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**CITY OF HAMLET REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
HAMLET CITY HALL- COUNCIL CHAMBERS
201 MAIN STREET, HAMLET, NC 28345
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2026
6:00 PM
Minutes**

Governing Body Present:

Mayor	Amy Guinn
Mayor Pro-Tem	Abbie Covington
Council Member	Oscar Sellers
Council Member	Eddie Martin
Council Member	Tony Clewis

Staff Present:

Interim City Manager	Mackenzie Webb
City Attorney	TC Morphis
City Clerk	Heather Hawks

1. Call to Order

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

2. Invocation/Moment of Silence

Pastor Ross provided the invocation.

3. Adoption of Agenda

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington motioned to adopt the agenda. Council Member Martin provided the second. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Consent Agenda

Council Member Clewis made a motion to adopt the Consent Agenda. Mayor Pro-Tem Covington provided the second. The motion passed unanimously.

New Business

5. Public Records Request Cost Recovery Ordinance 2026-9

Interim City Manager Webb stated that the City has been receiving an excessive number of extensive public records requests that have taken a significant amount of staff time and legal review to compile. The purpose of this proposed ordinance is to establish reasonable procedures and cost recovery measures for responding to public records requests in accordance with North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 132-6.2(b), while ensuring transparency and responsible use of municipal resources. The service charges shall be based on the actual hourly wage of the personnel performing the work; reasonable and necessary; and limited to the time required to fulfill the request. The ordinance states that public records requests requiring more than three (3) hours of cumulative staff time to locate, review, redact, compile, or produce records may be considered voluminous requests and will incur the special service charge consistent with NCGS §132-6.2, after the initial 3 hours of staff time. She stated that the City may also work with the requester to clarify or narrow the scope of the request to reduce costs and process time. She stated that currently the City has spent approximately \$18,000 on total legal fees related to these excessive records requests since July 2025.

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington stated that she had reviewed the proposed ordinance and believed it was fair to recover the City's costs associated with responding to voluminous public records requests. She stated that she is in favor of approving the ordinance because it will set a standard for the City to respond to these records requests in a manner that is fair to the public and City administration.

Council Member Sellers stated that he is opposed to charging citizens for public records requests and asked whether citizens could come to City Hall to look through records themselves and review them in person.

City Attorney Morphis explained that the process would depend on the nature of the records requested. He stated that certain records involving personnel or closed session matters may contain confidential information and would require review prior to release. He stated for routine requests, such as meeting minutes, citizens may be directed to records already available on the City's website. He also explained that extensive requests may require significant staff and attorney time to review records and determine what information may lawfully be released.

Council Member Sellers asked whether documents maintained at City Hall are considered public records.

City Attorney Morphis responded that documents are considered public records in accordance with the North Carolina Public Records Law and that the public should be given access to records that are not confidential or otherwise exempt from disclosure. He emphasized the importance of maintaining the integrity of City files by having staff locate the requested documents.

Council Member Sellers stated that, in his opinion, the proposed process could deny citizens the ability to view public documents.

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington clarified that the proposed ordinance would not deny access to public records but would allow the City to recover a portion of its costs when requests are voluminous. She reiterated that the City has incurred approximately \$18,000 in legal expenses associated with such requests.

Council Member Sellers stated that taxpayers should be permitted to view public documents.

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington responded that the majority of the referenced \$18,000 in costs resulted from requests associated with one taxpayer.

Council Member Sellers stated that all citizens pay taxes.

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington clarified that the ordinance would not prevent citizens from accessing public records but would establish a process to help ensure that extensive requests do not result in excessive costs to the City or consume an unreasonable amount of staff time.

Council Member Sellers stated that he did not support charging taxpayers for access to information.

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington stated that the County and Library also charge citizens for copies.

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington made a motion to adopt Ordinance 2026-9 Public Records Request Cost Recovery, Council Member Clewis provided the second. The motion passed 4 to 1 with Council Member Sellers in opposition.

6. 9/11 Day of Remembrance Proclamation

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington read the proclamation in recognition of 9/11.

7. Constitution Week Proclamation

Mayor Guinn read the proclamation in recognition of Constitution Week.

8. John Coltrane Proclamation

Mayor Guinn read the proclamation in recognition of John Coltrane.

Other Business

9. Public Comments

Esco Latimer expressed ongoing concerns regarding Mayor Pro-Tem Covington and requested an investigation and her resignation. He also expressed concerns regarding charges associated with previous public records requests, stating that he still had not received all the records requested.

