

MINUTES

CITY OF HARTFORD, ALABAMA

CITY COUNCIL MEETING

APRIL, 3, 2023

JOHNNY HUGHES COMMUNITY CENTER COURTROOM, 405 SOUTH THIRD AVENUE, HARTFORD, ALABAMA 36344

ATTENDANCE: Mayor Pro Tem Ron Adams, Councilmembers Melissa Clements, Ted Thompson, Zane Fowler and Paul Fondren

OTHERS IF ATTENDANCE: Fire and Rescue Chief Phillip Herring, Police Chief Annie Ward, City Magistrate Vernon Alford, See Attachment for others present.

CALL TO ORDER- The Mayor Pro Tem called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PRAYER AND PLEDGE- Councilmember Paul Fondren led the prayer which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

CHANGE OF AGENDA- Mayor Pro Tem Adams announced a change in the agenda. The items on the agenda were changed to the following order:

1. Declaration of Mayor's Seat Vacancy
2. Motion to approve American Rescue Plan Resolution
3. Jeanna Brannon
4. Jerry Justice

Item #5 was deleted due to lack of information.

APPROVAL OF MARCH 20, 2023, A motion was made by Councilmember Paul Fondren to approve the minutes of March 20, 2023. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Zane Fowler. All were in favor.

APPROVAL OF DECLARATION OF MAYOR'S SEAT VACANCY – Mayor Pro Tem Adams advised the council on the rules and regulations of declaring the Mayor's seat as vacant since Mayor Neil Strickland resigned effective March 31, 2023. Councilmember Paul Fondren made the motion to declare the mayor's seat vacant. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Zane Fowler. A roll call vote was called. Each councilmember voted in favor.

NOTICE OF A SPECIAL CALLED MEETING – Mayor Pro Tem Adams advised the council on the policy and procedure in filling the vacancy of the mayor's seat as outlined by the League of Municipalities. It is the duty of the council to elect a mayor. If a mayor is not elected by the council within 60 days of the vacancy of the mayor's seat, the responsibility is then assumed by the Governor of the State of Alabama to appoint one. Further, Mayor Pro Tem requested a special meeting for Monday, April 10, 2023, at

6:00 p.m. at the Johnny Hughes Community Center Courtroom. The purpose of this meeting is for the nominating and voting for a new mayor.

APPROVAL OF AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN RESOLUTION – Mayor Pro Tem Adams reminded the council of the information received at a previous meeting regarding the American Rescue Plan Resolution. Administered through the Geneva County Commission, this plan can reimburse the city for a full-time rescue crew, up to \$100,000 total with an end date of December 2024. By participating in this program, the city can receive quarterly reimbursements up to \$22,000. The motion to approve the American Rescue Plan Resolution was made by Councilmember Zane Fowler. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Ted Thompson. All voted in favor of this with the exception of Councilmember Melissa Clemmons who abstained.

COMMENTS BY JEANNA BRANNON - Jeanna Brannon spoke to the council in regards to city finances, the city purchase order system, city contracts and asked about the status of the state audit. She advised the council on the need to have transparency as they deliberate on electing a new mayor. After saying she was glad that the city is taking steps to review the city's expenditures on a monthly basis, she questioned the balance of the city's bank account and the ability to pay bills due this month. Second, she asked about current bills which may be past 90 days. Third, she asked about the city's funds and if there were enough funds to pay for expenditures outside of the regular monthly expenditures. Ms. Brannon asked about the audit by the state public examiners and the timeline of when it is expected. She asked for the city to make this open and transparent once it is received. Next, she raised the importance of the public comments section always being included in city council meetings. She admonished the Mayor Pro Tem for this not being done at this meeting. She asked for the council to take steps to add public comments to this meeting tonight. Ms. Brannon discussed how she took the appropriate steps to be added to the agenda, according to the rules. She said she was advised by the Mayor Pro Tem on the multiple reasons in which he would "shut her down". These include, but are not limited to, using the name of a vendor, a vendor's invoice, or a department head's name. Ms. Brannon felt that this is a violation of her First Amendment rights. Ms. Brannon asked the city council to do some soul searching due to the fact that 9 employees in positions of leadership have resigned during this council's tenure.

COMMENTS BY JERRY JOE JUSTICE – Jerry Joe Justice spoke to the council in regard to reports he had received that his electricity bill had been being discussed by someone affiliated with the city. He advised his methods of keeping his electricity bill low and said he did not want his private information discussed.

COUNCIL COMMENTS – Mayor Pro Tem Adams reminded council members of the special called meeting. Councilmember Clements said that the water on Radford Street is down to Tate's Mini Mall now. She said she would appreciate that being taken care of.

DEPARTMENT HEAD COMMENTS – Recreation Park Director Nick Holley submitted his resignation. He stated that he had been harassed and felt that he has been treated poorly by the council, especially in regard to his requests for money for the recreation park. He said he changed his initial resignation date from March 31, 2023, to April 4, 2023, so he could speak at the council meeting and not be censured. Mr. Holley scolded the council on what he views as out of control spending, although he admitted that he requested \$74,000 for the renovation of the old tennis court and basketball court area to turn it into a pickle ball court. Mr. Holley reminisced about how he was hired as the very first director of the recreation park when it was first constructed. He accused the council of running off the previous city clerk who had been employed with the city for 20 years. He said that nine department heads have left due to the city council. He addressed the budget for the recreation park and the need for a shower at the park for the director to be able to shower after getting dirty and sweaty. He addressed the tile floor and the steps he had to take to get it replaced. Mr. Holley discussed residency requirements for the city council. He brought up a fight he had at a basketball game and how it took 45 minutes to get a police officer. He said that Chief Ward's budget had been cut by \$81,000 and that is why it took that long. Mr. Holley thanked Lisa Cotton for her support and help. He continued to criticize the council about smart meters for the utility department. He brought up the money from concessions he turned in to the city and how it was put into the general fund. He did not agree that this money should go to the city's general fund. In conclusion, Mr. Holley read his formal resignation.

Police Chief Annie Ward requested permission to shut down a portion of 3rd Avenue between First National Bank and the Square on Thursday night. This is for the purpose of Geneva County High School's Prom. The Senior Lead-out will be at First National Bank with the Square being involved. Once Lead-out is over, the road will be opened back up. Councilmember Paul Fondren made the motion which was seconded by Councilmember Zane Fowler. All voted in favor of this.

ADJOURNMENT- The Mayor Pro Tem asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Paul Fondren made the motion which was seconded by Councilmember Ted Thompson. All voted in favor of this.



Presiding Officer

