



SHELLY HORTON JR
MAYOR

STEPHANIE SULLIVANT-COLLIER
CAO/ TOWN CLERK

TOWN OF BENTON LOUISIANA

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

MAYOR AND BOARD OF ALDERMAN
TOWN OF BENTON

105 SIBLEY STREET, BENTON, BOSSIER PARISH, LOUISIANA
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2024, 6:00 PM

Mayor Horton introduced Rep. Adam Bass, who is attending the meeting as a guest.

The Town of Benton Council met in regular and legal session on the 12th day of February 2024, at 6:00 p.m., in the Benton Council Chambers, Benton Town Hall, Benton, Louisiana. Mayor Shelly Horton called the Public Hearing to order. Stephanie Collier, called the roll, with all members as follows:

Alderman Jackie Carr	ABSENT
Alderman Tiffany Manning	PRESENT
Alderman Ron Jones	PRESENT
Alderman James Friday	PRESENT
Alderman Wayne Cathcart	PRESENT

Alderman Manning gave the invocation and Alderman Jones led the pledge. Others present were Attorney Erwin, Stephanie Collier, Chief Collier, Officer Mora, and members of the public. Motion was made by Alderman Friday seconded by Alderman Manning to approve the agenda. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

1. AN ORDINANCE APPROPRIATING \$55,000.00 FROM THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT GRANT FUND FOR PREMIUM PAY ALLOWANCES TO ELIGIBLE FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES OF THE TOWN OF BENTON

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WHEREAS, in recent years, a public health emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic affected state and local governments, including the Town of Benton. The national emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic was terminated by President Joe Biden when H.J. Res. 7 was signed into law with an effective date of April 10, 2023. This terminated the COVID-19 public health emergency; and

WHEREAS the employees and departments of the Town of Benton continued to provide in-person interactions with the public during the declared national health emergency in order to maintain continuity of operations of critical infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Benton has received grant funds pursuant to the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (“ARPA”) and the United States Treasury has promulgated rules for the use of such ARPA funds; and

WHEREAS a local government workforce is necessary to maintain continuity of operations of essential critical infrastructure, such as the employees of the Town of Benton who continued to provide in-person interactions with the public or whose co-workers continued to provide in-person interactions with the public during the declared national health emergency are eligible for a premium pay allowance to be appropriated from ARPA funds; and

WHEREAS full-time employees of the municipality and police department who have had no breaks in service from January 31, 2020, through April 10, 2023, and who have remained employed through the effective date of this Ordinance, are eligible to receive premium pay. Eligible employees will be pro-rated according to their hire date between January 31, 2020, and April 10, 2023. Persons employed as temporary, elected, seasonal, contract, inactive, or part-time employees are not eligible for a premium; and

WHEREAS each eligible employee will receive a one-time payment of up to \$4,000.00 from the available ARPA Grant Fund for premium pay.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED, by the Board of Aldermen of the Town of Benton, Bossier Parish, Louisiana, in regular session convened, that the Town of Benton appropriates \$55,000.00 from the available ARPA Grant Fund to provide a premium pay to eligible current employees. The above and foregoing Ordinance was read in full at open and legal session convened,

No Comments were made.

Mayor Horton adjourned the Public Hearing

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**REGULAR SESSION
MINUTES
MAYOR AND BOARD OF ALDERMAN
TOWN OF BENTON
105 SIBLEY STREET, BENTON, BOSSIER PARISH, LOUISIANA
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2024, 6:00 PM**

The Town of Benton Council met in regular and legal session on the 12th day of February 2024, at 6:00 p.m., in the Benton Council Chambers, Benton Town Hall, Benton, Louisiana. Mayor Shelly Horton called the Regular Session Meeting to order. Stephanie Collier, called the roll, with all members as follows:

Alderman Jackie Carr – ABSENT
Alderman Tiffany Manning – PRESENT
Alderman Ron Jones – PRESENT
Alderman James Friday - PRESENT
Alderman Wayne Cathcart -PRESENT

A motion by Alderman seconded by Alderman to amend the agenda by adding item 7. Approval of the 2023 Audit by Cook and Morehart. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
ABSENT: Alderman Carr

A motion by Alderman Manning seconded by Alderman Friday to approve the agenda as amended. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
ABSENT: Alderman Carr

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A motion by Alderman Jones seconded by Alderman Manning to approve the minutes from January meeting. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

OLD BUSINESS

1. ORDINANCE 589 of 2024

AN ORDINANCE APPROPRIATING \$55,000.00 FROM THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT GRANT FUND FOR PREMIUM PAY ALLOWANCES TO ELIGIBLE FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES OF THE TOWN OF BENTON

Alderman Manning asked how many employees will be paid. Stephanie Collier stated that 9 employee will get the full amount and 13 will get prorated amounts.

