

**MINUTES OF THE BENTON HARBOR CITY COMMISSION
LULA LEE COMMISSION CHAMBERS
AUGUST 1, 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 Henderson, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Commissioner Singleton. Roll call showed the following members present: Commissioners Adams, Clark-Griffin, Edwards, Henderson, Henry, Isom, Singleton, Mayor Pro Tem Seats (arrived at 7:19pm), Mayor Muhammad. Members Absent: None. Also present: City Manager Mitchell, Public Safety Deputy Director Clark, Assessor Story, Community and Economic Director/Assistant City Manager Little and City Clerk Moore.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Edwards to approve the Regular Minutes of July 18, 2022. Motion carried on the following roll call vote: YEAS: Commissioners Edwards, Henderson, Henry, Isom, Singleton, Adams, Clark-Griffin, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: None. Members Abstain: None. Members Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Seats.

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 welcomed Finance Director James Williams. She stated she had not had time to thoroughly go through the AP and direct questions, but she will.

Motion carried on the following roll call vote. YEAS: Commissioners Henderson, Isom, Singleton, Adams, Edwards, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: Commissioners Henry, Clark-Griffin. 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 that Paul Lippens with McKenna would like to give a 15 minute presentation update and Q&A session at the August 15 meeting.

Victoria White stated she does not approve of the increase in the water bills. She said the city looks horrible and we need to work together to make the city presentable.

Steven Boone asked how many public safety officers the city currently has. Mayor Muhammad reminded that the citizens comments portion was for comments only and was not for Q&A.

Spencer Nesbitt stated the city looks bad, the streets and sidewalks are not being cleaned. He said if staff is not doing what they are supposed to do, it's time to get rid of them, ordinances are not being followed and inspections are not being done.

Demarcus Carter asked why properties on the foreclosure list are being pulled before going to the public. Mayor Muhammad reminded that this portion of the agenda was for comments only and not questions.

Emma Kinnard followed up on previous comments on how bad the city looks and how its not being cleaned up, the alleys need to be cleaned and sidewalks need fixed.

Clerk Moore read written comments from Shaquille Turner.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Commissioner Clark-Griffin requested to separate APPROVAL OF PURCHASE OF PROPERTIES FROM THE BERRIEN COUNTY TAX SALE FOR THE CITY'S PUBLIC PURPOSES from the Consent Calendar for discussion.

Commissioner Adams requested to separate RESOLUTION TO PURCHASE CAMERA SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT AND INSTALLATION SERVICES from the Consent Calendar for discussion.

Commissioner Clark-Griffin requested to separate RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE CDBG POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL from the Consent Calendar for discussion.

Commissioner Adams requested to separate RESOLUTION TO APPROVE WAGE INCREASE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS from the Consent Calendar for discussion.

No other Consent Calendar items were left for approval.

SEPARATED ITEMS

Motion was made by Commissioner Edwards and supported by Mayor Pro Tem Seats for APPROVAL OF PURCHASE OF PROPERTIES FROM THE BERRIEN COUNTY TAX SALE FOR THE CITY'S PUBLIC PURPOSES

During Discussion, Commissioner Adams asked who made the decision to give properties to any organization that the board doesn't approve of. She asked if the properties obtained will be eligible for the lead removal program. Director Little explained that nothing has come before the Commission to designate to any entity and no property has changed hands. Mayor Muhammad said in the past there was an agreement that the Council had to authorize. Little stated no decisions have been made and the City Council would have to approve that. Mayor Pro Tem Seats stated in previous years people have received help getting their property back, and properties need to get back on the tax rolls. He stated the item has been vetted through the Planning & Economic Development Committee. Commissioner Clark-Griffin said that at the Planning & Economic Development Committee Director Little stated he already committed to the CDC, which is a non-profit. Commissioner Henry stated that she didn't know if she had enough information to vote on this item. Commissioner Singleton that the motive is to attain the property then come up with a plan. Commissioner Henderson said the city is trying to increase housing density and Little has looked at properties for the purpose of building. Commissioner Edwards stated from his understanding these properties are for the city's public purpose, which is to

increase the value of the properties and the city. Commissioner Isom read the justification of the resolution and stated the city needs housing in the community. Adams asked why are we not acquiring more properties and the Brownfield Authority would be a good source in helping develop property. Commissioner Clark-Griffin asked what the intended use was and if there were tax liens or contamination and residents should be given the opportunity to be a first time home buyer. Mayor Muhammad stated what HUD would like to see municipalities do is partner with non-profit organization that can obtain funding to renovate and rehabilitate to put the properties back on the tax roll, the agreement reverts the property back to the city if it's not used for it's intended use. Assessor Story stated she gets a call at least once a week where residents are taking care of property next to theirs and they would like to purchase those, she would like to see the moratorium lifted, there are other costs associated with those properties such as mowing and it would add a tax base to the city. Henry asked what the plan was for the properties and where the money is coming from to buy them. Little stated the money comes from the same place that if the taxes aren't collected, they withhold that money from the taxes paid, you are then paying the tax portion that goes to the other jurisdictions and then take possession. If the city is going to be redeveloped, tax base is needed, population increase is needed, housing is needed. After discussion with the County Treasurer, he was advised that 3 properties were not advantageous to take under the new law that allows the owner to request the fair market value of the property. These properties were selected based on size and location. Manager Mitchell stated this is a part of the plan that goes along with the moratorium on properties that are being looked at for development.

