

**MINUTES OF THE BENTON HARBOR CITY COMMISSION  
LULA LEE COMMISSION CHAMBERS  
JULY 5, 2022**

The regular meeting of the Benton Harbor City Commission was called to order by Mayor Muhammad at 7:01p.m. Invocation led by Pastor Wright, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Assistant City Manager Little. Roll call showed the following members present: Commissioners Adams, Clark-Griffin, Edwards (arrived at 7:04pm), Henderson, Henry, Isom, Singleton, Mayor Pro Tem Seats (arrived at 7:40pm), Mayor Muhammad. Members Absent: None. Also present: City Manager Mitchell, Director of Public Safety McGinnis, Assessor Story, Community and Economic Director/Assistant City Manager Little, Attorney Racht and City Clerk Moore.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**A motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Henderson to approve the Regular Minutes of June 21, 2022 Budget Workshop Minutes of June 27, 2022, Closed Session Minutes of June 27, 2022, and Budget Hearing Minutes of June 29, 2022. Motion carried** on the following roll call vote: YEAS: Commissioners Henry, Isom, Singleton, Adams, Clark-Griffin, Henderson, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: None. Members Abstain: None. Members Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Seats, Commissioner Edwards.

**APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS PAYABLE**

**A motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Henderson to approve the Accounts Payable Listing.**

During Discussion, Commissioner Adams asked for clarity on how many ThinkPads were replaced. Mayor Muhammad stated he believes those were for the police cars. Adams stated that last month \$48,000 was approve for hardware in the police vehicles and she will not, as usual, support without a Finance Director and will be glad when a new one is present.

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

**CITIZENS COMMENTS**

Lee Reed, Chairman of Planning Commission gave an update on the Master Plan. He stated he would like to schedule a meeting with the Commission, Planning Commission, and Advisory Committee to discuss attainable housing, union roles, and RRC. He stated as a representative of the people that everyone needs to come together.

Victoria White inquired about the reate increase on the water bills. She asked how can that be when water can't be used or used partially and they don't know what is safe.

Mayor Muhammad responded that in 2019, the city was faced with the issue of the lead lines and the city was presented with a plan to upgrade the water distribution system with a low interest bond, and at that time rates had to increase for a 5-year period, afterwards, the rates would be reverted back to the regular rates.

White stated a bunch of stuff has come upon us since then, maybe there are other alternatives. Citizens give but don't get anything.

Muhammad stated if repairs were not done, the water system would be in shambles. The city was at a crossroads and nobody saw what was to come, such as Covid or the lead line replacement project.

Reverend Jermaine Wright stated that he has a house at 1119 Bishop, with no plumbing, no meter, no water service and found out he was being charge and a lien was put on his house but there's no water. He has only gotten disrespect and this runs people out of Benton Harbor. He stated he called for 2 months and couldn't get anyone to answer the phone. It's not fair, and he's not getting any answers. He doesn't want to have to go to court.

Richard Rabbers requested the trash receptacles around the city. He observed items in them since last fall. He suggest reminding citizens to do their part as well to pick up litter. He mentioned the gas station and convenince stores and surrounding areas. There needs to be reminders and enforcement.

Mr James Duncan stated citizens deserve more time to express their concerns and opinions. He's been saying for a long time to not make citizens pay for water they can't use. There needs to be a plan that's going to work for the citizens.

## **PUBLIC HEARING – 2022 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN**

Mayor Muhammad opened the Public Hearing at 7:29pm

Director Little announced this as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Public Hearing on the 2022 Annual Action Plan, the 1<sup>st</sup> one was held on April 22, 2022. This hearing was scheduled for June 20, which was a holiday. The planned allocation at this point was 20% for Administration, 15% for Public Services, primarily the summer youth employment, the remainder for the Housing Rehab Program. The total of all coming to \$411,037. Written comments will be taken through Friday, July 8, 2022.

Commissioner Henry stated she's been speaking with HUD about redlining insurance and would like Little to get involved in fixing the problem.

Commissioner Clark-Griffin believes the Public Hearing should be separate from the Commission meeting.

Commissioner Adams suggested all sidewalk work be put to a halt.

Mayor Muhammad reminded everything that there are guidelines and restrictions through HUD.

The Public Hearing was Closed at 7:43pm.

## **CONSENT CALENDAR**

Commissioner Adams requested to separate RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A PORTION OF THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN (ARPA) FUNDS STANDARD REVENUE LOSS ALLOWANCE TO BE USED FOR THE UPGRADE IN TECHNOLOGY IN THE COMMISSION CHAMBERS and RESOLUTION TO APPROVE CITY MANAGER MITCHELL TO ENTER INTO A 5 YEAR CONTRACT WITH MUNICIPALONE FOR WEBSITE REDESIGN AND SUPPORT from the Consent Calendar for discussion.

No remaining Consent Calendar Items for approval.