A motion by Alderman Cathcart seconded by Alderman Manning to adopt Ordinance 589. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

NEW BUSINESS

1. Consider approval of the following alcohol permits:

Motion by Alderman Jones seconded by Alderman Manning to approve Trejos permit. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

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Motion by Alderman Friday seconded by Alderman Jones to approve Dixie Mart permit. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

- 2. Consider **Renewal of Vehicle Physical Damage Policy** with Rod Prejean Insurance: Mayor Horton discussed that we dropped some of the older vehicles which brought the premium amount down. Motion by Alderman Jones seconded by Alderman Friday to approve renewal of Vehicle Insurance with Rod Prejean. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

- 3. Consider Resolution 1 of 2024:

Authorized Signature Cards Home Federal Bank

WHEREAS the Town of Benton is determined to grant signing and authority to certain person(s) described hereunder.

BE IT RESOLVED the financial institute, Home Federal Bank, at any one or more of its offices or branches, be and it hereby is designated as a depository for the funds of the Town of Benton, which may be withdrawn on checks, drafts, and notes of other orders for the payment of monies bearing the following appropriate number of signatures. All checks must have two signatures, the Official and the individual certifying signature the Authorized order of signatures required on checks are as follows:

Authorized Official: Shelly Horton
Certifying Signature: Stephanie Collier or Hope Murphy

Authorized Official: Ron Jones
Certifying Signature: Stephanie Collier or Hope Murphy

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Aldermen does hereby authorize and approve the attached Banking Resolutions recognizing all accounts held by the Town of Benton at Home Federal Bank does hereby authorize Shelly Horton and Ron Jones, the Officials and Stephanie Collier and Hope Murphy, the Certifying individuals of the Town of Benton.

Motion by Alderman Cathcart seconded by Alderman Manning to adopt Resolution 1 of 2024. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

4. Chief Collier explained that the department lost four employees all within days of each other. All three of the employees that were in the academy dropped out and quit. The fourth employee resigned due to personal reasons. Alderman Manning asked about the contract that those employees signed. The Chief explained that it only becomes valid if the employee completes the academy. Which they did not. Alderman Manning asked how we can prevent that from happening in the future. The chief explained that Chief Collier presented **Mckayla Deen** for a full-time new hire. He discussed that she has been pre-approved by the mayor due to four vacancies within a few days of each other leaving the department shorthanded. The Chief stated that Mckayla is post certified and has 5 years' experience. She is coming from Shreveport Police Department where she was a patrol officer. She came up with excellent recommendations. I make the recommendation to hire Mckayla Deen. Alderman Jones: Why did you leave Shreveport? Officer Deen: Wanted to move out of Shreveport all together. I moved to Haughton and then applied here. Alderman Cathcart asked if she left Shreveport for Benton. Mckayla: No, I left Shreveport in July of last year and only recently did I hear about an opening her in Benton. Alderman Manning: What were your duties in Shreveport? Makayla: I was patrol. Alderman Manning: You just decided you wanted to stop? Mckayla: Yes ma'am. Alderman Cathcart: Why would you want to leave Shreveport? Mckayla: I wanted to leave because I was no longer happy in that department. Chief: She was miserable. Mayor: She shared with me in my office that the workload in Shreveport is surmountable. Alderman Manning: So, you were miserable on your job in Shreveport, but you want to get another job that is like the job you just left. You basically going to be doing the same thing. Chief: Shreveport is completely different than Benton. Benton is a lot slower and handles a lot less calls and lower crime rate. Alderman Manning: How can we keep from losing employees? Chief: There is no guarantee. People are unpredictable. Alderman Cathcart: My concern is that you lost four out of nine employees in one week. Chief: Three of them were in the academy. As soon as they started exercising, they quit. I think there was a team effort there. they just quit. Alderman Manning: I am concerned that you just left your job just because you were not satisfied with your previous department. What makes you think this will be a better fit? Mckayla: I have only been here since February 1, and I am already Happy. Alderman Manning: I am still not getting the connection with a lateral move to a smaller town. Alderman Friday: Asked so what was it about you last position that made you unhappy? Were