Mayor Muhammad called for the question, **Motion carried** on a unanimous roll call vote.

Motion was made by Commissioner Edwards and supported by Mayor Pro Tem Seats to approve the RESOLUTION TO PURCHASE CAMERA SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT AND INSTALLATION SERVICES

During Discussion, Commissioner Henry asked where the money was coming from. Mayor Muhammad responded that Whirlpool pledged to pay half the costs of the cameras, with the other half coming from ARPA. Director Little clarified there was also an additional \$103,000 for installation. Mayor Muhammad clarified that the resolution stated that \$103,452.25 for installation will be paid through ARPA. Commissioner Adams stated that Whirlpool should pay half of the entire project and she hopes that the cameras aren't going to be used to fine residents. Commissioner Singleton said that the cost has increased due to kicking the item down the road. Mayor Pro Tem Seats said cameras are needed down by the river. Mayor Muhammad stated that this is the first step, after purchased, it will be determined where to place the cameras that they will be best served. Commissioner Clark-Griffin asked that the items being reviewed are physically attached.

Mayor Muhammad called for the question, **Motion carried** on a unanimous roll call vote.

Motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Mayor Pro Tem Seats to approve the RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE CDBG POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

During Discussion, Commissioner Clark-Griffin stated she had not seen the manual. Mayor Pro Tem Seats stated the item was vetted through the Planning & Economic Development Committee and it is a required document. Commissioner Henderson stated that code compliance brings any changes or updates to policies to Committee and it was the same process with this manual. Director Little stated that regulations change monthly, every federal and HUD update requires the policy to be updated. Commissioner Adams called for the question. **Motion carried** on the following roll call vote: YAYS:

Commissioners Singleton, Mayor Pro Tem Seats, Commissioners Adams, Edwards, Henderson, Henry, Isom, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: Commissioner Clark-Griffin. Abstain: None. Absent: None.

Motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Edwards to approve the RESOLUTION TO APPROVE WAGE INCREASE FOR PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS

During Discussion, Commissioner Adams stated that if the cameras will do some of the work in the community as far as policing, there is no reason to give raises. The prices of everything has gone up for everybody. She sees the officers working and knows there is a skeleton crew but until more money comes in to the tax base, beans need to be counted, belts need to be tightened, now is not the time to be giving a raise to anybody. Commissioner Edwards stated the worst thing you can do is tell someone who is trying to save lives they don't need a raise. Commissioner Singleton stated we are not able to keep up with wages of other communities, we can't gain or retain labor, we need to put meat back on the skeleton, we have to get the wages up. We are in union negotiations; more money would be spent in arbitration. Mayor Pro Tem Seats said emergency management had staff working a free hour with no overtime, no holiday pay. They can jump ship and go somewhere else for more money with less calls. Commissioner Henderson said she will be abstaining as her husband is a police officer, the needs of the officers in the community need to be met, people are here because they want to be here. Mayor Muhammad stated the starting salary in St Joe of public safety officers is \$69,000, which is pushing Benton Harbor's sergeant wage and the 5% increase has already been approve din the budget, this is just a formality. Adams asked why does there have to be an association or union and why the city doesn't handle public safety.

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

COMMUNICATIONS

Deputy Director Clark reminded everyone about National Night Out, there will be a dunk tank, so come out and dunk the Director.

Director Little stated that 102 youth were employed this summer. The rehab program is moving along. \$350,000 was allocated to sidewalks, and would like to try the program again.

Finance Director Williams stated he is looking forward to working with everyone, he came from the State of Michigan and has written and audited policies and procedures and is familiar with that process.

Clerk Moore reminded everyone of election day, polls are open from 7am-8pm.

COMMISSION COMMENTS

Commissioner Clark-Griffin stated is going to ask questions, and if emails were answered there wouldn't be question asked during the meeting.

Commissioner Adams that at 717 Colfax, the resident next door has complained for years and wants to possess the property and should be given first dibs. She said we need to get serious about global warming and there is always a need for more housing.

Commissioner Henry encouraged everyone to get involved, listen to conversations, go online and watch the meetings on YouTube.

Commissioner Edwards said it was good to see 102 students out working.

Commissioner Henderson stated there is a lot of information to digest and thanked Clerk Moore for providing that information. She said a lot of people in the community are doing great things, she gave a shout out to Ashely Hines. And stated that 717 Colfax needs to be reverted back due to not being used for it's intended use.

Commissioner Isom welcomed James Williams as the new Finance Director. He said residents complaints about sidewalks were heard, the work needs to be done right and wants the city to look right. He went to the CDC garden part on Broadway, a great event. It's very important to get out and vote, the library millage is on the ballot.

Commissioner Singleton stated that people are doing good things for the community and everyone wants what's best for the city. The Lead Line project is approaching 80% complete. We are in a position to support recycling.

Mayor Pro Tem Seats said it's not about who talks or cusses the loudest, it's about who can get stuff done, there needs to be models.

Mayor Muhammad announced Riverfest this weekend and thanked Commissioner Henderson and Trenton Bowens for volunteering on the committee. He thanked Emma Kinnard for being an example, as her garden was the first and now Ashley Hines has a beautiful garden, would like to see a garden in every ward. It's important to participate in the primary election to keep the library operating.

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 9:30 p.m.

Tiffany Moore, City Clerk

Marcus Muhammad, Mayor