## SEPARATED ITEMS

**Motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Singleton to approve the RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A PORTION OF THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN (ARPA) FUNDS STANDARD REVENUE LOSS ALLOWANCE TO BE USED FOR THE UPGRADE IN TECHNOLOGY IN THE COMMISSION CHAMBERS.**

During Discussion, Commissioner Adams asked for an explanation why ARPA and not marijuana money is being used when it couldn't be used for racial equity, why other funds couldn't be used. Mayor Muhammad read the Memo for the resolution and stated ARPA gives the Council the opportunity to make upgrades without using taxpayer dollars. Mayor Pro Tem Seats agreed the technology needs upgraded. He clarified the equipment is not 15 years old, it's just had poor maintenance. Have to do what's right with our money, need to hire somebody to run the technology and utilize what we have. Muhammad responded that the whole system is broken and that the item came before the Commission months ago. Adams stated she would have liked to have a visual and that someone is needed to take care of it all, not just the equipment. Commissioner Henry stated that the item went through the Communications Committee for almost 2 years and they wanted to make sure there was more than one avenue of communication. She doesn't like that ARPA is going to be used as funding, but the residents need to be informed. Commissioner Henderson stated this is an option to fix this, and it falls under a category that can be used by ARPA. Commissioner Singleton stated he doesn't see why it needs to be beaten down the road any further.

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

**Motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Singleton to approve the RESOLUTION TO APPROVE CITY MANAGER MITCHELL TO ENTER INTO A 5 YEAR CONTRACT WITH MUNICIPAL ONE FOR WEBSITE REDESIGN AND SUPPORT.**

During Discussion, Mayor Pro Tem Seats asked if there could be a shorter contract than 5 years. Commissioner Adams stated usually there's a 90 day probation period, so it would be nice gave them an opportunity to reflect the community as a whole. Agrees the residents need better, but there needs to be a grace period to make sure they like the website. Mayor Muhammad asked what the reason was for a 5 year contract. Manager Mitchell stated the company was recommended by the City Clerk, who was very familiar with their work and has worked with them and they were the lowest bidder. Clerk Moore stated there is a lower upfront cost with the 5 year and after speaking with Finance Director Hildebrand, she suggested spreading the cost over the 5 year period. Clerk Moore stated that she had an 8 year relationship and that was the reason she recommended the 5 year. She stated there was not a contract, that would come after accepting the proposal. Muhammad recommended the company propose a contract and have it reviewed by the City Manager and Attorney Racht and then presented to the Council for approval. Attorney Racht stated generally the City Manager is authorized to review and accept the contract, with input by himself. The whole idea to have the City Manager review and accept, but the Commission can have it contingent upon reviewing the contract. Mayor Pro Tem Seats asked where the company came from and if there was a contract somewhere. Attorney Racht stated his understanding was the bids were reviewed by the Communication Committee, who proposed the approval. Commissioner Henry stated an RFP went out and the Communication Committee reviewed

the bids. She stated she is confident in Clerk Moore's recommendation and an improvement needs to be made.

**Mayor Muhammad added to the Resolution PENDING APPROVAL ON TERMS OF THE CONTRACT Motion carried on a unanimous roll call vote.**

## COMMUNICATIONS

Director McGinnis reminded citizens they can walk in his office and speak to him if he's available and National Night Out is one month away.

Director Little stated everyone here is trying to move the city forward. 17 months ago HUD money was frozen and now money is being expended and moving at a rate that will meet HUD requirements.

Clerk Moore stated absentee ballot applications have been sent out and can be returned by mail or directly to her office.

## COMMISSION COMMENTS

Commissioner Clark-Griffin reminded citizens to stand up and demand to be treated better.

Commissioner Henry address the water bills and the use of ARPA to assist the residents.

Commissioner Adams asked where the money for the CDBG employees is and agreed that the trash problem needed to be fixed.

Commissioner Edwards gave his number 269-277-6489 and addressed the Benton Harbor Parks and Recreation Conservancy which has been dissolved. He's trying to get activities in all parks for all ages, for free.

Commissioner Henderson thanked the staff, working with a diminished staff is not easy. She asked that the residents continue to be patient.

Commissioner Isom agreed that garbage cans need to be throughout the city. He said fireworks were all through the city and were beautiful and cleaned up after. He said the water bill is something that had to be done and he is grateful for the Communications Committee moving on the upgrade of the chambers and the website.

Commissioner Singleton stated at some point we have to look at lowering tax bills, where there are more developments. Hard decisions have to be made to see betterment down the road.

Mayor Pro Tem Seats stated that the delinquent water bills went on the 2021 taxes.

Mayor Muhammad said there's a lot of good work going on in the city by a collective group.

## MOTION TO ADJOURN

**A motion made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Mayor Pro Tem Seats to adjourn the meeting and was carried on a unanimous roll call vote.**

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

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Tiffany Moore, City Clerk

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Marcus Muhammad, Mayor