

**MINUTES OF THE BENTON HARBOR CITY COMMISSION
LULA LEE COMMISSION CHAMBERS
NOVEMBER 7, 2022**

The regular meeting of the Benton Harbor City Commission was called to order by Mayor Muhammad at 7:00p.m. Roll call showed the following members present: Commissioners Adams, Clark-Griffin, Edwards, Henderson, Henry, Isom, Singleton, Mayor Muhammad. Members Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Seats. Also present: Public Safety Director McGinnis, Community and Economic Director/Assistant City Manager Little, Finance Director Williams, Attorney Racht and Clerk Moore

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Commissioner Henderson and supported by Commissioner Adams to approve the Regular Minutes of November 7, 2022. Motion carried on the following roll call vote: YEAS: Commissioners Clark-Griffin, Edwards, Henderson, Henry, Isom, Singleton, Adams, 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 Henry stated she submitted some questions to staff. Finance Director Williams provided clarification to some of her questions; John Young is a consultant for the water analysis, still looking for details regarding Mike & Sons for \$1,290.00, Traveler's \$576.00 was a payment for deductible, trash can tops were purchased by public works to keep the cans up to date, it was approved by the Manager prior to purchase. Commissioner Adams asked if the contract was extended for lawn cutting. Clerk Moore explained that the contracts state that it can be extended upon mutual agreement between both parties; the contractor and City Manager, as signer. **Motion carried** on the following roll call vote. YEAS: Commissioners Edwards, Henderson, Isom, Singleton, Adams, Clark-Griffin, Mayor Muhammad. NAYS: Commissioners Henry. Members Abstain: None. Members Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Seats.

UPDATE – COUNTY COMMISSIONER YARBROUGH

Mayor Muhammad congratulated Commissioner Yarbrough on her re-election. Commissioner Yarbrough stated this election had the largest turn out that she can remember. She encouraged everyone to vote. She stated she was thankful for giving the Governor and the state a democratic house of government and senate of government. She stated she was able to speak when the Governor was in town and thanker her for everything she has done for the city and county, and for broadband, there have been new towers, all the safety departments are now on the same megahertz and equipment. She thanked for the help with the county parks and the Napier bridge repair, the completion of 1-94 to the Business Look and 31 to 94, all the hospitals that needed Covid supplies, and the pipes in the City being changed ahead of scheduled because the Governor gave the money needed.

CITIZENS COMMENTS

Patrick Patterson commented that when he filled out an application for the Public Works Department he took a pay cut of \$4 per hour, he has now been employed with the City for 7 years, he wanted to work in Benton Harbor. He was told to go to St Joe for more money, but knows the struggle is real. He agreed with Commissioner Yarbrough, this was the biggest voter turn out, people want change. \$16.65 for a heavy equipment operator vs \$28.50 in St Joe is a huge disparity. Working together we can make a change and adjustments to make the workers feel comfortable.

Dennis Hudson stated he has been in Public Works for 21 years, his dad and granddad also worked in the department. He started at \$16 per hour and is still at \$16. He loves the City of Benton Harbor, he comes to work, does what he's told and now the equipment is starting to get where work is getting done, need to draw people to work, need to get some people in that he can train while he is still here.

Emma Kinnard showed her Woman of the Year Award, Freedom Award, Hometown Hero Award, to bring a point we all want to see a better Benton Harbor, we love Benton Harbor. She stated there was an event last week with Rev. Pinkney, he got the attention of the state and EGLE that there was a problem here, he formed a Water Council to get the information to EGLE. Instead of giving everyone else a key to the city, he deserves a key to the city.

Marvin Haywood stated that we didn't get in this situation overnight, people voted to stand on truth. This situation didn't manifest overnight, people we know helped destroy the city from within. The County never mentions what have they done for the inner city, has seen maps to take down the High School, was promised a new Public Safety building. Work was put in strategically to get a Democratic House.

Rod Jennings stated he hasn't been as active on goings on in the city as he should, but he watches Public Works working diligently and stated there is a 1 billion infrastructure package coming down.

James Duncan stated Thanksgiving is everyday and it would help the citizens to get closer together, to work closer together. A lot would not have happened if it wasn't for the citizens. There's gentrification, 5G needs to be discussed, need to get on the same page, he thanked public works for their time and energy and know they need a raise.

CONSENT CALENDAR

A motion was made by Commissioner Henderson and supported by Commissioner Adams to SUSPEND THE RULES to add Termination of City Manager Contract to the agenda. Motion failed on the following roll call vote: YAYS: Commissioners Henderson, Adams, Clark-Griffin. NAYS: Commissioners Henry, Isom, Singleton, Edwards, Mayor Muhammad. Members Abstain: None. Members Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Seats.

Commissioner Adams requested to remove APPROVAL AND AUTHORIZATION FOR MANAGER TO SUBMIT GRANT APPLICATION FOR EGLE HIGH WATER GRANT for further discussion.

