

**MINUTES OF THE BENTON HARBOR CITY COMMISSION
LULA LEE COMMISSION CHAMBERS
JUNE 21, 2022**

The regular meeting of the Benton Harbor City Commission was called to order by Mayor Muhammad at 7:01p.m. Invocation led by Commissioner Singleton, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by City Manager Mitchell. Roll call showed the following members present: Commissioners Adams, Clark-Griffin, Henry, Isom, Singleton, Mayor Muhammad. Members Absent: Commissioners Edwards, Henderson, Mayor Pro-Tem Seats. Also present: City Manager Mitchell, Deputy Director of Public Safety Clark, Assessor Story, Attorney Racht and City Clerk Moore.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Isom to approve the Regular Minutes of June 6, 2022 and Special Minutes of June 14, 2022. Motion carried on the following roll call vote: YEAS: Commissioners Clark-Griffin, Henry, Isom, Singleton, Adams, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: None. Members Abstain: None. Members Absent: Commissioners Edwards, Henderson, Mayor Pro Tem Seats.

APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS PAYABLE

A motion was made by Commissioner Singleton and supported by Commissioner Isom to approve the Accounts Payable Listing.

During Discussion, Commissioner Adams stated she cannot and will not support the AP until a Finance Director is present and there is transparency for the taxpayers.

Motion carried on the following roll call vote. YEAS: Commissioners Henry, Isom, Singleton, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: Commissioner Adams, Clark-Griffin. Members Abstain: None. Members Absent: Commissioners Edwards, Henderson, Mayor Pro Tem Seats.

PRESENTATION – MICHIGAN AFL-CIO (AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR AND CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS)

Colleen Sullivan and JoAnn with the Workforce Development Institute gave a presentation of the Access All program and offered an invitation to partner with the City. Mayor Muhammad welcomed them back for a more formal presentation and Q&A session during an upcoming Planning & Economic Development Committee.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

Alvin Bridgewater, a grass cutting contractor for the city, asked for clarification on Jack Campbell cutting the cemetery and other city property. He stated he was told once you got the cemetery, that was it. He doesn't have a problem with that, what he does have a problem with is someone making twice as much as him when he gets the job done. He stated he was part of grass cutting at the cemetery last year and had to do other's jobs. He suggests there be 3-4 cutters and everybody gets their own section and if someone isn't doing their job they shouldn't get paid. He asks to be treated fairly. He is asking him to be removed from the cemetery but he needs help.

Lee Reed, Chairman of Planning Commission gave an update on the Master Plan. He stated he discovered a large amount of the citizens doesn't know what a Master Plan or Economic Development is. He stated the website has attracted over 600 inquiries. He is willing to meet with anyone that would like to go over information.

Shaquille Turner stated over a month ago in the Public Safety Committee the Mayor said that he was going to execute the buy of asphalt for potholes, it was discovered today that it was sitting down at Public Works. Alex Little stated that when the machine was purchased from Ohio that the potholes were going to be fixed. Rieth Riley is right around the corner, he asked why the potholes haven't been fixed. He said there have been no responses from the Commissioners or City Hall. He said last July the Mayor said that residents would get a response in 30 days, but it has not been done. The taxpayers deserve better and the machine should be moving tomorrow.

James Duncan stated that the citizens should have paperwork for presentations so they know what's going on. He said he's been asking for bathrooms and a drinking fountain at Yarbrough Park. He feels like he doesn't get any respect. And the citizens need to know about the river and why there isn't bathrooms or a drinking fountain.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Commissioner Isom requested to separate RESOLUTION APPOINTING JAMES WILLIAMS AS FINANCE DIRECTOR FOR THE CITY OF BENTON HARBOR from the Consent Calendar for discussion.

The following Consent Calendar items were moved by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Singleton. Motion carried on a the following roll call vote: YAYS: Commissioners Henry, Isom, Singleton, Adams, Clark-Griffin, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Commissioner Henderson, Mayor Pro Tem Seats, Commissioner Edwards.

RESOLUTION FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE GRANT (2020)

RESOLUTION FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE UNITED STATED DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE GRANT (2021)

SEPARATED ITEMS

Mayor Muhammad yielded to Commissioner Isom, who stated there were 3 interviews conducted with Mr. James Williams. This has been a long time coming, sometimes patience, trusting the process, doing due diligence the Personnel & Finance Committee went through the resumes, talked with candidates and has found the right candidate for the position.

Motion was made by Commissioner Singleton and supported by Commissioner Clark-Griffin to approve the RESOLUTION APPOINTING JAMES WILLIAMS AS FINANCE DIRECTOR FOR THE CITY OF BENTON HARBOR.

