Balance; the City still has funds from the State Capital Infrastructure Appropriation, and the ARP fund money is available. Council Member Sellers provided the second to the motion. The vote was 5-0. Mayor Bayless suggested football and soccer would need to be played somewhere other than Memorial Park. Mr. Christian explained last year the City installed a fence so no activities would take place on the infield. Mr. Gordon suggested if the outfield was used, they should overseed and fertilize the area after the games are over.

Other Business

7. City Manager's Report

City Manager Matthew Christian announced Raleigh St. remains closed for railroad repairs and asked everyone to be mindful. He advised Staff has started the Budget Meetings; the next Budget Work Session for Council is March 28th. The Manager mentioned the loss of Volunteer Firefighter Greg Swails and commended the Hamlet Fire Department for their representation and support to the family. Mr. Christian announced the City's recent auction, of items that had accrued over many years, raised \$115,000.00. He thanked Staff for their assistance. Council Member McQueen commented the funds would be a good source for the items Council had just discussed. The Manager answered the revenues will be split between the City's funds and Council can discuss allocating them at the Budget Work Sessions.

Mayor Bayless inquired on the progress of the South Hamlet Park. The Manager advised the City has received a quote of \$23,455.50 and the cameras are on order. Council Member McQueen asked what type of cameras would be used. Mr. Christian answered the same cameras used by the Police Department. Council discussed the need to approve the quote so the equipment would be in place before summer. The Mayor inquired what funds would pay for the purchase. The Manager answered the City received approximately \$18,000.00 from the insurance claim last year. Council Member Stuart provided the motion to approve the quote. The second was given by Council Member Covington. The vote was 5-0. Mayor Bayless asked the residents in the area to be vigilant and report any issues they see in the neighborhood.

8. Comments of Council

Council Member Martin offered his sympathy to the Greg Swails family and commended the Fire Department for the great job they did representing the City.

Council Member Sellers reported he has received good feedback from the citizens on the work the street sweeper is doing. He thanked the City employees for their hard work and Chip Gordon for his great representation of the Legion Program and Historic Memorial Park.

Council Member Stuart thanked the citizens for attending. He said, in celebrating Black History Month, he wanted to thank all the people whose shoulders he is standing on for allowing him to serve on Council. He thanked his colleagues, saying there was always equal access across the Board; they were always striving for equity. Mr. Stuart offered appreciation to the County and those serving it.

Council Member Covington discussed the beauty of living in a small town as she described an issue with a major leak at the Soup Kitchen. The quick response received shows how fortunate we are that people pitch in and help. She added the City employees represent Hamlet professionally and make this community a great place to live.

Council Member McQueen inquired on the Pine Street property that is in court. Attorney Morphis advised the December hearing was continued until yesterday. His colleague, Brady Herman, was at the hearing. The Judge was ready to go through the process when she received an email that Mr. Edens was in the hospital. The Court confirmed that he was just released. Judge Layton moved the hearing to March, but indicated this was the last continuation. Mr. Morphis stated the Judge needs to understand the length of time in this case and the seriousness of it; the chimney fell onto a neighbor's driveway.

Council Member McQueen discussed an issue with the City's policy of adjustments for water and sewer bills. He referred to a resident that had 2 high sewer bills due to a water leak. The leak occurred in the middle of the cycle. Mr. McQueen suggested the City review the policy and possibly change it to an adjustment for one incident rather than an adjustment for one bill. He commented the person he was referring to had a previous leak, so the change in policy would not benefit him, but it would others. Council asked if the Manager had discretion in these situations. The City Manager responded there are conflicting policies. Based on their comments, he will bring back to Council policies that are focused on the incident and/or delegate some of the authority to the City Manager for their consideration.

Council Member McQueen asked the City Attorney for clarification on the current law for remote meetings. Mr. Morphis responded, prior to Covid, Council could set its own policy. Now the law is clear that you can only have remote meetings during a Declared State of Emergency.

Mr. McQueen commended the Police Department on the improvements to the Washington Avenue area. He reported Major Chitwood went to UNCP and spoke with the Criminal Justice Club. In his speech and presentation he showed students good form and dusting for fingerprints; he provided a tremendous demonstration. Several students showed interest for employment. The Council Member also congratulated former City Manager Jonathan Blanton on his recent award for Excellence in Government Leadership. He offered condolences to the family of Greg Swails, saying he was a great asset to the Hamlet Fire Department, City and a great neighbor.

Comments from Attendees

Ms. Rachel Tillman was not present during the initial time to speak with Council. She advised she lived at the lower end of Charlotte Street and has been trying to get the City to do work to her driveway. The City put rocks, but they are causing people to fall. The City Manager responded Ms. Tillman made a request months ago to Public Works Director Billy Stubbs to have the City bring the rocks in. They discussed the type of rocks and the issues they may cause. She has since spoken with Interim Public Works Director Robert Brown. Council Member McQueen asked if the problem was water. Ms. Tillman answered there was no problem with water, but she cannot park in her yard. Council Member Sellers stated the issue was caused by the contractors when the trees were cut and land cleared. Mr. Christian advised he will investigate the matter.

9. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Bayless expressed his sympathy to the Swails family. He reported the crews are doing a great job, saying Doc Sylvain is always working and happy.

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

At 7:13 pm, Mayor Bayless asked for a motion to go into Closed Session and read the Statute. Attorney Morphis asked to add Attorney Client Privilege. Council Member Sellers made the motion. The second was offered by Council Member Covington. The vote was 5-0.

Return to Open Session

At 7:45 pm, Council Member Sellers made the motion to return to Open Session. The second was given by Council Member Covington. The vote was 5-0.

11. Adjourn

At 7:46 pm, Council Members Covington and Stuart provided the motion and second to adjourn the meeting. The vote was 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Gail M. Strickland, City Clerk