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you overlooked for a promotion? Mckayla: No sir, you start getting promotions at 5 ½ years and I left before I would be eligible. Alderman Manning: I don't understand why you would leave a job and go to another department that you will be doing the same job but less pay. Mckayla: Money doesn't matter as long as you are Happy. Alderman Friday: I have had the same thing happen before. Where I made less but because I was happy with my job. I understand. I like to see her hired and she seems like she has a good personality. I would like to welcome her aboard. Alderman Jones stated that I can understand why you moved from Shreveport because I left Shreveport because it was higher crime. Chief: She is training under Officer Weaver and is doing great. Alderman Manning: What can we put in place to keep this from happening again? Alderman Cathcart: I have the same concern. Chief: We can put them through the academy as soon as one is available when they are not post certified.

A motion by Alderman Friday seconded by Alderman Jones to approve Officer Deen as a new full-time office. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

Chief Collier Introduced **Mitchell Mora**. He is Cesar Mora's son. Mitchell is 18 will be 19 next month. He is in the National Guard. He is not post certified but will be enrolled in the next available academy. Alderman Cathcart: You are in the National Guard? How was that? Mora: Yes sir, it was ok. It got a little rough at times, but it was ok. Alderman Manning: How does working full-time and being in the National Guard work? Chief: We will work around that because their training is on the weekends and if he were to be deployed, we will hold his job and of coarse work around that. Alderman Cathcart: Why police work? Mora: I love this country is why I went into the military, and I want to help people so that's why I picked this job. After various questions from the council a motion was made by Alderman Jones seconded by Alderman Manning to approve Mitchell Mora to be hired as a full-time office. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

Alderman Manning asked if there is a way to make new non-post hires to go through the academy first? Chief stated that we can when the first academy becomes available. Alderman Cathcart asked about retirees from the BPSD? Chief stated that he is open to the idea.

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Mayor Horton asked Senator Bass if he had any comments about police officer shortage. Senator Bass stated that it is a national problem. We have a shortage of not only police officers but teachers and nurses. There is a lot of discussion right now in Work Force Development and Career Technical Education. As far as specific, the closer we get to the Regular Session we will know what the budget looks like. So, for now I will say that I don't know, but everything that I have mentioned is a workforce problem in our state as well as the entire nation.

Chief Collier introduced Danny Hatcher. He is a post certified officer who has worked for the BPSD. He started in Ruston and moved back to Benton and went to work for the BSO at the jail. But there is such a shortage that they weren't pulling from the jail. He decided he did not want to pursue a career in law enforcement working in the jail, so he applied here. Alderman Jones asked if he has worked patrol any. Hatcher stated he worked in Ruston for two and a half years working patrol working everything from domestics to drunk college kids. A motion was made by Alderman Manning seconded by Alderman Jones to approve Danny Hatcher to be hired as a full-time office. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

5. Motion by Alderman Cathcart seconded by Alderman Friday to approve the Month to date budgets and monthly financials. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

6. Mayor Horton gave a brief update on all active project:

- Simpson Street work we are about a week into the project, and we expect it to stay on track.
- Sewer project we are still working. It was a 700k LCDBG grant and is still moving forward.
- Spray Park has had a few delays due to the weather, but we do expect it to be ready by spring.
- The school board decided they are going to tear down the old field house and build a storage facility and they are going to renovate the Old High School gym and turn it into modern office space.

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- Sent out info to the council on the EPA project and cleanup of the Creosote site and they will be holding a public meeting at the Library on Thursday, February 22, at 5:30pm where they will be answering questions from the public.

(Item added by amendment)

7. Mayor Horton stated we received a letter of engagement from Cook and Morehart for the 2023 audit. A motion by Alderman Manning seconded by Alderman Friday to approve Cook and Morehart to do the 2023 annual audit. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

Citizen Dawn Bushnell spoke about the ballpark traffic and putting traffic signs up to slow them down and make them stop at the stop signs. Chief Collier stated that he will look into ordering signs and get those put up.

A motion by Alderman Manning seconded by Alderman Jones to adjourn the meeting. Mayor Horton called for any comments, there being none the following votes recorded:

YEAS: Alderman Manning, Alderman Jones, Alderman Friday, and Alderman Cathcart

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

ABSENT: Alderman Carr

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