During Discussion, Commissioner Adams stated it's been way overdue riding against the charter. She thanked Commissioner Isom for finally bringing this forward and understanding we are no longer under emergency management. She stated this gentleman has skills and ability to bring us together and we will now have someone that can teach grant writing and how to keep up with the paperwork and go after more funding. Grateful to be at the stage to bring on someone that can answer questions on the city finances.

Mayor Muhammad read the justification presented for the resolution: "Section 3.17 of the City Charter states that the Commission shall appoint the Director of Finance and they shall be responsible to the supervision and control of the Commission in the discharge of their duties. Mr. William's is currently a Senior Auditor with the State of Michigan Department of Education and Department of Treasury. He holds an Associates in Accounting, Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration, and Master in Taxation. He holds experience in taxes, auditing, and financial statement preparation. He has strong knowledge of accounting principles and the taxation process and possesses a clear understanding of governmental regulation, tax compliance, and enforcement rules." Financial Impact is a starting salary of \$85,500 per year, plus standard benefits. The city has paid Plante Moran to head the financial department a minimum of \$240,000 so this gives the city an opportunity increase that budget, and allows for the finance department to be manned by an individual who would be responsible to the City Commission, who would be responsible to the City residents.

Mayor Muhammad called for the question, **Motion carried** on a the following roll call vote: YAYS: Commissioners Henry, Isom, Singleton, Adams, Clark-Griffin, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Seats, Commissioners Edwards, Henderson.

COMMUNICATIONS

Deputy Director Clark announce Thursday afternoon's gas giveaway sponsored by Pilgrim Rest. He stated there will be a press conference prior to and asks everyone to follow rules. There will be more information coming.

Assessor Story stated that summer tax bills will be going out. If taxpayers see a mistake, to let her office know right away.

COMMISSION COMMENTS

Commissioner Clark-Griffin thanked everyone for coming out and appreciates the citizens and residents of Benton Harbor. She would like everyone to stand up, speak up, and demand to know what your tax dollars are paying for.

Commissioner Henry thanks the citizens for coming out and seeing your government at work. She expected to see the chamber repair on the agenda. She is disappointed to have to wait another two weeks.

Commissioner Adams thanked the residents for coming out and thanked the ladies for the presentation, but it would have been nice to see the presentation. Too much money has been given to be sitting there with nothing working or allow the community to view what's being presented and it's unacceptable. She stated it unacceptable when your elected official reaches out to the administrator of day-to-day operations to ask a question and never get an answer. She was reminded during the presentation about Manchester Bidwell Arts and Training Technology Center, for every bit of 15 years now, training has been going on in Benton Harbor that hasn't been going on in Benton Harbor.

Commissioner Isom gave a shout out to the Juneteenth Committee for a great event. He can't wait for another presentation. Reminder about the Kite Flying event by First Lady Muhammad on June 25th from 9am-2pm. The city is finally getting a Finance Director, he said trust the process, have patience, expect great things.

Commissioner Singleton said there are some good things going on, such as a new Finance Director. Coming from years out of emergency management and things being done a certain way, but now it's back to the way the charter is written. Another good thing is the Master Plan, there is a chance to get involved and help shape the city. On the Public Safety side, he stated the city is blamed for things going on in the township, but it's still concerning and it touches us all no matter where it happens.

Mayor Muhammad read an official statement regarding the Lead Service Line Replacement project "The City of Benton Harbor has completed nearly 70 percent of the lead service line replacements. The project is being completed at record pace and we are on schedule to finish the project in the time frame of 18 months. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services are working with residents to inspect for lead contamination inside of the home. The inspection and repairs are at no cost to the homeowners and or occupants of the property. As Mayor of the City of Benton Harbor I am soberly pleased. In 2018 we started this project with \$284,000 and now we have \$60 million at our fingertips to make the City of Benton Harbor lead free. The above announcement is no justification for a victory lap. We will not rest until the entire 4.4 square miles is 100% lead free." He reminded residents they can go online to MDHHS to have someone come in to test for lead, whether it's paint, pipes inside the home, etc. He stated that the community has been actively involved in 30% or above of the workers of the project have been residents.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

A motion made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Singleton to adjourn the meeting and was carried on the following roll call vote: YEAS: Commissioners Adams, Clark-Griffin, Henry, Isom, Singleton, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Commissioners Edwards, Henry, Mayor Pro Tem Seats

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Tiffany Moore, City Clerk

Marcus Muhammad, Mayor