Denise Cozart provided an update on the Doc Hills Family Home Care facility project, stating that the project remains on schedule and that the grant application is due October 13. She stated that she has been working with City administration to ensure the project remains on track and reiterated that the City has no financial obligation associated with the project but will serve as the fiduciary agent for the grant application.

Pat Preslar asked whether the previously referenced \$18,000 represented employee expenses or legal expenses. Interim City Manager Webb responded that the amount represented legal fees related to excessive public record requests. Mr. Preslar also asked whether any policy or procedural changes had resulted from the public records request process. Interim City Manager Webb stated that no changes had been necessary. Council Member Sellers asked whether the \$18,000 included materials associated with the requests. Interim City Manager Webb clarified that the \$18,000 represented legal fees only and did not include materials or staff time.

Amber Daniels requested that the City improve financial transparency by posting full budget amendment reports online, including descriptions for public review. She thanked Mechelle and Interim City Manager Webb for allowing her to conduct a chalk art contest at Food Truck Friday in recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month. She stated that she would provide resources related to suicide prevention and mental health awareness and announced giveaways for both older and younger participants.

Gerard Morrison stated that he had submitted a resolution earlier in the day recognizing John Coltrane. He encouraged the community to work together rather than compete against one another and invited everyone to attend the Education Festival honoring John Coltrane on Saturday, October 3, from 12:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m.

10. City Manager's Report

Interim City Manager Webb thanked the community members and local leaders who attended the Imperial Foods Memorial Service in honor of the 35th anniversary. She also expressed appreciation to Doc Sylvain and his crew for preparing the monument and site, and to Chief Goodwin and Assistant Chief Lassiter for their assistance in organizing the event honoring the victims and first responders.

Interim City Manager Webb reported that CodeWright is expected to provide its full set of recommendations and Code Diagnosis next week as work continues on the City's Unified Development Ordinance.

She stated that CROM is onsite to begin construction on both clearwells simultaneously for the Water Plant and that this phase of the project is expected to take approximately 15 weeks to complete.

Interim City Manager Webb stated that engineers are finalizing bid documents to begin the informal bid process for the Senior Center Retaining Wall. She stated that a pre-bid site visit will be held in the coming weeks, with the bid anticipated to be awarded in early October.

She reported that for the City Lake Trail clearing and grading have been completed with the project on track for completion by mid-October.

Lastly, Interim City Manager Webb highlighted upcoming events:

- Food Trucks and a Movie in Main Street Park Friday, September 11.
- Tribute to John Coltrane's 100th Birthday on September 23 at the John Coltrane Mural.
- Nitrofest in downtown Rockingham September 24 with NHRA Nationals at the Rockingham Dragway September 25-27.
- Seaboard Festival and 5k is fast approaching, the last Saturday of October, which falls on Halloween this year.

11. Comments of Council

Council Member Martin thanked the City of Hamlet staff for their efforts in organizing the Imperial Foods Memorial Service.

Council Member Sellers had no comments.

Council Member Clewis thanked the City of Hamlet, Abbie Covington, Calvin White and Richard Lassiter for their attendance at the Imperial Foods Memorial Service. He stated that the City's budget is managed appropriately and noted that the financial reports provide information regarding expenditures and available fund balances. He also stated that he plans to attend the John Coltrane Education Festival on October 3. Lastly, he stated it's time for Council to conduct a three-month evaluation of Interim City Manager Webb.

Mayor Pro-Tem Covington thanked City staff for their efforts in organizing the Imperial Foods Memorial Service. She stated that the City held four budget sessions prior to finalizing the budget, during which departmental needs were evaluated. She stated that the budget meetings are open to the public and encouraged everyone to attend in the future. She stated that monthly financial reports provide information regarding the City's current budget.

Mayor Guinn stated that Council Member Stuart wanted her to thank citizens for attending the meeting and for their involvement in the community. She stated that he also wanted her to recognize John Coltrane in honor of his 100th birthday this month.

12. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Guinn thanked American Woodmark for their assistance with the Scam Jam held at the Hamlet Senior Center. She announced that football and cheerleading registration would end this Friday. She stated that United Way Days of Caring would be held September 16 at Backpack Pals and September 18 at Our Daily Bread for City volunteers.

13. Motion to go into Closed Session per NCGS § 143-318.11 (a)(3)(6) for attorney-client privilege and personnel.

At 6:38 pm, Council Member Clewis motioned, seconded by Council Member Martin, to go into closed session for attorney-client privilege and personnel. The motion passed unanimously.

Return to Open Session

At 7:03 pm, Mayor Pro-Tem Covington motioned to return to Open Session, seconded by Council Member Clewis. The motion passed unanimously.

14. Motion to Adjourn

Council Member Sellers motioned, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Covington to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously at 7:04 pm.