No further Consent Calendar items

SEPARATED ITEMS

A motion was made by Commissioner Adams and supported by Commissioner Henderson for the APPROVAL AND AUTHORIZATION FOR MANAGER TO SUBMIT GRANT APPLICATION FOR EGLE HIGH WATER GRANT

During discussion, Commissioner Adams stated that there was a feasibility study done on Riverview Dr from Main St to Yarbrough Park and asked why the engineer hasn't done anything. She asked in Committee if it was going to cost the residents anything and the answer was no, but that is not what this document says, and if we're going to obtain grant money for new developers then we need to help those that build the city. Mayor Muhammad read the resolution and clarified that speaking with EGLE and looking at the FEMA map regarding flooding from the St Joe River could be catastrophic. He stated that EGLE recommended Benton Harbor to apply and the local match would not come from taxpayers or city money and this would address many levels of flooding, we can't not take the opportunity to make it suitable to be redeveloped. Adams stated the resolution should be clear that there is no cost to the city and all grants should go to Committee. Mayor Muhammad clarified this was just to apply for the grant. Commissioner Clark-Griffin stated that looking at the resolution, it talks more than just about high water, it mentions OX Creek and would like to study this further. Director Little stated the what Clark-Griffin is referring to is a different document. And the amount for this grant would be revised to reflect \$392,000 and the local match would be hours worked from himself, Marcy at Southwest Michigan Planning, and Emily at EGLE. There is no cash required from the city and that has always been an area of high-water table, there are going to be opportunities for all kinds of grants to go to whoever can get it and manage it. Mayor Muhammad yielded to Marcy with Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, she clarified that the local match comes from time put into the program from Director Little, as well as Southwest Michigan Planning and EGLE as partners. Mayor Muhammad stated resources are going to flow from the state, and federal through agencies and we have to position ourselves as a government body ready to do business on behalf of the residents.

A motion was made by Commissioner Clark-Griffin and supported by Commissioner Henry to postpone to the next Commission meeting for further study. Motion failed on the following roll call vote: YAYS: Commissioners Adams, Clark-Griffin. NAYS: Commissioners Isom, Singleton, Edwards, Henderson, Henry, Mayor Muhammad. Members Abstain: None. Members Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Seats

During further discussion, Commissioner Henry stated another project that does not reflect on the citizens was pushed back until she heard there was going to be a study, she would like the study to extend to the neighborhoods as well. The sewer issue is more pressing than the flooding in that area. If that UofM study would include the inner city, she would vote for it. Commissioner Edwards stated he goes to the River a lot and has been told that citizens would love to fish there but with no ducks, but because it's wet there are ducks. Commissioner Singleton stated this item came through Personnel & Finance Committee with good discussion. It was explained that starting to take care of the problem on the front end would open up having things in place when other money comes. Commissioner Isom stated the project will be ongoing and that area needs to be developed, once it's started, more money will be coming in. Commissioner Adams stated the need to know if the grant will cover beyond Riverview, she knows this is the start, and the resolution should reflect there is no cost to Benton Harbor residents. Henry asked if this grant and the UofM study will include the neighborhoods. Mayor Muhammad clarified this grant has been earmarked for this particular area. Director Little restated that no this is not for neighborhoods or Ox Creek and the best opportunity to be successful is to use it for Riverview Dr, there will be other grand funding coming through that will be suitable for sewer and housing, it's coming in all categories. Commissioner Clark-Griffin wants to see stuff in the inner city, there's high water and sewer issue and would like to see those type of grants requested. Commissioner

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

COMMUNICATIONS

Director McGinnis stated he is going to be working on two items for the Legislative Committee and that he has never seen us have to ask to apply for grants.

Director Little – no report

Finance Director Williams stated the audit is going well and there's a plethora of grants, and he's been sitting in meetings and working aggressively to obtain those.

Attorney Racht has been working with Director McGinnis and Code Compliance on process and procedures.

Clerk Moore – no report

COMMISSION COMMENTS

Commissioner Clark-Griffin encouraged everyone to pay attention, stand up and deserve better, it's time for a change.

Commissioner Adams thanked Commissioner Yarbrough and stated she was upset she missed the meeting with the land bank. She said it's disheartening when ARPA money came, and some was given to the County, and they used it for parks throughout the County, why not help with Ox Creek, the County needs to do more in Benton Harbor. She didn't realize until Public Works employees spoke, but there needs to be a shift in funds. She is glad that Public Safety gets grants, we need to apply for Public Works grants, and she is glad for the voter turnout.

Commissioner Henry let everyone know if you can't be here, to listen on YouTube. The newsletter will be out next month. The State of Michigan is blessing us with money, we need training, and need to keep priority as residents.

Commissioner Edwards congratulated Commissioner Yarbrough and all those who won and wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Commissioner Henderson clarified that a lot of changes and things are done are for the residents, when looking at work and things being done, that is change. It may be direct or indirect. The things that are done improve the quality of life for residents. When changes happen, it overall affects the community in a positive way, and housing has a major impact on the community.

Commissioner Isom thanked Commissioner Yarbrough for her comments and update. She congratulated Ms. Kinnard and said Public Works deserves more, they've got new equipment and need trained in the right way, need to hire and pay more so they can take care of their families, and they will take care of the city. He thanked Director Little for the work is doing. He is thankful for today and trying to do the best for the people.

Commissioner Singleton stated that we've come a long way in a short time and he enjoys working with this body. Everyone has their own opinion, but all get to the same place. We need to clean up the city, and public safety is working on the issue of towing vehicles.

Mayor Muhammad stated that the LSL is over 99% complete under budget and before the projected date. Over 1.6 million bottles of water were distributed. Churches and volunteers were paid to distribute water and hire residents. The next phase is to have home inspections, where homeowners can get up to \$10,000 to change windows, doors, siding at no cost as long as the homeowner is the residents. Landlords can get up to \$6,000. Dollars were allocated to the water plant, and the

distribution system. Benton Harbor needs revenue, needs commercial taxes, small business taxes, residential taxes if Public Works is to be paid more, we need revenue, investment and local government to work with developers and investors.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

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

The regular meeting was adjourned by Mayor Muhammad at 8:40pm.

Tiffany Moore, City Clerk

Marcus Muhammad, Mayor